

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN MARK'S GOSPEL – CHAPTER FOURTEEN

As they left the temple area after what had been a dramatic confrontation, one of the disciples acted as a tourist guide to their Friend from up north. Jesus' answer was devastating. It would all be destroyed. His prophecy was fulfilled in two stages. The temple would be wrecked in AD 70 when the Jewish revolt was finally put down by the Romans at the end of 3 ½ years of conflict. Six hundred thousand people would die in the siege of Jerusalem. The Jews were scattered but some still hoped to rebuild the temple. A revolt led by Bar Kochba in AD 132 was put down and the last traces of temple walls were removed. It would not be until 1947 that the Jews would be allowed to regain their country but no new temple has been built because a Muslim mosque stands on the site. As often before it was the inner circle of disciples who privately asked Jesus two questions. First they wanted to know 'when?' and secondly 'what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' (Matt.24:3) They assumed that the destruction of the temple would coincide with Jesus' return. In the message which followed Jesus wove the two answers into one.(13:1-4)

First the Lord talked of the events preceding His return, warning how easy it would be to be misled by false claims to be the Christ. Then He spoke of war, earthquake and famine which have happened many times over the last 2000 years and often caused those caught up in these catastrophes to wonder if this was the time Jesus promised. In this is a clue to His purpose in telling us about His return, not to have us checking the calendar but instead to check our relationship with Him which alone will keep us through hard times. Next He warned of the persecution which they and Christians who followed them in future would face from a hostile world. They would be under pressure to deny Christ to escape pain and death and would wonder how to respond. The answer would be very simple. If they trusted God, the Holy Spirit would speak through them. Before He came back again however they had a job to complete, to take the gospel to every nation. Assuming that this means not only telling people of different nations about Jesus but putting the Bible into every language, there is still much work to be done. One of the most painful aspects of being witnesses of Christ will be not the hostility of strangers but rejection by family. Expect to be hated for Jesus' sake. Look not to family but to Jesus for the strength to cope.(13:5-13)

The Lord now gave His followers advice which would save the lives of many in the coming revolt. After the rebellion began in AD 66 and the Roman armies arrived to put it down, the general, Vespasian, was called to Rome to become the next emperor so the attack on Jerusalem was temporarily halted. This gave opportunity for the Christians to escape to the surrounding mountains before Vespasian's son, Titus, was appointed the new general and ordered to finish the job his father had begun. Jesus quoted from the book of Daniel, (9:27; 11:31; 12:11) which warned of 'the abomination of desolation', desecration of the temple by idol worship. This had happened on an earlier occasion in the second century under an invading king, Antiochus Epiphanes, and would happen again under the Romans. There would be an urgency to leave in a hurry with only the bare essentials, like Lot and his wife in Gen.19:22-26. History records that the Christians did heed Jesus' warning and largely escape from the destruction of Jerusalem.(13:14-18)

Terrible though AD 70 would be it was only one persecution and even worse would follow so Jesus prepared future generations with the encouragement that at such times we can remember that God is still in charge of history but to beware of the false teachers who will mislead with wrong claims. Jesus referred to the often repeated warnings in the Old Testament about the sun and moon being darkened.(Joel 2:10;31; 3:15) A taste of this happened when He was crucified,(Mark 15:33) but a world wide event will occur before His final return. He will then appear and believers will be gathered from the earth to Him. We are to have a sense of the imminence of Jesus' coming again as we see world events unfold, but we will not have a date. Beware of anyone who offers one! Even when Jesus was on earth did not know when, because He did not need to. He had work to do first, and so do we. He closed His message with a final parable about slaves who were to get on with serving their master despite the fact that they had no idea when he would be home again.(13:19-37)

As usual, it will be worthwhile to review your section titles in chapter 13 to see what new understanding God has given you as you have studied the chapter in detail. My suggestions for titling chapter 12 are as follows: verses 1-12 the consequences of spiritual authority abused; 13-17 the choice between God's authority and man's; 18-27 the correction from scriptural authority acknowledged; 28-34 the commandments to love God and man; 35-37 the confusion between the lordship of David and Christ; 38-40 the condemnation of leadership for recognition; 41-44 the cents from the heart. Chapter 14 is totally different, packed full of action and events of deep emotion. My suggestions are the following divisions - verses 1-2; 3-9; 10-11; 12-16; 17-21; 22-25; 26-31; 32-42; 43-50; 51-52; 53-65; 66-72. This may seem a lot of sections but as you will see the scene switches back and forth between some key players in the drama. Title the sections and watch how expertly the story is unfolded for us.

Section 1 - verses 1-2 Q.1 On which day of the final week of the Lord's life on earth did these events occur? What were Jesus' enemies trying to do? Why didn't they act openly? What does secrecy tell us about the real motives of those who still hate Jesus today?

Section 2 - verses 3-9 Q.2 What do we already know about people in Bethany?(Jn.12, Lk.7) Is this the same story as the one in John 12? Give your reasons? If you decide that the stories are different consider how the first event encouraged the second. Compare also the story in Luke 7:36-39. Why wasn't the woman's action bad stewardship of money as some suggested? Where did the objectors get their ideas from? What would be modern examples of the same behaviour as that of the woman and her critics?

Section 3 - verses 10-11 Q.3 How does this little section follow the first one? Where did Judas get the idea from? What was the temptation which drew him into doing what he did? How had he been prepared for this moment for some time?(Jn.12:6)

Section 4 - verses 12-16 Q.4 Which day of the crucifixion week have we reached now? With what Jewish feast did it coincide? What special significance would this feast have for Jesus?(Lev.23:5-14) What would be the first thing Jews would do to celebrate the feast? What therefore did they need at this moment? How were they to recognise the owner of the room which would be lent to them? In a crowded city how would they know which one he was? How was he similar to the man in Mk.11:3? Again what would be modern day ways in which we might be like this man?

Section 5 - verses 17-21 Q.5 How did Jesus know which disciple would betray Him? How long had He known? Did He treat him in the same way as the other disciples? Why? Why did Jesus ask all the disciples which one would betray Him if He knew the answer already? What effect did this have on the whole group?

Section 6 - verses 22-25 Q.6 Was the communion part of the Passover celebration? What did the Passover lamb picture?(I Cor.5:7) What would have surprised the disciples about what Jesus said and did after they had eaten the Passover lamb together?(Lev.17:14) What do the bread and the wine picture? How can we benefit from these symbols in daily life? When would Jesus again drink of the fruit of the vine? In heaven or where?

Section 7 - verses 26-31 Q.7 What warning did Jesus give all the disciples? Why would they do this? What was the difference between Judas' action and the rest? What does this teach us about what it means when we fail Jesus? Why do we do it? How was it that all Peter's determination did not prevent him doing the same as the others?(Rom.7:15) What promise did Jesus give His disciples about what would follow their time of failure? How does this help us?

Section 8 - verses 32-42 Q.8 Why did Jesus want the three disciples with Him while He was praying? Was it to help Him or them? What was Jesus' prayer to His Father? What did He ask Him to do? Was He trying to avoid the cross? What other explanation could there be? What was Jesus experiencing at the time? How can we learn from the example of His faith? Why do you suppose the three disciples kept falling asleep at such a critical time? How can we be 'asleep' to the suffering of those around us, and to the danger we ourselves are in? What was the direct result of Peter falling asleep at this time?

Section 9 - verses 43-52 Q.9 How would you have felt if you had been Jesus when He saw Judas leading the mob who had come to arrest Him? What was Jesus' reaction? Who was the 'certain one' in verse 47 according to Jn.18:10. What do you suppose he was intending to do when he lashed out with the sword? How was he trying to fulfil his promise in Mk.14:31? How do you think he would have felt when Jesus healed the slave's ear? Does this have anything to do with Peter's denial of Jesus at the end of the chapter? What was the point of Jesus' rebuke to the crowd? Which scripture was being fulfilled? Why did the disciples run away at this moment? How can we too run away from a situation that does not work as we supposed it would? What explanation can you suggest for the fact that this story is found only in Mark's version of events? What lesson might he have learned from this occasion? How can we learn from moments like this?

Section 10 - verses 53-65 Q.10 Why did Jesus' first trial take place at night considering that this was illegal according to Jewish custom? What does it tell us about the hearts of those responsible? What kind of charges did Jesus' enemies bring against Him? Where had such ideas come from?(Jn.2:19-21) How will false accusations against us also often come to nothing? What was Jesus' response? Why is it so difficult to do as He did? What happens if we do? How did the high priest change his approach? How did Jesus answer? Why did He reply this time when He had remained silent before? What upset the high priest about the answer he got? Why was it grounds for the death sentence? What does the behaviour of His captors after they had passed sentence of death tell us about them? How do similar things still happen these days?

Section 11 - verses 66-72 Q.11 What three questions were asked of Peter? How did he respond to them? How do we also, all too commonly, do the same? Was his motive fear? If not, what other possible explanation can you offer? How did Jesus warning come true? What was Peter's reaction? Try to describe in your own words how Peter must have felt when he heard the cock crow.