

4.0 The Jerusalem Ministry

The Jerusalem ministry of Jesus begins on Palm Sunday and unfolds over the following days. The passion narrative proper begins on Wednesday. It will be most convenient to consider the Jerusalem ministry according to the plan of the days.

4.1 Sunday: The Triumphal Entry (Mark 11:1-11)

The approach to Jerusalem from Jericho led up from the Dead Sea by a steep slope on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives. The traveller today still meets the villages of Bethany and Bethphage along the side of the ancient Roman road. The disciples are sent to find a mount for Jesus to ride: the prediction of what they will find and the answer to make if they are challenged (11:2) is similar to the word to those who are sent to prepare the Passover meal (14:13). It is intended to emphasize Jesus' foreknowledge and control of the events leading to his death. It is not altogether unlikely that Jesus would have had contacts in Jerusalem. John who devotes a great more time to describing the Jerusalem ministry tells us for instance of the family of Lazarus and his two sisters at Bethany whom Jesus loved. Pilgrims going to the festival at Jerusalem often arrived several days ahead of time, some in order to undertake required purification rites at the Temple while for others it would have been a time to make contact with family and friends. At Passover time, the population would have been swollen by the arrival of thousands of visitors for the festival. For the purpose of the celebration, the city limits were considered as including Bethany. Some people would have been able to find lodgings within the city. Others, and probably the majority, would have camped on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Jesus probably stayed at Bethany (11:11-12; 14:2). We should envisage then Jesus and his disciples joining with the walking groups of pilgrims. Singing psalms and religious songs would have been a feature of the arrival of pilgrims in the Holy City; indeed, it would appear that a whole section of the Book of Psalms (the so-called *Songs of Ascent*: Ps. 120 – 134) was intended for just such an occasion. The evangelists take this ordinary joyful entry into Jerusalem and centre it on Jesus himself. He is the only one to mount the donkey. A makeshift saddle of garments is arranged and the clothing and branches strewn along the way make it a royal road. Jesus is greeted by the crowds as one who comes in the name of the Lord (i.e. as a divine emissary) and as heir apparent of the Davidic Kingdom. Jerusalem was intimately associated with David. He captured it from its earlier inhabitants, made it his royal capital and the resting-place of the Ark of the Covenant. We have already noted in the introductory summary that the road by the Mount of Olives was the route by which David left the holy city; it is now the path by which the messianic Son of David returns. The first day concludes with Jesus inspecting the Temple, after which he withdraws to Bethany.

4.2 Monday: The Temple Cleansing (Mark 11:12-19)

(a) The Text

[12] On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. [13] Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. [14] He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it. [15] Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the [temple](#)¹ and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple,² and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers³ and the seats of those who sold doves;⁴ [16] and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the [temple](#).⁵ [17] He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” [18] And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. [19] And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

(b) Commentary

We begin by noticing Mark’s familiar device on enclosing one story within another. The framing story is the apparently difficult one of the barren fig-tree. The first part of it is told on the Monday, the second part the following day. It is difficult because if we take it simply as it stands, it would appear to indicate an impatient, if not indeed capricious, Jesus. If it were “not the season for figs” (11:13), then expecting figs on a tree would appear to be most unreasonable. It is probable that the story of the fig tree circulated independently as an old legend about Jesus and was intended to illustrate his power as a wonder-worker

1 The word, *hierós* (ἱερός – Greek: *temple*), here means the whole complex of temple buildings as opposed to the sanctuary or holy place.

2 These were pilgrims to Jerusalem for whom services had to be provided for the sacrifice. They were probably in the Court of the Gentiles.

3 The term refers to those who changed Roman and Greek currency into Jewish currency, which was [kosher](#) for paying Temples taxes.

4 Doves were the offering of the poor for women’s purification (Lev 12:6) and for cleansing those with skin complaints (Lev 14:22) and other purposes (Lev 15:14.29).

5 People used the Court of the Gentiles as a shortcut from the city to the Mount of Olives.

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who could curse a fig-tree with terrifying results. By using it as the frame-work of his Temple-cleansing scene, Mark clearly intends his readers to draw the parallel between the barren fig-tree and the barren state of piety in the Jerusalem Temple. In doing so however, Mark set himself a difficult problem. Anyone with any knowledge of Middle Eastern fruit-seasons would know that figs fruit in the autumn, and the entry of Jesus took place in the spring. He has therefore to add the explanatory note that “it was not the season for figs.” In the context of the Temple-cleansing story, I think that Mark intends us to see the visit of Jesus to the Temple as unexpected and out of season. The blasting of the fig-tree to the roots will become a symbol of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE during the [Jewish War](#). The fate of the fig-tree thus becomes a parable in action for the fate of the Temple.

Mark, when compared with the longer account in John 3:13-22 recounts the scene of the Temple cleansing with great economy of detail. What precisely was Jesus’ action in the Temple and what point was it intended to make? Four groups are indicated as attracting some action on the part of Jesus: those who *bought and sold*; the *moneychangers*; the *pigeon-sellers*, those who *attempted to carry something through the Temple*. Mark does not tell us what sort of “buying and selling” went on - on the basis of John it is often concluded that it was trade in sacrificial animals. This might not be an altogether accurate conclusion for Mark’s account, so for the moment, we shall keep it fairly vague. Money changing was required since tradition dictated that the Temple-tax had to be paid in a particular type of coin; the so-called [Tyrian shekel](#) and other coins were changed into it for this purpose. Whether exorbitant rates were charged on the transaction is difficult to tell on the basis of Mark. The dove was required for certain sacrificial rites; poorer people could substitute it for a more expensive lamb. Carrying things through the Temple might imply that people were using the Temple court as a short cut: archaeological excavations in recent years have brought extensive portions of the ruins of the Temple. The main residential area of Jerusalem was built on the slope of the so-called Western hill at the foot of which ran a narrow valley, the Tyropean, on the opposite side of which was the Temple mount. The Temple was connected to the main city by means of at least two foot-bridges: this might have provided an attractive foot route for people who did not want to walk down the steep slopes or steps into the Tyropean valley and up the other side. The activities against which the actions of Jesus are directed can be arranged as follows: he *drove out* buyers and sellers; *overturned* the tables of money-changers; *overturned* the chairs of dove-sellers; prevented the carrying of burdens. Jesus’ word to justify his actions is a composite quotation from two prophets, which should be looked at in detail:

- The first is from Isaiah and looks forward to a renewed and purified Temple to which all nations will be welcome: “these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; *for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*” (Isa 56:7).

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- The second is taken from a sermon, which Jeremiah is ordered by the Lord to speak against the abuses in the Temple: “Has this house, which is called by my name, *become a den of robbers in your eyes?* Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord” (Jer 7:11). There is a third quotation which is not quoted directly, but which may be in the back of the evangelist’s mind. This prophet ends his book with an account of the coming of the Lord from the Mount of Olives and he will purify the holy city: “And *there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day*” (Zech 14:21).

What Jesus is doing therefore is not so much destroying the religion and cult of Israel as recalling it to its beginnings in the line of the great prophets. Temples in the ancient world were great public open spaces, which served a variety of purposes, including on occasion trade. It is quite likely that such was the case in the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus’ protest at those who bought and sold is directed at the very idea of turning the great sacred space into a market place, just as preventing people from carrying loads is a protest at making it merely a convenient short-cut. The other actions are directed more at the Temple worship itself. Most Jews seem to have paid the Temple tax without complaint: according to Matthew, Jesus himself paid it (Matt 17:24-26). So it is hardly the principle which is at stake: it may be the legalism of insisting that payment had to be in a particular rare coin, or perhaps even at the inevitable profit which might be made on the transaction. The selling of doves is a different case. Even some of the Pharisaic rabbis protested at the inflated cost of doves on sale to the poor. Hillel, whom we have met already in the context of the divorce saying, permitted poor women undergoing the purification rite to offer a single dove to cover all their needs: in doing so, he would probably have raised the ire of the dove sellers who, like all of their kind, would have argued for one dove to cover every case of impurity.

Jesus’ action in the Temple is in line with the great prophetic voices of Israel. It is therefore not an anti-Temple act so much as an act of prophetic protest and reform of the Temple to bring it into line with its original purpose of providing a place for the worship of Israel’s God. As Christian reflection on the scene develops, particularly in John, the sacrificial purification offered by the Temple is excluded by the new understanding of the nature of Christ’s sacrifice.

4.3 Tuesday: A Day of Teaching (Mark 11:20 – 13:37)

The second part of the fig-tree incident forms the introduction to the third day of Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem. It will be enough here to note that it forms the introduction for a brief teaching on the nature of praying with faith. Mark preserves very little of Jesus’ teaching on prayer. He does not even include the Lord’s Prayer but there is an echo of it in the final word in this section on forgiveness as a necessary condition for Christian prayer: “so that your Heavenly Father will forgive you your trespasses” (11:25). The teaching

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activity of the third day is divided into two parts: a public teaching in the Temple and a private teaching reserved for the disciples alone, which takes place on the Mt of Olives (chapter 13). We shall consider each separately. The Temple teaching (11:27 – 12:4) is composed of eight smaller units, and a brief overview of them will provide the initial orientation for our study:

- Challenge to the authority of Jesus (11:27-33).
- The parable of the wicked tenants (12:1-12).
- Controversy story on the payment of taxes (12:13-17).
- Controversy about resurrection (12:18-27).
- The greatest commandment (12:28-34).
- David's son (12:35-37).
- The warning about the scribes (12:38-40).
- The widow's offering (12:41-44).

What emerges from this is that the note of challenge and controversy is particularly pronounced. We are back with the same type of material as we met in the controversy stories of the early Galilean ministry. The Temple teaching is framed by a story that challenges the authority of Jesus and another that praises the piety of a poor widow who puts into the Temple treasury all that she has to live on. We should also note that a genuine teacher who is praised as "not far from the Kingdom of God" provokes the story about the great commandment. Although the note of rejection by the leaders of the people is accentuated here, these two stories which praise the scriptural insight and good works of Israel's faithful should ensure that we do not interpret the rejection of Jesus as God's rejection of Judaism.

It will not be necessary to treat all of these smaller units in equal detail, although we will look more closely at *taxes to Caesar* because it raises a number of issues about Jesus and his movement that may bring us momentarily beyond the limits of this course. We will be familiar enough with the outline of the controversy or pronouncement story by this stage. Not all pronouncement stories are necessarily controversy stories, but controversy stories usually do contain an element of pronouncement - that is to say, they culminate in a well-turned statement of Jesus. The stories about the authority of Jesus, on payment of taxes, and on the resurrection, are all controversy stories in the strict sense. Jesus' victory in the first consists on successfully routing his enemies by fixing them on the horns of a dilemma regarding their attitude to John. Something similar takes place in the controversy about resurrection - he refuses to be drawn into the debate about the fictitious case of the woman with seven husbands and instead concentrates on God as the God of the living. A discussion such as this may well have been regarded as standard training in disputation in rabbinical schools. Jesus avoids the pit-fall of entering into such speculations.

4.3.1 The Payment of Taxes to Caesar

(a) Mark 12:13-17: The Text

[13] Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap⁶ him in what he said. [14] And they came and said to him,⁷ “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes⁸ to the emperor, or not? [15] Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy,⁹ he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius¹⁰ and let me see it.” [16] And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.”¹¹ [17] Jesus said to them, “Give¹² to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him.

(b) Commentary

The dispute about the payment of taxes to Caesar is a perfect example of the controversy genre. The story unfolds at a leisurely pace; a dilemma is created, which is finally solved by a masterful intervention of Jesus. The question of payment of Roman taxes would probably have represented a live and indeed divisive issue for Jews in the time of Jesus. The Jews paid two different taxes - a religious tax for the upkeep of the Temple and the defraying of the cost of the daily sacrificial worship, and a Roman poll-tax. It meant that a great deal of the income of the ordinary people went towards the payment of taxes, particularly when the Roman system of farming out tax-collection to private individuals (the

6 The verb used, **agreuō** (ἀγρεύω – Greek: *to trap/catch*), is that of catching by hunting or fishing.

7 The question is preceded by all the circumstances of flattery.

8 The tax was the Roman imperial *fiscus* or poll tax. It caused great anger among the Jews because it was a sign of their servitude under the Romans and because the coins used in payment carried pagan symbols. If Jesus answered “yes” he would have incurred Jewish disfavour; if he had answered “no” he would have incurred Roman suspicion.

9 The Greek word used, **hypókrisis** (ὑπόκρισις – Greek: *insincerity/pretence*), does not mean deliberate playacting or dishonesty. It meant rather a casuistic, niggling, hypercritical petty attitude.

10 This was a silver coin, the basic daily wage of an unskilled worker.

11 The emperor in question was Caesar Tiberius (14-37 CE) and the inscription read: *Ti(berius) Caesar divi Au(gusti) F(ilius) Augustus* or “Tiberius Augustus Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.”

12 The verb used here is **apodidōmi** (ἀπόδιδωμι – Greek: *to give what is due*).

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publicans) meant that they were allowed to add a surcharge to cover their own expenses. It has been calculated that up to a third of the income of the Galilean peasant may have gone on payment of taxes of various kinds. To say that people were bound to the Roman tax system might run the risk of stirring up [nationalistic Jewish fervour](#).¹³ To say that they were free of the obligation would certainly lay any one who made such a claim open to suspicion of being opposed to Roman rule.

The people who ask the question in this story are represented as Pharisees and Herodians, the latter representing the supporters of the Herodian royal family, which incidentally, had lost all claim to power in Judea and Jerusalem since shortly after the death of Herod the Great a quarter of a century before. They begin flatteringly enough by commenting on his manner of teaching the way of God in accordance with the truth. Such flattery, it is implied, was designed to make Jesus drop his guard. The alternatives are put clearly: should we pay or not pay? It would almost seem to mimic Jesus' earlier ploy with the scribes and the elders on the question of John's Baptism, from men or from God? Jesus' strategy is to ask for a coin and then to ask them about its image and inscription. The coin in question was clearly Roman. Very devout Jews might have scrupled about carrying a coin with a pagan image. The answer of Jesus seems clear: if his opponents had chosen to live within a system, which accepted Roman ways, then they should go the whole way and accept the tax-system. The traditional conclusion from such a reading is that there are two spheres of human life - one ruled by the emperor, the other by God and they have different obligations. A church trying to put down roots in the Roman Empire would be glad to apply such a theory - it would save it from accusations of disloyalty.

Is this what Jesus originally intended? When the payment of taxes and the decoration of coins becomes an issue it implies a certain status and degree of financial stability. What was Jesus' own attitude to such things? The economic status of the Jesus movement was probably a precarious hand to mouth existence. It did not leave much surplus. It is probably true to say that the radical poverty of Jesus and his first disciples made coins of any type fairly rare among them. He asked for a coin presumably because he did not carry money himself. The only other time when a member of the Jesus group is asked for money is when Peter is challenged about paying the Temple tax: they seem to have none available, so it is provided miraculously by a coin in the mouth of an obliging fish (Matt 17:24-27). The story has elements of folk-lore, even though it seems to be used to provide guidance for the question of whether Christians are obliged to pay the Temple tax or not. The instruction to the disciples sent on mission forbids them to carry money in their purses: indeed, for groups living on the margins of ancient society, money was probably not something they had to worry about very much.

¹³ We should be careful, however, not to view Palestine at this time as being awash with violent revolutionaries. Such groups only clearly emerged in the period leading to the [Jewish War](#) of 66-73 CE.

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If Jesus practiced a radical type of poverty and set this as the standard for his followers, then the saying about “rendering to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” might well take on a different dimension. We might begin by asking what, for Jesus “belonged to God”? For a pious Jew, there was no doubt that the earth was the Lord’s and all that filled it: the world and all that dwell therein. To acknowledge God’s kingship was to recognise him as the Lord of creation to whom all human allegiance belonged. Who then is Caesar in such a view of humanity and its world? Jesus’ statement then about “rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” in such a context is not a statement about the need for Church and state to keep their proper spheres. It is an invitation to ask seriously whether in view of the coming Kingdom, the claims of Caesar have any validity at all or whether all of life does not come under the claim of the God’s rule. Jesus’ attitude to tax, whether to Caesar or Temple, was probably quite a radical one that claimed the privilege of the children of the Kingdom. In the story of the coin in the fish’s mouth, he asks, “From whom do kings collect taxes, from their children or from others?” And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free” (Matt 17:25-26). It is worth remembering that one of the charges that, according to Luke, were brought against Jesus was that he forbade payment of taxes to Caesar. Does this accusation have its origins in a more popular account of a radical question posed by the Jesus movement about the justice of taxation in the light of the coming reign of God?

4.3.2 The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

(a) Mark 12:1-12: The Text

[1] Then he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard, put a fence¹⁴ around it, dug a pit for the wine press¹⁵ and built a watchtower;¹⁶ then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. [2] When the season came, he sent a slave¹⁷ to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. [3] But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. [4] And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. [5] Then he sent another and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they

14 The fence was designed to keep out wild animals, not thieves.

15 This was a vessel into which the juice of the grapes ran after they had been pressed in a vessel above it.

16 This enabled the owner to keep watch over the property.

17 The Greek term, *doulos* (δοῦλος – Greek: *slave*), is used of Moses (Josh 14:7; Psa 105:26), Joshua (Josh 24:29), David (2 Sam 3:18) and of the prophets (Jer 7:25; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6).

killed. [6] He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘they will respect my son.’ [7] But those tenants said to one another, ‘this is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ [8] So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. [9] What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. [10] Have you not read this scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; [11] this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?’” [12] When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.

(b) Commentary

This is the only parable in the Jerusalem ministry. The situation envisaged is that of a land-owner who developed his land into a productive vine-yard and leased it out to a number of tenants. This situation is reminiscent of a similar one in Isa 5, the “Song of the Vineyard.” The effort put into the preparation of the plot is similar in both cases. The “watch-tower” was a low structure, which was a useful addition to a vineyard, because it would provide shelter for the workers during the vintage-season and members of the family could stay there at night as security against attempts to steal the fruit. The love-song of Isaiah soon turns into a court-case in which the audience is invited to act as a jury between God (the careful vineyard owner who has taken care to plant choice grapes) and the vineyard that has yielded sour grapes (the whole house of Israel).

Normally in Israel, rent would be paid when the harvest had been collected, so the land-owner attempts to collect the rent due to him. Servants are sent in relays to collect the rent but are abused and ill- treated by the tenants. The parable at this point has taken the form of a commentary on the religious history of Israel. The servants are clearly the prophets who have been treated shamefully in the past. The vineyard owner next takes a large risk in sending “his beloved son.” Mark has at several important points in his narrative designated Jesus as the beloved son. The tenants however treat the son even more brutally than they have treated the servants “they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard” (Mark 12,8). The patience of the land-owner is at an end: he will destroy the vineyard and give it to others. The ending of the parable looks forward to the destruction of Jerusalem and the call of the Gentiles into the Kingdom. The parable ends with a verse from a psalm about the rejected stone that has become the corner-stone. This psalm was frequently used in early Christian liturgy as a reference to God’s vindication of Jesus in the resurrection. The effect of the parable, like Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard is to goad the

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conscience of the hearers. In the case of the religious leaders who have questioned the authority of Jesus, they wish to kill him but for fear of the crowd, they are decide to bide their time.

4.3.3 Mark 13

Chapter 13 begins with Jesus and the disciples making their way out of the Temple. The disciples are impressed by the size of the great stones used in the construction of the Temple by Herod the Great - they can still be seen today in the only remaining fragment of the Temple, the [Western Wall](#). The scene for the rest of the chapter shifts to the Mount of Olives. We have already pointed out the symbolic importance of this place. The disciples, Peter, James and John ask, “When this shall be.” Their question becomes a signal for the long discourse (13:5-37). This part of the Gospel presents a number of difficulties. Let us begin by reading it in the context of Mark’s presentation of the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem, afterwards we shall return to pick up a number of the critical issues. Much of the preceding scene of teaching in the Temple has prepared us for the note of violent cataclysm that is to shake Jerusalem in the future. Jesus has come as judge to Jerusalem and found that the holy centre of Judaism is far from perfect. The disorder in the Temple can only be finally put right by an intervention of the Lord coming from the Mount of Olives. The plot to kill Jesus will draw on its perpetrators the same kind of consequences as came on the murders of the beloved Son in the parable of the wicked tenants of the vine-yard. The solid wall of the magnificently reconstructed Temple of Herod will not be able to withstand the disaster that is to come. We need to bear in mind that, according to the sacred history of the Jews, the truly decisive moments of divine judgement were accompanied by destruction of the Temple. This came about in 586 BCE under the Babylonians, and again in 168 BCE at the time of the Maccabees. So moments of decisive divine judgement were moments in which the Jewish world as it was then known was brought to an end by the destruction of the Temple. The end of the Temple was symbolically at least, the end of a religious world.

The discourse on the Mount of Olives is about how the disciples of Jesus should behave in the moment of crisis of such a world-ending. The first word to the disciples is to take care not to be laid astray into panic (13:3-8). There will be signs of chaos - wars and rumours of wars, international upheaval, earthquakes, famines etc but that does not mean that the end has arrived. The church will also face a time of persecution and betrayal, even at the hands of those it considered its nearest and dearest (13:9-14). One important sign will be the presence of the “desolating sacrilege.” This probably refers to the custom whereby when a city was captured by foreign troops, they often set up a statue of their own protecting god in the major sanctuary of the place, as a symbolic way of stating the superiority of their god over the god of the conquered people. When that happens, the disciples must take flight from Jerusalem. Flight will be difficult: the winter will pose

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particular difficulties, as will health, small children. This time of crisis be accompanied by an outbreak of messianic hysteria (13:21-22), and the disciples will need to exercise a special vigilance. There will also be signs in the heavens of some great trial still to come, and at its climax, the Son of Man will appear in glory to gather his elect from the four winds (13:24-27). Yet, this prophecy about the future is not meant to inspire fear. The disciple should learn above all how to read the signs of the times, just as they learned almost instinctively to read the signs of nature (the fig-tree and its leaves). There exact moment of the ending the world has not been revealed to anyone (even to the Son). In the meantime, all the believer can do is to act like a faithful servant who keeps watch for the master's return. The final word of the discourse is a call to watchfulness, yet as we shall see in the account of the Passion narrative, the disciples fail to watch even for one hour. If they fail in the crisis of the passion, how will they fare in the crisis of a world-ending, whether that be the symbolic ending of the religious world of the Temple or in the ending of the real world when the Son of Man comes in glory?

The most important clue to reading this chapter is probably to be found in the fact that much of it is private teaching given by Jesus to a small inner core of the disciples away from the crowd. It is not therefore public teaching, but it is probably intended as a word of comfort, encouragement or guidance to the church in a time of later crisis. What might such a crisis have been? The situation that fits best is the crisis that faced Jerusalem in the time of the Jewish War (66-73 CE). It corresponds to many aspects of this chapter, e.g. the references to war, famine, and international disorder. It also corresponds to the situation of a persecuted church in which believers will be handed over to the civil authorities. If this is the case, then Mark 13 is an important aid to dating the Gospel of Mark, and shows that it was compiled about 70 CE, although commentators differ on whether it was before or after the fall of Jerusalem in that year. Mark's account of the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem, and probably the earlier Christian oral tradition, makes several important links between the death of Jesus and the fate of Jerusalem in the next generation. Given this link, the serious unrest of the period 66-70 CE would have offered a number of challenges to the Christian community. Unlike the Jewish partisans who believed initially at least that they would throw off Roman power and restore Israel as a Jewish kingdom, Christians would have had no such hopes for the future. The Jewish world had had its opportunity to respond to the call of the Kingdom in the preaching of Jesus and it had refused. It could point to the prophetic movement in Israel's past for confirmation of this. Israel failed to listen to the prophetic call to conversion. Instead, it trusted in its own ability to withstand a powerful colonial power (Babylon) with disastrous consequences, including the loss of Holy City and Temple. The Christian reading of the scriptures saw that a similar disaster would be repeated in Judaism's present conflict with Rome. How were they to respond to the crisis? According to Eusebius the early Church historian, many Christians did in fact flee to Pella across the Jordan. No doubt, many others remained behind and for them as well as for Christians living among Jewish communities in the Diaspora, life must have been quite tense. In such

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a setting it is quite likely that some might have appealed to the current situation as signs of the end time. If we re-read Mark from this perspective, we will find a wiser and more cautious point of view. He does not ignore the signs of the times, but stresses the necessity of a calm Christian discernment in interpreting them. Watchfulness and steadfastness must continue to the marks of the disciple of Jesus. Nor does he deny that the culmination of Christian expectation is the return of the glorious Christ. He does however discourage useless speculation about when it will take place. The master is already on his way and may return at any time. It is perhaps significant that the time Mark indicates, evening, mid-night, cock-crow or dawn, may have been times for Christian prayer. Watchfulness with the suffering Christ in agony may be of more value than vain waiting for the return of the glorious Christ as judge.