FIVE LESSONS ON MARK’S GOSPEL

By Tim Randolph

The goal of this presentation is to not only prepare teachers to lead classes through the life and teachings of Jesus but to understand Mark’s presentation of Jesus. We will review the standard introductory material for Mark’s Gospel along with key and distinctive components of Mark’s story.

Instead of merely presenting the material to the teachers, I wish to make our time more collaborative. A few times during each lesson I will pause and ask a question concerning the material we have covered. This will be indicated in the lessons by the letter Q. You will also see links to short videos to watch together to enhance and spark discussion. My hope is that by wrestling with the topics found in Mark, teachers will digest the material and feel adequate to ultimately teach through Mark’s Gospel.

OUTLINE OVERVIEW

**Lesson 1 – Introduction**
1. The beginning of Mark & Gospel
2. Mark and the Other Gospels
3. Authorship/Place Of Writing/Date/Audience

**Lesson 2 – Key Thematic Components**
1. Kingdom of God
2. Mark is a Gospel of action!
3. Mark’s use of threefold patterns
4. Irony, Vision and the Unexpected Characters

**Lesson 3 – The Christology of Mark**
1. Son of Man or Messiah?
2. Son of God and the Secret

**Lesson 4 – Mark’s Structure**
1. Drama in three acts (R.T. France)

**Lesson 5 – From the Upper Room to the Resurrection**
1. Brief Synoptic Comparison
2. A Challenge of Discipleship
Lesson 1 - Introduction

The purpose of Lesson 1 is to answer introductory questions regarding the nature of the Gospel according to Mark. We will get a feel for where Mark is taking us.

I. The beginning of Mark & The Gospel

A. Mark’s story begins “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

   Q - What is a Gospel? What is the good news? Is it limited to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection? Is it significant that Mark places this line at the beginning of his story?

   Watch this video - http://youtu.be/ICHovRHJAYY

   If you can, watch the entire video but if there are time constraints watch from minute 1:12 to 8:43.

B. Mark begins at Jesus’ baptism (Read Mark 1:1-12 together)

1. Lacks a birth narrative.

   a. Moves straight to Jesus’ ministry.

   Q - Why would Mark skip to Jesus’ Ministry?

II. Mark and the Other Gospels

A. Synoptic

1. Means – “Seeing together”

   a. A new Christian in our congregation was reading the New Testament for the first time. He expressed curiosity by asking me, “Why do the gospels sound the same? I swear Tim, this Luke guy is the same person as Mark!”

   Q - Why do you think the canon includes three gospels that share such an identical story?

2. Each Gospel writer had a different audience.

   a. Matthew is written to display a Jewish Messiah who fulfills the prophecy of the Old Testament. - (Read Matthew 5:17)

   b. Luke is written to show Jesus’ ministry to the Gentiles. - (Read the story of Simeon in Luke 2:25-32)

   c. Mark is written to Gentiles—possibly to Rome? (We will discuss this in more detail under III.)

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B. Who wrote 1st? Matthew or Mark? (Handout #1)

1. Traditionally attributed to Matthew. St. Augustine believed that Matthew wrote first then Mark borrowed from Matthew.²

2. Modern scholarship mostly holds to a Markan priority. Due to Mark’s brevity in comparison to the other Gospels and the amount of Markan material found in the other Synoptic writings, the Hypothesis is that Matthew and Luke use Mark’s narrative.
   a. Discuss Handout #1.
   Q - Obviously we are hypothesizing about who wrote first, but what do you think? What makes sense? Do you think this matters?

III. Authorship/Place Of Writing/Date/Audience

A. The Author is never stated in the text.

1. Large works such as Mark were seldom distributed anonymously. A title (the Gospel According to Mark) was placed on the text at a very early period of circulation.³

2. Traditionally attributed to John Mark (read the texts together)
   c. 1 Peter 5:13

B. It is unknown where Mark wrote his Gospel.

1. Possibly Rome, maybe Alexandria or Galilee? —Somewhere in the Mediterranean world.⁴

2. 1 Peter 5:13 locates Mark in Babylon (Rome).

C. The dating of Mark is disputed.

1. One internal clue might be found in Mark 13 (Read Mark 13:1-8,14) - However, Jesus is speaking apocalyptically referencing the O.T.⁵
   a. Roman Jewish war late 60’s to mid 70’s CE. so possibly written some time near.⁶

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⁴Ibid, 126.


D. Audience
1. Likely a Gentile audience—possibly the church in Rome?
   a. Mark fees the need to explain Jewish semantics (Read 3:17; 5:41; 7:11)
   b. Use of Roman expressions (Read 12:42, & 15:16)

NEXT LESSON - We will look at a few of Mark’s themes.
**LESSON 2 - KEY THEMATIC COMPONENTS**

The purpose of Lesson 2 is to highlight key themes and distinctive components in the Gospel according to Mark. The goal is to be mindful of the theological devices used by Mark to convey the message of Jesus and to tell his story.

(To begin this lesson read Mark chapter 1 in its entirety.)

I. The Kingdom of God

A. Highlight Mark 1:14-15.

Q - What is the Kingdom of God?

Watch this video together - http://youtu.be/yNh0z36LsA0?t=8m30s

The video should start at minute 8:30. Jesus scholar Marcus Borg discusses the implications of the Kingdom of God.

Q - When you read or hear “Kingdom of God,” do you think about this term having religious/political implications rather than just a personal meaning between God and his people?

B. We will address this in more detail in our next lesson - **CHRISTOLOGY.**

II. Mark is a Gospel of action!

A. Highlight the use of immediately in the first chapter (v. 12; 18; 20)

1. έυθύς - “Immediately” used 41 times by Mark. Used 51 times in the N.T.!

   έυθύς is used 11 times in the first chapter alone!

   Some translations use “At once” or “without delay”.

   a. Covers a lot of ground in just the first chapter!

   b. Considerably shorter than the other Gospel accounts.

B. Mark uses the historical present over 150 times instead of the past tense.  

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III. Mark’s use of threefold patterns⁹

(Here are a few key examples)

A. Three seed parables
   1. 4:1-9 – The sower
   2. 4:26-29 – Growing seeds
   3. 4:30-32 – Mustard seed

B. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection three times
   1. 8:31 – First prediction
   2. 9:31 – Second prediction
   3. 10:33-34 – Third prediction

C. Peter’s Denial
   1. 14:66-72

D. Jesus announced as Son of God. (Excluding the demoniac confessions)
   1. 1:11 – Jesus’ baptism
   2. 9:7 – The Transfiguration
   3. 15:39 – The Centurion’s confession

E. Even Mark’s Gospel is broken up into three distinct sections. We will look at this in more detail in our 4th lesson – MARK’S STRUCTURE

IV. Irony, Vision and Unexpected Characters

A. Throughout Mark’s Gospel those who should see Jesus cannot, while those least expected can see.
   1. Jesus family – Read 3:20-35
      a. Jesus’ inside teaching
      b. Family is outside (outside of understanding?)
   2. His disciples – Read 8:11-33
      a. The disciples are confused about the bread – v. 16.

b. Jesus says, “Do you have eyes, and fail to see?” – v. 18

c. Jesus heals the blind man at Bethsaida and he “saw everything clearly.” – v. 25.

d. Peter confesses! Does he see? – v. 29.

e. Jesus predicts his death and Peter rebukes. Peter still doesn’t fully see. – v. 31-33.

3. The religious – Read 1:21-28

a. Those in the synagogue are amazed and confused at Jesus’ healing power. – v. 22, 27.

b. A man with an unclean spirit confesses that Jesus is the “Holy one of God.” – v. 24. (More on Jesus’ request to “be quiet” in our next lesson.)

i. Note that among the religious the Pharisees persistently struggle with blindness. – Read 8:10-11. After Jesus multiplies bread for the 4,000 (a sign) the Pharisees ask for a sign.

Q - What do you think is the purpose of these stylistic components? Is it ok that Mark stylistically structures his story for theological purposes?

NEXT LESSON - We will look at Mark’s Christology.
Lesson 3 — The Christology of Mark

The Goal of Lesson 3 is to review the titles given to Jesus in Mark’s story. A better understanding of Mark’s use of titles for Jesus will help the teacher comprehend the Gospel’s theological purposes.

I. Messiah or Son of Man?

We began our last session discussing the importance of the Kingdom of God. This ties nicely to our discussion about the Messiah.

A. Messiah

1. Literally means “anointed one”
   a. Christ is the Greek term meaning Messiah.
      i. Christ/Messiah is a title given to Jesus. It has transformed into a proper name.

   a. Act of anointing (Messiah) has kingly implications. (Mark 15:32)
   b. Messianic language had Davidic connotations.
      i. Root of Jesse – (Read Isaiah 11; Jeremiah 23:5)

3. Expectations
   a. During the time of Jesus there were various speculations on the coming of the messiah.
      i. Numerous messianic movements and political movements.10
         ii. Expectations were high!
   b. Messiah as restorer!
      i. David, the first great king, plans to build the Temple for the Lord. The messiah to come will be a rebuild of the temple and restore Israel to her former glory.11

4. Take another look at Mark 8:27-33.
   a. Peter confesses, “You are the messiah.”
   b. Jesus explains the plan—to suffer and be killed.
   c. Peter rebukes his messianic vision.
      i. Peter’s expectations do not fit Jesus’ vision.
         ii. This is a good place to recognize another title given to Jesus in Mark—Son of David. (Mark 10:47-48) This is clearly recognition of Messiahship.


11Ibid, 483-84.
B. Son of Man
1. A title used by Jesus.
   a. Read Daniel 7:13-14
      i. Representative of God and a man—member of the human race.\textsuperscript{12}
2. Jesus often shifts attention to “Son of Man” after talk of Messiah.
   a. Mark 8:38
      i. After Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah
   b. Mark 14:62
      i. After the Council asked if he was the Messiah
   c. Mark 13:26
      i. After the cleansing of the temple and the prediction of the temples destruction. Such action was considered Messianic.

\textbf{Q} - Which is it? Is Jesus the Messiah or the Son of Man?
Watch this video together - http://youtu.be/WXQbBhNSkHs

\textbf{Q} - How does Jesus’s vision of the Son of Man fit with his vision of Messiah?

II. Son of God and the Secret
A. The use of the Son of God
1. By the demoniac
   a. Read 3:11-12
      i. Wherever unclean spirits saw him!
   b. Read 5:7-8
      i. Do not torment me... recognized Jesus’ power
         ii. Legion uses “Son of the Most High God.” In 1:24-25 the man with the unclean spirit calls him “the holy One of God”
2. Messianic
   a. Mark 1:1
      i. The story about the Messiah, Son of God.

\textsuperscript{12}Marcus, 528.
b. Mark 15:61-62
   i. Jesus confesses (I AM) to the question of being the Messiah son of the Blessed one.

3. Divine? (review the triad confessions)
   a. His baptism – The voice of God (Mark 1:11)
   b. The Transfiguration – The voice of God (Mark 9:37)
   c. The Cross – The Centurion (Mark 15:39)
      i. The 1st human confession.
   d. Paul?
      i. Read Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4
   e. Old Testament?
      i. Read Psalm 2:7; Psalm 110 (see Mark 12:35-37)

B. The Secret
1. Messianic Secret?\(^{13}\)
   a. Jesus quiets Bartimaeus for calling him Son of David. (As we just read)
   b. Most call him Son of God/ Holy one of God.
      ii. As we read the Son of God confessions by the demoniacs Jesus tells them to be quiet after they reveal his identity.
         \(Q\) – Why do you think Jesus wanted to keep his identity private early in his ministry?
      iii. Jesus’ identity cannot truly be known until he is glorified.\(^{14}\) – Read 15:38-39 and 9:9.

We will return to the question of the secret and the thematic issue of vision when we get to lesson 5 - From the Upper Room to the Resurrection

NEXT LESSON - We will look at how Mark structures his story.


\(^{14}\)Marcus, 526
Lesson 4 – Mark’s Structure

The purpose of Lesson 4 is to get a feel for the overall structure of Mark’s Gospel. Now that we’ve discussed key themes and components along with the Christology of this Gospel, we see how Mark constructs his story to communicate his message of Jesus.

I. Drama in Three Acts

A. Scholar R. T. France has done an excellent job with Mark’s structure. It is to be noted that Mark’s Gospel is moving towards Jerusalem—ultimately the cross.

1. Galilee – 1:14-8:21
   a. After a brief prologue, Jesus does the bulk of his public ministry in the Galilean region among non-Jewish people.16
      i. “Mark’s aim [is] to lead us to understand how the messianic mission of the Son of God, set out in theological perspective in the prologue, was worked out in practice among the inhabitance of the villages and smaller towns of Galilee.”17

   a. The story begins to intensify and focus its sights on Jerusalem.
      i. 8:31 – Jesus predicts his suffering at the hands of the “elders, chief priests and scribes” – In Jerusalem.
      ii. The failure to see the kingdom and Jesus’ plan intensifies among the disciples and Jesus’ opponents.
   b. Less public ministry
      i. Only a few healings (8:22-26; 9:14-29; 10:43-52)
      ii. Private instruction with Disciples
   c. ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ & εἰς ὁδόν – “on the way”
      i. (Read 8:27; 9:33-34; 10:17, 32, 52)
      ii. Geographical movement
      iii. Discipleship as a journey18

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16 Ibid, 88.

17 Ibid, 89.

18 Ibid, 320.
   a. 11:1 – Approaching Jerusalem – First time in Jerusalem.
   b. Healings finished – only one miracle.
      i. Cursing the fig tree - negative not positive – a prophetic judgment.
   c. Prophetic actions
      i. Entering Jerusalem - Zach. 9:9; Cursing the fig tree - Jeremiah 8:13; Cleansing the temple – Isaiah 56:7, Jer. 7:1-11; Little apocalypse/ Son of Man – Dan 7:13-14.
      ii. Mark 13 serves as France’s second Explanatory Discourse. Allows the “readers to pause and think about the significance of what is being narrated.”\(^\text{19}\) See also Ezk. 40-48.
   d. Messianic
      i. Though Jerusalem is his place of death it is the city of David. “The Messiah must come to ‘his’ capital and present himself to his people.”\(^\text{20}\)

B. Notice how the three “Son of God” statements fit nicely within this triadic structure.
1. Jesus’ Baptism – 1:11
   a. Jesus’ identity is revealed to Jesus
      i. Jesus’ glory revealed to readers
      ii. Inaugurated his ministry in Galilee
2. The Transfiguration – 9:7
   a. Jesus’ identity is revealed to his disciples
      i. Jesus’ glory is revealed to some
3. The Cross – 15:39
   a. A climatic confession—Jesus’ identity & glory revealed to all!
      i. Compare this full confession to Peter’s half confession
      ii. Mark’s gospel has led us to this point – finally someone can see! Identity revealed to the Gentiles.

\(^{19}\)Ibid, 427.
\(^{20}\)Ibid, 426.
C. In addition to France’s *Explanatory Discourses* I’ve added an emphasis on Jesus’ death predictions. *These discourses or concentrations of teachings*² are used to explain the actions of Jesus.

1. Explanatory Discourse 1 - 4:1-34
   a. This discourse falls in Act 1. Jesus teaches in Parables.
      i. Jesus teaches about the Kingdom to explain what has been happening.
      ii. Just before – Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God (1:15) and begins to heal.

2. Explanatory Discourse 2 - 13:3-35
   a. This discourse falls in Act 3. Jesus gives us his apocalyptic and prophetic vision of the destruction of the temple and the end.
      ii. Just before—Jesus curses the fig tree and cleanses the temple (11:12-19)

3. Jesus’ Death Predictions
   a. 8:31
      i. Jesus reveals his plan
      ii. Just before—Peter confesses Jesus is the Messiah (8:29)
         iii. Jesus explains his messianic plan.
   b. 9:31-32
      i. Jesus reveals his plan to die a second time.
      ii. Just before—Jesus is seen in a glorified state at the Transfiguration (9:7), and restores (resurrects?) a boy thought to have died (9:26-29)
   c. 10:33-34
      i. Jesus reveals his plan to die a third time.
      ii. Just before—the disciples argue who’s the greatest (9:33-37), a rich man refuses to give up his wealth to follow Jesus (10:17-22), and Peter confesses to giving up everything to follow Jesus (10:28).

Q - What surprises you about the structure of Mark? What is striking? Why do you think he chooses to construct his story in such a way? How does Mark’s chronology compare with the other 3 Gospels? Why do you think they are different?

NEXT LESSON - We will take a closer look at Mark’s ending.

²Ibid, 14.
The Purpose of Lesson 5 is to review the final days of Jesus and to see how Mark’s ending functions as the climax of the story—revealing Jesus as the Son of God. It also serves as a challenge to Mark’s readers—the church in Rome. It is also a challenge to us today!

I. Brief Synoptic Comparison

(Because, as most believe, Mark was used for Matthew and Luke’s narrative there isn’t a lot of passion material unique to Mark. A few comparisons are helpful to understand Mark’s ending.)

A. The Upper Room & Gethsemane

1. Both Matthew and Mark foretell Peter’s denial after the Supper (Matthew 26:30-35 & Mark 14:26-31)
2. Sleeping in the garden (14:32-42)
   a. In Mark the disciples appear foolish and weak. – Enough!
      i. Their eyes are closed to what Jesus is doing.
   b. In Luke the disciples are grieving – (22:45)
      i. Sad because they are aware

B. Arrest and trial

1. Young Man who ran away naked (14:51-52)
   a. Only mentioned in Mark
      i. Completes the deserters
         ii. Jesus is calm while the disciples run away
         iii. Allusion to Judgment of Israel in Amos 2:16?
            Genesis 39:12?
         iv. Adam in the garden?
2. Only Matthew and Mark include Jesus being interrogated by the priest’s and elders at night. (Matt. 26:59-66 & Mark 14:55-64)
   a. Emphasizes Jesus’ suffering
      i. Peter is in the distance with a guard!
      ii. Maximizes Jesus’ loneliness (see below)
      iii. See also Matthew 27:27-31 and Mark 15:16-20

22See Lesson 1’s discussion on Mark’s audience.
C. Crucifixion
1. Jesus is offered wine as a drug to dull the pain
   a. In Matthew Jesus tastes (27:34)
   b. In Mark he refuses to taste (15:23
      i. Jesus fully suffers and feels everything!

D. Resurrection
1. Mark’s ending is the shortest. Earliest manuscripts end at 16:8.
   a. Most scholars believe that the longer ending of Mark (16:9-20) is not written by Mark.  
      i. Missing ending? Intended to end openly?

Q – What are the advantages or disadvantages of ending Mark at 16:8?

(Read Mark 14-16:8)

II. A Challenge of Discipleship

A. Alone
1. Rejected by the religious – 14:1-2
   a. Plot to Kill (Destroy) Jesus has been brewing since 3:6
2. Betrayed by Judas – 14:10, 44
   a. Imagine the deep hurt – It’s one thing to be betrayed by an enemy (the religious) but by one in your inner circle would be difficult to undergo.  Hindsight makes us forgetful that Judas was special to Jesus- called as one of the 12!
2. Denied by Peter – 14:29-31, 66-72
   a. Earlier Peter confesses Jesus is the Messiah – 8:29
3. Asleep in Gethsemane – 14:32-42
   a. Can you not keep awake for one hour?
      i. Asleep/in the dark about Jesus’ glorification.
      ii. Could you stay awake? When’s the last time you’ve prayed an hour?
4. Alone in his darkest hour – 14:53-16:8
   a. Among the counsel
      i. Peter follows at a distance – 14:54

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b. At the cross and resurrection
   i. Only the women are present at the cross (15:40-41) and the resurrection (16:1)
   ii. Jesus’ apostles (the men) have deserted him – 14:27
   iii. It is important to note the significance of women in Mark’s gospel!

_The Challenge for the Church:_ Will you follow Jesus in light of persecution? When the going gets tough, will you follow the Son of God?

B. Witness

1. There’s nobody left to proclaim Jesus as God’s Son!
   a. His closest friends have deserted him.

2. At the Cross (15:39)
   a. “Truly this man is God’s Son!”
      i. The Centurion—non-Jew is the Witness to Jesus’ glory.
      ii. Finally this is confessed by a human voice!

3. At the resurrection
   a. The disciples are to meet Jesus in Galilee – 14:28
      i. The young man dressed in white tells the women that Jesus has gone to Galilee—like he told his followers - 16:7
      ii. Afraid.
   b. Told to “go and tell” – 16:7
      i. Mark ends by saying “they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” – 16:8
      ii. Compare to demoniac in 5:20

   A Challenge to the Church – Will you be a witness to the things you’ve seen and heard?

Q - How does the issue of vision play a key literary role in Mark’s story? – Notice in Mark’s gospel that only after witnessing the cross and resurrection do his followers fully understand.

As we end our study, what is the take-away for you? What is something new that you learned about Mark’s Gospel? What features do you plan to highlight when you teach?

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The Synoptic Problem - Who Wrote First?\textsuperscript{25}

1. Augustinian\textsuperscript{26}

Matthew $\rightarrow$ Mark  \hspace{0.5cm} Matthew & Mark $\rightarrow$ Luke

Matthew wrote first. Mark borrowed from Matthew and Luke borrowed from both Matthew and Mark.

2. Two-Source Hypothesis

Mark  \hspace{1cm} Q

\hspace{1cm} Matthew  \hspace{1cm} Luke

Mark wrote first. Matthew & Luke borrowed their narrative from Mark and the remaining material in Matthew and Luke was borrowed from another source (Q).

3. Q-Source

Q (\textit{Quelle} – “Source”) is primary sayings of Jesus.\textsuperscript{27}

3. The Farrer Hypothesis

Mark $\rightarrow$ Matthew  \hspace{0.5cm} Mark & Matthew $\rightarrow$ Luke

A. M. Farrer hypothesizes that Mark wrote first. Matthew borrows from Mark and Luke borrows from both Mark and Matthew. Instead of depending upon another source (Q), Farrer assumes the differences between Matthew and Luke is original material.


\textsuperscript{26}D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, \textit{An Introduction to the New Testament}. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 93.

1:1 The Heading
1:2-13 The Prologue: Setting The Scene
  1:11 – “You’re My Son” – Jesus’ Baptism
1:14-8:21 Act One: Galilee
  1:14-15 Introduction: The Essential Message Of Jesus
  1:16-20 The Formation Of The ‘Jesus Circle’
  1:21-39 Preaching And Healing: General Impression (A Day In Capernaum)
  1:40-3:6 Controversial Aspects Of Jesus’ Ministry
  3:7-12 Wide Recognition Of Jesus’ Authority To Heal
  3:13-35 Varying Responses To Jesus: Supporters And Opponents
  4:1-34 – Explanatory Discourse: The Paradox Of The Kingdom Of God
  4:35-5:43 Further Revelations Of Jesus’ Unique Authority
  6:1-6 Not Everyone Is Impressed By Jesus
  6:7-30 Jesus’ Mission Extended Through The Disciples
  6:31-56 A Sequence Of Miracles Around The Lake: Who Is Jesus?
  7:1-23 A Foretaste Of Confrontation In Jerusalem: The Issue Of Purity
  7:24-8:10 The Mission Extended To Neighboring Peoples
  8:11-21 Summary So Far: Both Opponents & Supporters Still Have A Lot To Learn

8:22-10:52 Act Two: On The Way To Jerusalem (Learning About The Cross)
  8:22-26 First Healing Of A Blind Man
  8:27-9:13 Learning To Recognize Jesus
    8:31 – Jesus Foretells His Death: First Prediction
    9:7 – “This Is My Son” – The Transfiguration
  9:14-29 Success And Failure In Exorcism
  9:30-50 More Lessons About The Way Of The Cross
    9:31-32 – Jesus Foretells His Death: Second Prediction
  10:1-31 The Revolutionary Values Of The Kingdom Of God
  10:32-45 Following Jesus In The Way Of The Cross
    10:33-34 – Jesus Foretells His Death: Third Prediction
  10:45-52 Second Healing Of A Blind Man

11:1-16:8 Act Three: Jerusalem
  11:1-25 Throwing Down The Gauntlet
  11:27-13:2 Confrontation With The Jerusalem Establishment
    13:3-35 – Explanatory Discourse: The End Of The Old Order
  14:1-11 Setting The Scene For The Passion
  14:12-42 Last Hours With The Disciples
  14:43-15:15 The Arrest And Trials Of Jesus
  15:16-47 The Crucifixion, Death, And Burial Of Jesus
    15:39 – “This Was God’s Son” – The Centurion At The Cross.
  16:1-8 The Empty Tomb

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Sources Consulted


