



## The Gospel of Mark - Chapter Three

### II. Mark 1:14-8:26 - Demonstration of Jesus' Authority (continues)

#### II.a Mark 1:14-3:12 - Jesus' early Galilæan ministry (continues/concludes)

##### Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter commences with the second Sabbath controversy in which Jesus healed a man with a shrivelled hand in front of everyone in the synagogue, something that set the religious and political leaders against him, even though it was so clearly an act of compassion.

The crowds continued to flock to Jesus to hear him teach and to be healed of their diseases and demonic possession. His fame had spread so far and wide that people were coming from as far south as Idumæa, from east of the Jordon river and from the Mediterranean Sea coastal areas of Tyre and Sidon.

By now Jesus had a large group of disciples following him, who were being taught by Jesus and served the needs of the crowds that flocked to him. From this group, Jesus selected twelve, whom he designated apostles. These would be the main men who would later build his church.

A number of Teachers of the Law travelled down from Jerusalem to hear Jesus speak and see him perform healing miracles. What they saw could not be disputed but they misunderstood and attributed his work to Satan. His mother and her children arrived in the hope of taking Jesus with them back to the family home but Jesus taught that his true family are those who faithfully serve God.

#### II.a.x Mark 3:1-6 - Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

This was the second of the Sabbath controversies, following on from his disciples picking grains of corn on a Sabbath that the Pharisees had seen as work (Mark 2:23-28). This time, however, their opposition reflected the hard-heartedness of those in the synagogue who should have rejoiced at a man being healed of a physical disability, being set free to perform more able duties in his community.

<sup>1</sup> Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. <sup>2</sup> Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.

### Mark 3:1-2

Another time indicates this was a separate Sabbath day to the incident where the disciples had picked corn, which Luke agrees with and makes it quite specific: <<*On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shrivelled*>> (Luke 6:6). Matthew however records as being on the same day: <<*For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"*>> (Matthew 12:8-9). The accuracy of the day makes no difference to the point of the account and does not support the argument of those who claim that Scripture is flawed. Those who do so are missing the point of what is being taught, just as these officials did to their own eternal harm.

Some of them probably refers to the Teachers of the Law or scribes and the Herodians (v.6), as well as the synagogue ruler, who believed that healing was not permitted on a Sabbath as it was perceived to involve some form of work by either the healer or the man being healed. One synagogue leader was clearly annoyed when Jesus healed a woman in the synagogue on a Sabbath: <<*But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. "There are six days of the week for working," he said to the crowd. "Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath"*>> (Luke 13:14).

Accuse, the Greek *katēgoreō*, also means bring charges, and is a technical term. Jesus' opponents were seeking to mount a legal case against him by collecting evidence of perceived wrong-doing, i.e. infringements of the Mosaic Law.

They watched him closely. Jesus was always under close scrutiny by those who opposed him, looking for any opportunity to bring charges against him, even setting traps to do so: <<*Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Cæsar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Cæsar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Cæsar what is Cæsar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him*>> (Mark 12:13-17).

<sup>3</sup> Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." <sup>4</sup> Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath:

to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

### Mark 3:3-4

Stand up in front of everyone. Jesus was not intimidated by his opponents; he made this Sabbath healing an intentionally public incident. He also wanted to make sure that everyone could see the man’s disability that they should have compassion on him for themselves, wanting a loved neighbour to be restored to full health and capability. But their hearts were hardened and empty of love.

They remained silent. The silence of the opponents displayed their hardness of heart, as well as their hypocrisy, and Jesus’ anger showed that his question, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” should have been answered: to do good by anyone with any sense of compassion. This would not violate the OT law, but it would violate the opponents’ extra-biblical, mostly Pharisaic tradition. Their tradition missed the point of the Mosaic Law: to love both God and one’s neighbour: <<*Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these”*>> (Mark 12:29-31).

<sup>5</sup> He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

### Mark 3:5

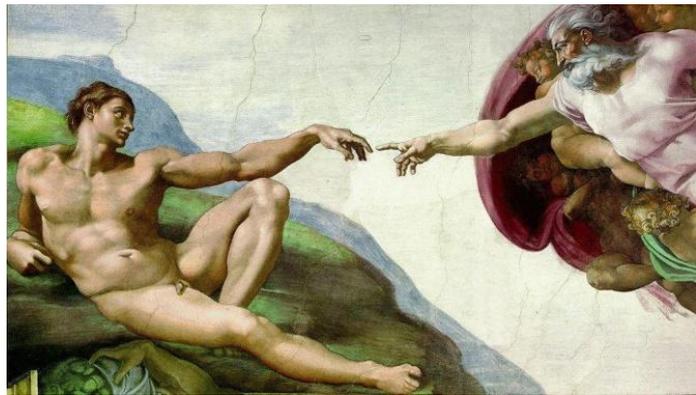
He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts. The lack of compassion that these men showed to a neighbour brought his anger to the surface and yet his own compassion for them distressed him, for he knew that their eternal outcome would be so much worse if their hearts could not be brought to repentance.

We have seen this type of grief in God before: <<*And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart*>> (Genesis 6:6 ESV), where the NLT states that: <<*it broke his heart*>>, and the NIV that: <<*his heart was deeply troubled*>>. Jesus would later reveal that his very soul was troubled, this time at the thought of what he must do: <<*Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour*>> (John 12:27). Therefore, these are not just the emotions of Jesus the man but that of Jesus in his divine nature.

Stretch out your hand. Jesus pointedly did not do anything in this situation that could be called work. He did not even touch the man but simply spoke a word and surely *speaking* is not prohibited on the Sabbath! Nor did the disabled man do any forbidden work, for he simply stretched out his hand. Jesus’ accusers were silenced and they were furious according to a complimentary account: <<*But the*

*Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus>> (Luke 6:11).*

What this passage also teaches is that people need to stretch out to God in order to be healed both physically and spiritually. They need to do so in the way God is reaching out to Adam and not with Adam's half-hearted response. God is prepared to meet his people most of the way but they need to reach out in their hearts to him. See the image.



Michaelangelo's Adam

His hand was completely restored. This was proof, not just of his love and compassion, or even his obedience to his Father's commands, but that Jesus is: <<**Lord even of the Sabbath**>> (Mark 2:28). Prior to this healing the man's disability would have limited his choice of work, now he would be able to undertake many more tasks in a society where manual dexterity was important for most forms of employment.

Despite the animosity of those around him, Jesus did what was right and healed the man. It would have been easy just to sit down quietly and let the problem go away, even if that meant leaving the man disabled and perhaps damaging his faith. What this account also demonstrates to those who would choose to follow Christ is that they must always try to do the right thing in the face of adversity, no matter what the opposition is or what the subsequent consequences may be.

<sup>6</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

### Mark 3:6

The Pharisees were quite different from the Herodians, i.e. supporters and associates of Herod Antipas of Galilee and the Herodian family dynasty. The Herodians were a loosely organised group that sought to advance the political and economic influence of the Herodian family, who reigned in the region from circa 37BC-AD93.

Although the Herodians and the Pharisees were adversaries in regard to many political and religious issues, they joined forces here, i.e. began to plot, in order to combat the perceived threat to their power and status that was being posed by Jesus and the acceptance of his Gospel message by an increasing number of people. Therefore, these two groups held counsel together as prophesied by King David: <<**The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed**>> (Psalm 2:2), in order to destroy their perceived common enemy Jesus: <<**Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the**

*teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him*>> (Mark 14:1).

The Pharisees resided primarily in Jerusalem and were divided into at least three schools: the disciples of Shammai, Hillel and Gamaliel. These schools were especially concerned with the proper administration of the temple.

The disciples of Shammai, who represented the more conservative wing of the group, were dominant before the destruction of the temple in AD70 (Mishnah, Shabbat 1:4). But Hillel, representing a more liberal interpretation of the Jewish scriptures, had moved from Babylon to Jerusalem about a generation before Jesus, and had gained wide influence as well.

Gamaliel, the son or possibly grandson of Hillel, was a renowned teacher of the law in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul had been a disciple of Gamaliel, which Paul himself confirms in Acts 22:3. Gamaliel is perhaps best remembered for his wisdom when dealing with the disciples in Acts 5:34 and with his careful management of the Jewish calendar.

For more information on the Pharisees, refer to the comments made on Luke 5:17 of this series.

#### II.a.xi Mark 3:7-12 - Crowds Follow Jesus

Jesus' fame had spread well beyond Galilee and Samaria, with crowds coming from Judæa and Idumæa in the south, from east of the Jordan River and from the coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon, where the latter two areas were predominantly Gentile regions, although there were pockets of Jews and their descendants living there too.

Although the crowds posed difficulties for Jesus, especially in terms of having time alone with his closer disciples and apostles, so that he could teach them, Jesus always had compassion for the people, making time to teach and heal them, many of whom were demon possessed. The demons readily acknowledged Jesus and succumbed to his much superior power.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. <sup>8</sup> When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judæa, Jerusalem, Idumæa, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.

#### Mark 3:7-8

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake. Some early commentators state this was Jesus drawing away from the Pharisees and Herodians, who were plotting against him. It seems more likely that he sought a place where his teaching would not be interrupted by his opponents. Jesus never ran away from controversy, in fact, there were times when he deliberately seemed to court it: <<***But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?***>> (John 5:45-47), and: <<***You belong to your father, the***

*devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies>>* (John 8:44). In these early days though, it was more important for him to get his message out to as many people as possible in order to establish a base for his disciples to work from after he had left them and gone back to the Father.

A large crowd from Galilee followed. Jesus would no doubt have been content that so many were seeking him, just as Moses wrote: *<<But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul>>* (Deuteronomy 4:29), and the writer to the Hebrews takes it further: *<<And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him>>* (Hebrews 11:6).

Despite serious opposition, Jesus was now known in Galilee, in Judæa including Jerusalem, and Idumæa, the Herodian stronghold in the south, in the area across the Jordan, i.e. to the east of the river, and in Tyre and Sidon to the northwest by the Mediterranean Sea. All of these regions had belonged to Israel during the time of the Judges and especially under Kings David and Solomon, and descendants of the 12 tribes had now resettled in these regions following the Babylonian exile, although it does not discount the probability that some of these people were Gentiles, as will be seen later in Mark.

<sup>9</sup> Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. <sup>10</sup> For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him.

### Mark 3:9-10

Because of the crowd, have a small boat ready. The popularity of Jesus had grown, especially on account of his healings and casting out demons. His main aim, however, was to teach about, and to call people to, the Kingdom of God: *<<After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!">>* (Mark 1:14-15).

Have a small boat ready. Although Jesus would use this means of transport to seek a place to be alone with his disciples: *<<So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place>>* (Mark 6:32), on this occasion he did not want a boat to escape from the crowd but as a way to maintain control and a platform from which to teach from, should they crowd too closely and prevent him from teaching effectively to all: *<<Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge>>* (Mark 4:1). It would also provide him with transport to move further along the coast, where other crowds would soon have gathered.

Crowding him. Unlike the other religious leaders, Jesus was not afraid of being in among the ordinary people or being touched by them, as seen with the man who had leprosy: *<<Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the*

man. *“I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”*>> (Mark 1:41), or when a woman who had continual menstrual bleeding for twelve years touched him and was healed: <<*At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’”*>> (Mark 5:30-31).

Those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Diseases is the Greek word *mastigas*, which was used to describe plagues, but also means corrections or chastisements, indicating these people may have been suffering because of their sins. The crowds seemed to gather because Jesus had a reputation for performing miracles and they had faith that just being able to touch him would be sufficient to heal them.

Although Jesus wanted to teach them about the Kingdom and to instil faith in them, he was no doubt content to perform miracles in order to draw the crowds. In the early days of both Christ’s ministry and during the apostolic era, miracles were performed in abundance. As the Word spread there was less need for them, as their main purpose was often to help the spread of the Gospel rather than the compassionate outcome of the miracle, as can be seen with an example from Peter’s ministry: <<*Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord*>> (Acts 9:40-42).

In Jewish Antiquities, historian Josephus wrote: ‘About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats’.

<sup>11</sup> Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” <sup>12</sup> But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

### Mark 3:11-12

They fell down before him. The impure spirits were probably reacting out of fear that Jesus might destroy them rather than finally acknowledging his lordship, repenting and turning to him: <<*“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!”*>> (Mark 1:24), and in an even more dramatic account: <<*When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!” For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”*>> (Mark 5:6-9). It is unlikely that the offer of eternal life through Jesus applies to the spirit world in the way it does to humans. Anyway, these impure spirits were clearly openly opposing the Holy Spirit and therefore guilty of an eternal sin as noted in v.29, placing them beyond salvation.

Jesus did not permit impure spirits to speak about him, giving them strict orders not to tell others, for even when they made true statements about him, i.e. you are the Son of God, unwillingly acknowledging his greater authority, their intent was still evil, and they would divulge Jesus' true identity, which would lead to much misunderstanding before he wanted to make himself fully known.

## II.b Mark 3:13-6:6a - Jesus' later Galilæan ministry

Jesus appointed his disciples to teach what he teaches and to do as he did. Parables, nature miracles and healings expand the range of Jesus authority, which is met with rejection in Nazareth.

### II.b.i Mark 3:13-35 - Calling of the Twelve

The appointment of his disciples to do the will of God constituted a further movement toward the formation of the messianic people of God, i.e. the church.

#### II.b.i.1 Mark 3:13-19 - The Appointing of the Twelve Apostles

Mark is quite succinct in his telling of how Jesus chose the twelve apostles, who would then go out to spread the Gospel message, especially after the death and resurrection of Jesus. All but one of the twelve would die as martyrs for the Christ they so faithfully served.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and to have authority to drive out demons.

#### Mark 3:13-15

Jesus went up on a mountainside. According to Luke, this was an all night vigil to allow Jesus to be in communion with his Father: <<**One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God**>> (Luke 6:12), indicating the importance Jesus placed on this selection, even though any decision would have been taken before the dawn of time, as was the anointing of Jesus himself: <<**He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake**>> (1 Peter 1:20).

Called to him those he wanted, that is, those who were given to him by the Father: <<**All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away**>> (John 6:37), first revealing the Father to them: <<**I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word**>> (John 17:6), and then equipping them for service.

They came to him. Jesus calls people to himself as apostles here or as disciples throughout the church age. Those who are called must make a positive decision and then act accordingly by going to Christ to demonstrate their acceptance of that call in faith. Jesus does not impose himself on anyone, even if that means they will be lost for all eternity. However, he has made himself clearly known to all through the Gospel.

He appointed twelve. As is often the case, Mark presupposes further actions of Jesus without narrating them. Here it becomes evident that Jesus had, in the meantime, selected and appointed the twelve, whom he called out of the larger crowd that had been following him, for it seems unlikely to have been a late revelation in response to his prayer: <<*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles*>> (Luke 6:12-13).

The Twelve had a specific, twofold task:

1. That they might be with Jesus, reinforcing their call to discipleship and then being shaped by him.
2. That Jesus might send them out, thus suggesting the sense of the term apostles, Greek apostolos, as those Jesus would send out to proclaim the Gospel. After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the apostles established and governed the whole church, under the overall control of their Risen Lord Jesus Christ, and they had authority to speak and write the Words of God, equal in authority to the OT Scriptures.

In their function of serving as Jesus-dependent emissaries, they were to do what Jesus showed and taught them to do, then gave them the authority to do it, that he might send them out to do it, which is true of all disciples throughout church history:

1. To preach the Word of the Kingdom of God, attracting people to come back to God through Christ, with the promise of eternal life in his presence.
2. To drive out demons and presumably to heal the sick was also part of their commission: <<*They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them*>> (Mark 6:13). This commission was put into action as recorded in Mark 6:7-12.

Initially, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God to descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel, and the selection of the 12 apostles almost certainly represented these tribes: <<*It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*>> (Revelation 21:12-14). The disciples' experience of being under the immediate oversight of Jesus would have been important for them, as they themselves would soon oversee the ministry of others after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.

<sup>16</sup> These are the twelve he appointed:

- <sup>17</sup> Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter),  
James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"),

### Mark 3:16-17

The core group of three apostles is mentioned first: Simon Peter, James and John. Peter was first in all the listings and was more of a spokesman than their appointed leader, the first among equals. These three men would serve Jesus on special occasions, such as the raising of Jairus' daughter to life (Mark 5:37), on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2), and on Jesus' final night in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33).

To whom he gave the name Peter: John records this renaming at their first meeting, when his brother Andrew brought Simon to Jesus: <<***And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter)***>> (John 1:42).

Sons of thunder. There are several theses put forward for John and James being named thus, including:

1. They had loud, strong voices that would be useful for preaching to large crowds, such as Jesus himself was able to do. There were no PA systems in those days, although it is written: <<***At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens"***>> (Hebrews 12:26).
2. They had strong, fervent spirits, and were passionate in all they did and spoke about. One example of this came when they encountered a Samaritan village that did not welcome Jesus: <<***When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"***>> (Luke 9:54), for which Jesus naturally rebuked them, reminding them of the need for grace!

18            Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son  
19            of Alphæus, Thaddæus, Simon the Zealot  
              and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

### Mark 3:18-19

Andrew is Simon Peter's brother. He was listed second in Matthew 10:2, so it may be that Mark wished to establish the inner core of three early on in his account.

Philip was from Bethsaida, the same town or birthplace as Peter and Andrew: <<***The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida***>> (John 1:44).

Bartholomew, which is from Bar-Tholomaios or son of Tholomaios, and is a family name that occurs in each of the lists in the Synoptic Gospels. He is probably the same person as Nathanaël listed in John's Gospel and is frequently paired with Philip.

Since Levi, now referred to as Matthew, was also named as the son of Alphæus (Mark 2:14), it seems likely that he and James the Lesser, as he was known, made up the third pair of brothers in the apostolic group.

James son of Alphæus is not to be confused with James the Greater, the brother of John, or James the Just, the brother of Jesus. As already noted, he was known as James the Less or Lesser, and appears to have been the brother of Matthew.

Thomas is referred to as Didymus by John, which means the twin. He is listed ahead of Matthew in Matthew 10:3, perhaps showing that Mark preferred to keep to the probable calling order.

Thaddæus is listed in Matthew 10:3 but does not appear in the parallel account of Luke 6:16, where he is called Judas the son of James, probably his second name, as many of the apostles had double names. Some earlier translations have Judas as the brother of James and commentators speculated he was the son of Joseph and Mary; the author of the Book of Jude. Modern thinking now has this as being most unlikely.

Simon, the Zealot is confirmed in Matthew 10:4 and Luke 6:15. Zealot comes from the Greek word *zēlōtēs*.

The Zealots were political activists, and were radically opposed to Roman rule. Apart from Jesus' call and influence on their lives, Matthew and Simon would have had deep animosity toward each other, with Matthew, as a tax collector, working in the service of Rome and Simon, as a Zealot, seeking to overthrow Rome.

Judas Iscariot was the son of Simon Iscariot, which probably means man from Kerioth, a town in Judæa. It was Judas who betrayed him and was therefore mentioned last in all the apostolic listings. Judas was called to be with Jesus, to be one of the Twelve, to proclaim, to heal and to cast out demons; he is loved, but not trusted by Jesus: <<***Yet there are some of you who do not believe.***>> ***For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him***>> (John 6:64).

#### II.b.i.2 Mark 3:20-35 - Jesus Accused by His Family and by Teachers of the Law

Again, Jesus drew a large crowd and taught them, even though it meant he and his disciples could not eat. Some scribes had travelled from Jerusalem due to the spreading fame of Jesus' teaching. As they could not dispute the miraculous work he performed, or the words he spoke, they did the only thing they could to oppose him, and that was to attribute his teaching to the Devil.

Jesus' supposed biological family came looking for him as they clearly believed he was neglecting his duty as the eldest Son or possibly they feared his workload and lifestyle would bring him harm. It was a feature of Jesus' earthly life that he met opposition from those who hated him and opposition from those who care about him most: <<***He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but***>>

*merely human concerns*”>> (Mark 8:31-33). Jesus went on to teach that his true family are those who perform the will of his Father in heaven.

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

### Mark 3:20

Jesus entered a house, probably that of Simon Peter, where he appeared to stay while he was in Capernaum.

Not even able to eat. Jesus would always put aside his personal needs to see to those of others who came to him. While working one Sabbath day in Jerusalem: <<*In his defence Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working”*>> (John 5:17), and: <<*whatever the Father does the Son also does*>> (John 5:19b). Anyway, when Jesus was offered food once before: <<*he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about”*>> (John 4:32).

<sup>21</sup> When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

### Mark 3:21

The members of Jesus’ earthly family, his mother, brothers and sisters, believed he is out of his mind on account of all that has happened and at that time they did not support his work: <<*For even his own brothers did not believe in him*>> (John 7:5), although his mother, James and Jude at least would do so later on. Now, in addition to his opponents, Jesus also had to contend with unbelieving family members. He would never forsake his relationship with his supposed biological family, yet he will always pursue the call of God above all else (vv.31-35).

Out of his mind. Jesus was not the first person obeying God’s will to be thought of in this way, for it was once said of a prophet that: <<*When Jehu went out to his fellow officers, one of them asked him, “Is everything all right? Why did this maniac come to you?”*>> (2 Kings 9:11).

Mary’s husband Joseph is not mentioned in Scripture following their visit to Jerusalem when Jesus was 12 years old, which is recorded in Luke 2:41-52. Many believe that he had now died as he was older than Mary. If this were the case, then Jesus would have become the head of the family with the responsibilities that would normally entail for this poor family. However, his duty was to fulfil his heavenly Father’s work and, therefore, he was not in a position to remain in Nazareth with these other people.

<sup>22</sup> And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

## Mark 3:22

Teachers of the law, from Jerusalem, accused Jesus of being possessed by the Devil, showing that he had come to the attention of the Jewish leadership council, the Sanhedrin, in Jerusalem. They implicitly acknowledged his undeniable powers but labelled them as satanic.

Came down from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is in mountainous territory and is elevated above all the surrounding land, therefore people always come down from there and go up to it. Similarly, the temple was built on the highest point of the city and therefore people went up to and came down from the temple.

Beelzebul means ‘master of the house’ and refers to Satan. The accusation that Jesus, the real ‘master of all’, was really Satan is shockingly perverse.

By the prince of demons he is driving out demons. The Pharisees were unable to recognise that God was doing something unique through the teaching and works of Jesus, so they attributed his powers to the only other existing source, since they could not deny the reality of the miraculous works that Jesus had done. However, the truthfulness of Jesus’ teachings, the moral excellence of his character, and his ministry of doing good should have convinced them otherwise. Elsewhere, Jesus refers to him as the prince of this world: <<***Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out***>> (John 12:31), and again: <<***I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me***>> (John 14:29-31).

Practicing magic by Satan’s power was a capital offense under Jewish law and was punishable by stoning. This view of Jesus as a sorcerer was common among Jews, even into the early centuries of Christianity.

<sup>23</sup> So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan?”

## Mark 3:23

Jesus called them over. Jesus did not publically dispute with them for he respected their public position, nor did he get angry with them over their misguided but nonetheless sinister claims. Instead, he wanted to take the opportunity to speak directly to these men. After all, they were servants of God, loved by him and he would have wanted nothing more than for them to accept the truth, repent and be saved.

Parables are stories that may or may not be factual but convey a key message to those who can comprehend them, which not everyone can for they can appear to be cryptic: <<***The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them***>> (Matthew 13:10-11).

How can Satan drive out Satan? If the Teachers of the Law were correct in their assumptions, this is exactly what they were claiming, which can clearly be seen as nonsense, such as their blindness to what was going on around them: <<*Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains*>> (John 9:40-41).

<sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.  
<sup>25</sup> If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

### Mark 3:24-26

Jesus used two illustrations to show that the accusations by the Teachers of the Law were false:

1. If the satanic sphere of power were internally divided, then it could not stand (vv.24-26).
2. Satan must be bound before his sphere of power can be challenged (v.27).

In essence, these eminent scribes were claiming that Jesus was working in collaboration with Satan. That cannot be the case however, for in order to allow Christ to cast him or his associates out, he would have had to voluntarily give up his power, thus causing his kingdom to collapse in on itself. Whatever else, it is clear that Satan is no fool, nor would he act so directly against his own self interest. Jesus' actions therefore could only have been genuinely against the kingdom of darkness, meaning that he had the authority of God to do so. This is something that a senior Pharisee did acknowledge: <<*Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him”*>> (John 3:1-2).

His end has come. In reality, Satan was defeated the moment he was cursed by God in the Garden: <<*So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel”*>> (Genesis 3:14-15), although God has suffered him to remain, and even uses him to test his own people from time to time: <<*One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out*>>

*your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord>> (Job 1:6-12). However, his fate is sealed, even if he gets a brief respite: <<And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time>> (Revelation 20:1-3).*

<sup>27</sup> In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house. <sup>28</sup> Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

### Mark 3:27-29

Jesus was able to expel demons because he had bound Satan, i.e. tying him up, the strong man. Beginning with Jesus’ victory over Satan during the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus demonstrated that Satan was powerless to prevent him from proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and demonstrating the reality of its presence through his work and his words.

Satan’s house represents the sinful world over which, until the coming of Christ, he had such power. Jesus had come to plunder the strong man’s house and rescue people for the Kingdom of God, confirming the answer to the question posed by the prophet: <<Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives be rescued from the fierce? But this is what the Lord says: “Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save>> (Isaiah 49:24-25).

The opponents’ accusation against Jesus is the unforgivable, eternal sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark emphasised that people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter anticipating the eternally valid, substitutionary atonement of Jesus: <<For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many>> (Mark 10:45). However, if a person persistently attributes to Satan what is accomplished by the power of God, that is, if one makes a flagrant, wilful, decisive judgment that the Spirit’s testimony about Jesus is satanic, then such a person never has forgiveness.

It should be remembered that Jesus faced personal blasphemies and insults throughout his ministry and even as he was dying on the Cross. His response was to cry out to God: <<“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”>> (Luke 23:34b).

Jesus closed this occasion of teaching his disciples with one of the most enigmatic, debated and misunderstood sayings of his ministry. Key to understanding this passage is the distinction Jesus made between, on the one hand, the extreme case of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and on the other hand, the lesser case of all other sin, still extremely serious but forgivable through the Cross. Anyone who genuinely asks to be forgiven in the name of Jesus for any sin they have ever committed, including thoughts as well as deeds, and for any actions they should have done for God but did not, they will be forgiven. But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, that is, the persistent and unrepentant resistance against the work of the Holy Spirit and his message concerning Jesus as the Saviour of mankind, will not be forgiven. The person who persists in hardening his heart against God, against the work of the Holy Spirit, and against the provision of Christ as Saviour, is outside the reach of God's provision for forgiveness and salvation. Christians often worry that they have committed this sin, but such a concern is itself evidence of an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>30</sup> He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."

### Mark 3:30

Claiming that Jesus has an impure spirit is just such a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as recently discussed. These men of God were rapidly talking their way into eternal damnation. They had a history of doing just that as Stephen would later proclaim to the Sanhedrin: <<*You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!*>> (Acts 7:51).

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

### Mark 3:31-32

Jesus' mother and brothers. It is not clear whether Mary was the biological, or more likely, the surrogate mother of Jesus, for she became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit: <<*This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit*>> (Matthew 1:18), and: <<*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God*>> (Luke 1:35). For more information on the brothers of Jesus, see the About section on the website.

Standing outside. This most likely indicates that the presence of a large crowd, something Jesus always attracted in those days, had prevented his family from gaining access to Jesus. This seems more likely than reluctance or even refusal on the part of his family to enter the house to see or hear him teach, as some have claimed.

A crowd was sitting around him gives the impression of attentiveness to his teaching. Jewish crowds were often vociferous and volatile, enjoying the banter and argument that went on. Not so much, it seems, when Jesus was teaching, although there were occasions when Jesus did engage with such crowds, especially some of the scenes in Jerusalem that are recorded in the Gospel of John. For example: <<At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”>> (John 8:52-53), and: <<Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep>> (John 10:22-26).

<sup>33</sup> “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. <sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

### Mark 3:33-35

He looked at those seated in a circle around him. In the midst of Jesus’ teaching, his mother and brothers were <<looking for him>> (v.32); they presumably now tried to: <<take charge of him>> (v.21). Without severing his relationship with his earthly family or his responsibilities toward them, as he demonstrated on the Cross: <<When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home>> (John 19:26-27), for they too would become part of his body, the church: <<They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers>> (Acts 1:14), and Jesus visited at least one of them following his resurrection: <<Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles>> (1 Corinthians 15:7), Jesus emphasised the priority of the messianic community of faith as the core family of God, i.e. whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother. As the writer to the Hebrews records it: <<Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, “I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises”>> (Hebrews 2:11-12).

Who are my mother and my brothers? Some see this apparent off-hand remark as denigrating his earthly family, which would not be Jesus’ intent for the law says: <<Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you>> (Exodus 20:12). His language toward his mother was respectful but often somewhat distant: <<When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come”>> (John 2:3-4).

As recently noted, Jesus ensured his mother would be well cared for by the apostle John and she is a woman that history should remember with respect and admiration, for she had committed herself to the service of God: *<<I am the Lord's servant,>> Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her>>* (Luke 1:38). However, there is nothing in Scripture to say that she should be revered in the way that some faith groups appear to do. This was clearly demonstrated by the apostle Peter, a great man in his own right: *<<As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself">>* (Acts 10:25-26), so too John: *<<Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus">>* (Revelation 19:9-10).

Whoever does God's will was something close to Jesus' heart throughout his time on earth, from the time he delivered his sermon on the Mount: *<<your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven>>* (Matthew 6:10). He offered it as a means to authenticate his own teaching: *<<Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own>>* (John 7:17), and as the Cross loomed ever nearer Jesus gave himself to his Father's will: *<<"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done">>* (Luke 22:42). The apostles gave explanations and exhortations as to how doing the will of God could be achieved: *<<Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will>>* (Romans 12:2), and: *<<Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God>>* (1 Peter 4:1-2).

The people of God, especially those called to service in the church - originally those descended from Levi - were always called to do God's will, sometimes at great cost to themselves, their family and friends: *<<Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbour.'" The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day">>* (Exodus 32:25-29), and: *<<About Levi he said: "Your Thummim and Urim belong to your faithful servant. You tested him at Massah; you contended with him at the waters of Meribah. He said of his father and mother, 'I have no regard for them.' He did not recognise his brothers or*

*acknowledge his own children, but he watched over your word and guarded your covenant*>> (Deuteronomy 33:8-9).

The outcome is the same for both biological and spiritual Israel: <<*You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honour him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!*>> (Psalm 22:23).