



## The Iona School for Ministry

**New Testament  
Historical Context and the Gospel of Mark  
Juniors  
February 13, 2021  
The Rev. Dr. John Lewis  
Study Guide**

### Read

- deSilva (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), pp. xix-209.
- The Gospel of Mark

### Watch/Read the following short online video materials:

- **Scholarly Study of the Bible:**  
<http://bibleodyssey.com/tools/bible-basics/how-do-biblical-scholars-study-the-new-testament>
- **Second Temple:**  
<http://bibleodyssey.com/places/main-articles/second-temple>
- **Biblical Timeline:**  
<http://bibleodyssey.com/tools/timeline-gallery/s/second-temple-judaism>

### As you read and watch, make some general notes on the following:

#### Cultural Contexts: The Roman Period

1. Name the several “Judaisms” that coexisted in Palestine before 70 CE. Which one of these survived the fall of the Temple? What characteristics of this form of Judaism made it capable of surviving? In what ways is it similar to or different from Christianity?
2. What conflicting realities appear to have been a part of life in Palestine under Roman Rule? How would social class and religious commitments have played a role in a person’s attitude toward Rome?
3. What picture are you developing of the life of Jesus, in a setting that included villages and urban centers, rich and poor, Jews under Gentile rule? What tensions do you perceive? For whom would the teachings of Jesus have been life-giving?
4. It is important to remember, from your study of the Old Testament, that religion and politics were not separate spheres in the ancient world. All power of every kind was understood to come from God (or the gods). Many of the Old Testament references used in the Gospels point us to Jesus’ concern for the restoration of Israel as an instrument for God’s will in the world, to bring about justice for all who had been suffering under various unjust regimes (both Jewish and Roman). The move to see the *church* as the “new Israel” was an insight developed by Jewish followers of Jesus after the crucifixion and resurrection.
5. What is your understanding of Mark’s “apocalyptic” perspective and its influence on the Gospel of Mark? We will discuss Jewish apocalyptic in more detail during class.

## **Introduction to the Gospels**

1. In what ways might modern readers misunderstand the literary genre of the gospels? What appear to have been their original purposes?
2. What are the *synoptic* gospels, and why are they called that?
3. What is “Q,” and why is it important?
4. What are the Two-Source Hypothesis/Four-Source Hypothesis, and what questions do they answer?
5. How does the Gospel of John differ from the synoptics?
6. You may recall that, in the Pentateuch, the sources are integrated into a single narrative, though the seams between one source and another are sometimes apparent. Early Christians retained their sources as four separate Gospels. What are the advantages of this decision? What are the difficulties that come with this decision?

### **Read the Gospel of Mark once through, taking note of these questions:**

1. What is the significance of Jesus’ baptism in this Gospel? His family? His birth?
2. Who knows the true identity of Jesus, and who struggles to figure out who he is?
3. What sorts of expectations interfere with the disciples’ faithfulness?
4. Read the parable of the sower (Mark 4) and use the different kinds of soils as a way to chart the response of various people to Jesus (including the disciples). What patterns do you see? What have you learned about discipleship through this exercise?
5. What seems to be Mark’s understanding of discipleship? What is the significance of Mark 4:11 in this context? How does Matthew 13:11 seem to change this particular understanding of Mark 4:11? How do Mark 8:22-26 and 10:46-52 illuminate Mark’s understanding of discipleship?