

**Introduction**

1. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there has been a rise in end-time frenzy.
  - a. I have seen that theme in many social media posts this week and even on some church signs.
  - b. Is this the end? Maybe. I don't know and neither does anyone else.
  - c. Jesus will shortly declare, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains" (Mk 13:7-8).
  - c. We must be ready every day because we do not know the day or the hour of His return.
2. The Jewish leaders asked a second tricky question related to the end-times in an attempt to trap Jesus.
3. **Read Mk 12:18-27.**

**A. The Second Tricky Question (18-23)**

1. In the context of Mark's narrative, remember that Jesus had already been confronted by the Jewish leaders about His authority for clearing the temple and for His teaching there.
  - a. Remember that Jesus said that He would answer their question if they answered His question of them about the source of John the Baptist's authority. They refused and so did Jesus (cf., Mk 11:33)
  - b. Jesus then told them the Parable of the Tenants to reinforce the fact that these Jewish leaders had ultimately rejected God's authority! (cf, Mk 12:1-12)
  - c. In our last study, the Jewish leaders asked the first of four tricky questions (cf., Mk 12:13-37) in an attempt to trap Jesus in His words.
2. Also remember this insight from William Lane, "The sequence of questions proposed corresponds to four types of questions recognized by the rabbis: questions of wisdom, which concern a point of law (cf. Ch 12:13-17); of mockery, which frequently bear on the resurrection (cf. Ch. 12:18-27); of conduct, which center in relationship to God and men (cf. Ch. 12:28-34); and of biblical exegesis, which often concern the resolving of an apparent contradiction between two passages of Scripture (cf. Ch. 12:35-37). It is only in the Passover eve liturgy that the four types of questions appear in this particular order, and there the first three questions are posed by a wise son, a wicked son and a son of simple piety. The fourth is posed by the head of the family himself. This arrangement shed light on the sequence of questions in Ch. 12:13-37" (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 421, underlining mine).
  - a. In our last study, the Pharisees and Herodians played the role of the wise son asking the first question of wisdom about the law—
    - 1) Should they pay taxes to Caesar or not?
    - 2) Jesus wisely replied, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mk 12:17).
  - b. In today's study, the Sadducees play the role of the wicked son asking the second question of mockery related to the resurrection.
3. Who were the Sadducees?
  - a. This is the only text in Mark that specifically mentions the Sadducees.
  - b. The Sadducees were priests and most likely took their group's name from Zadok, one of David's priests (cf, 2 Sam 20:25).
  - c. They were also wealthy aristocrats, who looked down on everyone else.
    - 1) They appeared on the Jewish scene in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE with the rise of the Hasmonean Dynasty during a brief period of Jewish self-rule between the Greeks and the Romans.
    - 2) They disappeared after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE.
    - 3) None of their writings remain, and most of what we know of them was written by their enemies.
  - d. The Sadducees supported Herod, who ruled as a Roman puppet of the Hasmoneans. So, they were friends with the Herodians, and, like them, were more interested in political power than in spiritual things. They were politically liberal.

- e. The Sadducees and Pharisees held many different beliefs and didn't like one another.
    - 1) The Sadducees affirmed only the Torah/Law (i.e., first five books of the Bible) as scripture, while the Pharisees affirmed the Prophets and Writings as well as their own additional writings as authoritative. The Sadducees were theologically more conservative than the Pharisees.
    - 2) The Sadducees appear to have espoused a doctrine of annihilation at death (i.e., no life after death, no final judgment, no resurrection), whereas the Pharisees believed the soul/body continued in a resurrected but imperfect form (i.e., deformities continued with the body in the resurrection).
    - 3) The Sadducees did not believe in angels or demons (cf, Acts 23:8), but this point is debated since angels are mentioned in the Torah (cf, Gen 19:1).
  - f. Based on Lane's earlier comments, we can consider the Sadducees to be the wicked son since they "say there is no resurrection" but asked a question about it anyway.
    - 1) Why would they ask a question about something they didn't believe in?
    - 2) The Sadducees had probably used this tricky question in debates with the Pharisees and thought that Jesus might fall victim to it as the Pharisees had in the past.
    - 3) They, like the Pharisees and Herodians before them, were hypocritical, deceitful, and wicked.
4. The Sadducees' Question
- a. They begin, as did those before them, by flattering Jesus—"Teacher" (Gk., *Didaskale*).
  - b. The intent of their question was to make Jesus look like a fool in the eyes of the people and possibly alienate Him from the Pharisees.
  - c. The Sadducees based their tricky question on the words of Moses in Dt 25:5-6.
    - 1) Moses wrote, "If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel" (Dt 25:5-6).
    - 2) Based on this scripture, the Sadducees state, ". . . if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring (Gk., *sperma* – "seed") for his brother" (v. 19, parenthetical insertion mine).
    - 3) This instruction is related not only to continuing the physical line of the husband but also to providing an heir for his inheritance in the land.
      - a) If the man had no heir, then to whom would his inheritance in the land be passed?
      - b) Moses' solution was for a brother of the man to father an heir by his widow for him (cf, Ge 38:8-10, Dt 25:5-6, Ruth 3-4).
    - 4) This instruction from Moses provides important background for the Book of Ruth.
      - a) Naomi the wife of Elimelech, who had died, had two sons (i.e., Mahlon and Kilion).
      - b) Her sons married Moabite women, where they were living during a famine, but both sons died without fathering a child.
      - c) When Naomi returned from Moab to Israel, her family's inheritance in the land was jeopardized since there was no heir, and Naomi was past the age of child-bearing.
      - d) However, Ruth, who was the widow of one of Naomi's sons, was still of child-bearing age.
      - e) Even though Ruth was a Moabitess, she could marry a kinsman redeemer or levirate (Latin for "brother-in-law"), the closest relative to her deceased husband, and have a child by him who would be the heir of Naomi's family line and inheritance in the land.
      - f) Boaz was not the closest kinsman, but he took that man's place since the closest relative was unwilling to fulfill his duty due to risking his own inheritance becoming part of Elimelech's.
      - g) Boaz married Ruth, according to Moses' command, and together they fathered Obed, who became the father of Jesse, the father of David, whose ultimate heir is Jesus! (cf, Ru 4:21-22)
  - d. The Sadducees constructed a question even more complex than the situation in Ruth. (20-22)
    - 1) "Now there were seven brothers . . ." (20)
    - 2) The first brother died without an heir.
    - 3) The second brother did his duty as kinsman redeemer and married the widow.
    - 4) However, this brother also died without an heir.
    - 5) Each subsequent brother, five more, also married the widow but also failed to produce an heir.
    - 6) Then the woman also died. So, there was no chance of an heir at this point.

- e. Of course, this is a very unlikely, complex, and convoluted scenario. In logic, it is called “. . . a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, reducing things to the absurd or the ridiculous” (Akin, 281).
- f. After this long story-question, the Sadducees asked their wicked question: “At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” (23)

## B. Jesus’ Wise Answer (24-27)

1. Jesus confronted their ignorance, “. . . Are you not in error . . .?” (24)
  - a. “error” (Gk., *planasthe*) – By using this word Jesus confronted their ignorance of the heart of scripture and their own hypocritical, wicked, deceitfulness in asking such a question.
  - b. James Brooks proposes that the Sadducees most likely expected the typical answer of the Pharisees that “. . . the first would be the woman’s husband following the resurrection because the others were merely producing children for their brother” (James Brooks, *Mark*, 195).
2. Jesus then told them why they were in error—“. . . because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?” (25)
  - a. They were ignorant of “the Scriptures” (Gk., *tas graphas*).
  - b. They were ignorant of the “power of God” (Gk., *dunamin tou theou*).
  - c. Daniel Akin notes, “Misinterpreting the Scriptures inevitably leads to a distorted view of God. It always leads to your god being too small and impotent to be the God of the Bible!” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 282)
3. In regard to the Scriptures they have failed to discern that “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (25).
  - a. Warren Wiersbe notes, “Resurrection is not the restoration of life as we know it; it is the entrance into a new life that is different” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 141).
  - b. In the resurrection there will be no marriage and no bearing of children as in this world.
  - c. We will be in the presence of God for eternity, basking in the light of His love (cf, Revelation 21-22).
  - d. The old order of things will have passed away and all things will be made new.
    - 1) Akin states, “Christians have always had a strong doctrine concerning life after death. . . . But we have to admit to a good bit of mystery on the precise details. The Bible tells us a lot, but it does not tell us everything” (Akin, 280).
    - 2) Our bodies will be different (cf, 1 Corinthians 15).
    - 3) There will be no more death, sickness, or pain (e.g., childbirth).
    - 4) We will not be angels but we will be “like the angels” (v. 25) with a supernatural, eternal body.
    - 5) Wiersbe adds, “He [Jesus] said that in our resurrection bodies, we would be sexless like the angels, and therefore marriage would no longer exist. In the eternal state, where our new bodies are perfect and there is no death, there will be no need for marriage, procreation, and the continuance of the race” (Wiersbe, 141).
    - 6) Akin notes, “Will there be sex in heaven? . . . We will exist as glorified bodies in heaven but will maintain our unique identities. There will be, in one sense, sex in heaven because sex identifies us in terms of gender. But whatever physical, sensual, and sexual pleasure we enjoy in this life will be transcended beyond our imagination in the life to come. . . . No one will be disappointed in any way when they get to heaven! No one will be deprived of one thing that is necessary for maximum joy, optimal happiness, and complete satisfaction. Our relationship with Jesus and with all of our brothers and sisters will be so intense and so filled with love and affection that all earthly marital bliss will seem shallow and small in comparison. Heaven is indeed God’s perfect plan for His children who have come to Him through His son Jesus” (Akin, 282-3).

4. In regard the “power of God” Jesus affirmed God’s power when He said, “When the dead rise . . . .” (25)
  - a. Jesus pointed the Sadducees back to the Book of Moses, the Law, from which they drew their question. He met them in a part of the Bible that they affirmed as scripture.
    - 1) He proposed that the Law, in fact, did speak about the power of God to bring the dead back to life.
    - 2) So, the Sadducees belief that there was no resurrection was revealed to be contrary to scripture.
  - b. As evidence of resurrection, Jesus noted the words of God Himself to Moses at the burning bush: “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (26)
    - 1) Wiersbe states, “God did not tell Moses that he *was* (past tense) the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ The patriarchs were *alive* when God spoke those words to Moses; therefore, Moses does teach that there is life after death” (Wiersbe, 142).
    - 2) Some commentators have quibbled with the simple logic of Jesus on this point about a verb tense. However, I believe that Jesus’ argument is more sophisticated than just the verb tense, since in the original Hebrew the “I am” in the verse Jesus cites can mean “I was,” “I am,” “I will be”—it is a timeless statement.
    - 3) Perhaps, Lane provides a better insight when he writes, “If God has assumed the task of protecting the patriarchs from misfortune during the course of their life, but fails to deliver them from that supreme misfortune which marks the definitive and absolute check upon their hopes, his protection is of little value. But it is inconceivable that God would provide for the patriarchs some partial tokens of deliverance and leave the final word to death, of which all the misfortunes and sufferings of human existence are only a foretaste. If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula ‘the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob’ is the symbol. . . . Jesus showed how resurrection faith is attached in a profound way to the central concept of biblical revelation, the covenant, and how the salvation promised by God to the patriarchs and their descendants in virtue of the covenant contains implicitly the assurance of the resurrection. It was the failure to appreciate the essential link between God’s covenant faithfulness and the resurrection which had led the Sadducees into their grievous error” (Lane, 430).
    - 4) Jesus concluded, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” (27)
      - a) The implication of this statement is that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had been physically dead for many centuries by the time of Moses, were still alive!
      - b) The only way they could be alive was by the power of God who raised them back to life.
  - c. Jesus’ conclusion about the Sadducees’ question and their failure to believe in the resurrection and power of God was, “You are badly mistaken!” (v. 27)
    - 1) “badly mistaken” (Gk., *polu planasthe*)
    - 2) Jesus circled back to His opening point—“Are you not in error . . . ?” (24)
5. The Pharisees and Herodians and now the Sadducees have had their turns asking a question.
  - 1) Next up will be one of the teachers of the law, acting as a son of simple piety, who will ask a question of conduct about the relationship between God and men.
  - 2) We will examine his question in our next study of Mk 12:28-34.

### C. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. Do we sometimes ask “wicked” questions of God and the Bible as we seek out difficult and trivial matters that have no real bearing on the main point of the Bible which is that humans are sinful and in need of a Savior, whom God has sent in Jesus Christ.
2. Akin asks, “Have you met anyone who seems to have a standard ‘trick question’ ready for a Christian? What was the question? Have you prepared a good answer in case you hear that question again?” (Akin, 285)
3. Just because we believe something does not make it true. It is only true as we verify it by Scripture illumined by the Spirit of God and resting in His power to make it so.
  - a. We must look in scripture for the real meaning that it clearly proclaims.
    - 1) Do you know the scriptures and how to interpret them properly?
    - 2) Do you know the power of God at work in your life right now by His word and Spirit?
  - b. Be careful about dogmatism on controversial topics, such as the how/when of creation or the how/when of the end-times.
  - c. Be sure to trust fully in what is clearly proclaimed in scripture: the sinfulness of every person, God’s plan of salvation in Jesus, and the hope of a future resurrection and eternal life only in Jesus.
4. Akin asks, “What are some mistaken ideas about what heaven is going to be like? Why do people project such ideas onto the concept of heaven?” (Akin 285)
5. God is faithful. We can rely on His promises. Heaven will be both better than we deserve and better than we can imagine.