

SUMMARY OF THESE CHAPTERS: In Matthew's final chapters, Israel's leaders fully reject Jesus by handing him over to be killed, exposing how deeply the nation's leadership has failed in its calling to recognize and respond to what God was doing in their midst. But this is not a failure of God's plan. Through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, God brings His purposes to completion. These events are not a sad interruption in Israel's story; they are the turning point where God deals with sin, brings the failure of Israel's leadership into the open, and opens a new way forward for those who remain faithful. The resurrection is not just the "happy ending" to the story—it is God's public confirmation that Jesus is indeed Messiah and Lord, and it launches a renewed people who are sent to carry this good news to the nations.

Mark 1-2 then takes us back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, now read in light of how the story ends. Jesus announces that God's kingdom is arriving, calls people to follow him, drives out evil, heals the hurting, and even forgives sins. From the very start, the same tensions are already there: Jesus brings renewal and mercy, while the religious leaders begin to question his authority and push back against what he is doing. Read together, these passages show that the cross and resurrection are not a detour in Israel's story, but its climax and turning point, shaping everything that comes after.

MATTHEW 26:1-5 – THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS

Israel's leaders openly plan Jesus' death, showing that their rejection of him is now deliberate and final. What has been building throughout the Gospel becomes a settled decision to remove him. The story moves from confrontation to conspiracy.

MATTHEW 26:6-13 – COSTLY DEVOTION AT BETHANY

A woman anoints Jesus with expensive perfume, showing deep love and insight into what is about to happen. While others criticize her as wasteful, Jesus honours her act as true devotion. She recognizes the value of Jesus when many around him still do not.

MATTHEW 26:14-16 – JUDAS' BETRAYAL

Judas agrees to hand Jesus over for money, reducing the Messiah to a transaction. His betrayal mirrors the larger rejection of Jesus by the nation's leadership. The inner circle itself begins to fracture.

MATTHEW 26:17-30 – THE LAST SUPPER

Jesus shares the Passover meal with his disciples and reshapes it around himself. The bread and cup point to his coming death as the means of forgiveness and covenant renewal. This meal frames the cross as God's redemptive act, not a tragic accident.

MATTHEW 26:31-35 – SCATTERED DISCIPLES FORETOLD

Jesus warns that his followers will abandon him under pressure. Peter confidently insists he will remain faithful, revealing how little the disciples understand their own weakness. The coming failure of the disciples is acknowledged before it happens.

MATTHEW 26:36-46 – GETHSEMANE: THE STRUGGLE OF OBEDIENCE

In the garden, Jesus wrestles with the cost of what lies ahead but submits himself fully to the Father's will. The disciples sleep while Jesus bears the weight alone. This scene shows that the cross is chosen obedience, not forced martyrdom.

MATTHEW 26:47-56 – JESUS ARRESTED

Jesus is betrayed with a kiss and taken by force. Though he could resist, he willingly allows himself to be seized, showing that this is not a failure of power but a fulfillment of Scripture. Violence is rejected in favour of trust in God's purposes.

MATTHEW 26:57-68 – JESUS BEFORE THE COUNCIL

Jesus is falsely accused and condemned by the religious leaders. When he speaks of the Son of Man being vindicated, they treat it as blasphemy. The trial exposes the leaders' blindness to what God is doing through Jesus.

MATTHEW 26:69-75 – PETER DENIES JESUS

Peter denies knowing Jesus out of fear. His collapse shows that even sincere followers can fail under pressure. The story holds together both human weakness and the need for grace.

MATTHEW 27:1-10 – JUDAS' REGRET

Judas feels remorse but finds no path to restoration among the leaders. His tragic end highlights the emptiness of the religious system that helped produce his betrayal. Guilt alone does not heal what betrayal has broken.

MATTHEW 27:11-26 – JESUS BEFORE PILATE

Jesus stands before Roman power as the leaders push for his execution. Though Pilate sees Jesus' innocence, political pressure wins. Israel's leaders choose Caesar over God's Messiah.

MATTHEW 27:27-44 – THE MOCKED KING

Jesus is mocked as "king" by soldiers, even as he is beaten and crucified. The irony is sharp: the one they ridicule is, in truth, the true king. His kingship is revealed through suffering, not force.

MATTHEW 27:45-56 – THE DEATH OF JESUS

Jesus' death is marked by signs of cosmic and covenantal significance. The tearing of the Temple veil signals that access to God is being opened in a new way. The centurion's confession hints that even outsiders begin to see who Jesus truly is.

MATTHEW 27:57-66 – THE GUARDED TOMB

Jesus is buried, and the authorities try to secure the tomb to prevent any claims of resurrection. Their efforts to control the outcome only set the stage for God's decisive act.

MATTHEW 28:1-10 – THE RESURRECTION

God raises Jesus from the dead, vindicating him as the true Messiah. The women become the first witnesses, showing that God entrusts the announcement of new creation to unexpected people. Death does not have the final word.

MATTHEW 28:11-15 – THE COVER-UP

The authorities spread a false story to explain away the empty tomb. Rather than repent, they double down on denial. The same pattern of resistance continues even in the face of resurrection.

MATTHEW 28:16-20 – THE GREAT COMMISSION

The risen Jesus claims all authority and sends his followers to announce his reign to the nations. The mission of Israel is now carried forward through this renewed community. The story ends not with retreat, but with outward movement into the world.

MARK 1:1-8 – JOHN PREPARES THE WAY

John announces that God is about to act and calls Israel to repentance. He frames Jesus' arrival as the beginning of a new and decisive moment in Israel's story. The stage is set for kingdom renewal.

MARK 1:9-11 – JESUS BAPTIZED

Jesus is publicly identified as God's beloved Son. This moment signals divine approval and calling before Jesus begins his ministry. His mission is grounded in God's affirmation.

MARK 1:12-13 – JESUS TESTED IN THE WILDERNESS

Jesus faces temptation in the wilderness, echoing Israel's own story. Where Israel failed, Jesus remains faithful. The true representative of God's people emerges from testing.

MARK 1:14-15 – THE KINGDOM ANNOUNCED

Jesus proclaims that God's kingdom is arriving and calls people to repent and believe. This is not about escaping the world, but about God setting things right within it. The story of renewal officially begins.

MARK 1:16-20 – THE FIRST DISCIPLES

Jesus calls ordinary fishermen to follow him. Their immediate response shows the authority of Jesus' call and the new direction of their lives. The kingdom begins by forming a new community.

MARK 1:21-28 – AUTHORITY OVER EVIL

Jesus teaches with authority and drives out an unclean spirit. His authority is not just in words, but in power over the forces that bind people. The kingdom is shown to be active, not abstract.

MARK 1:29-34 – HEALING THE BROKEN

Jesus heals many who are sick and oppressed. His mission is deeply compassionate, aimed at restoring people to wholeness. The kingdom touches real pain in real bodies.

MARK 1:35-39 – PRAYER AND PURPOSE

Jesus withdraws to pray, showing that his power flows from his relationship with the Father. He resists being trapped by popularity and keeps moving to spread the message. The mission shapes the movement, not the crowd.

MARK 1:40-45 – CLEANSING THE LEPER

Jesus touches and heals a man considered unclean, restoring him to community. This shows the kingdom breaking social and religious barriers. Mercy is placed above purity codes.

MARK 2:1-12 – AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS

Jesus forgives a paralyzed man's sins, shocking the religious leaders. He then heals the man to show that his authority is real. Jesus acts with divine authority, not just prophetic authority.

MARK 2:13-17 – TABLE FELLOWSHIP WITH SINNERS

Jesus calls Levi and eats with those considered outsiders. This shows the inclusive nature of God's kingdom and challenges the boundaries set by the religious elite. Grace reaches those who know they need it.

MARK 2:18-22 – NEW WINE, NEW WAYS

Jesus explains that his mission cannot be contained within old religious forms. God is doing something new that requires new ways of thinking and living. The kingdom brings renewal, not just reform.

MARK 2:23-28 – LORD OF THE SABBATH

Jesus claims authority over Sabbath practices, placing human need above rigid rule-keeping. This does not reject God's law but reveals its true purpose. Jesus presents himself as the one who rightly interprets and embodies God's intent.

• UNITARIAN READING

Matthew 26–28 and Mark 1–2 continue to present Jesus as God's chosen and obedient Messiah whose authority is received from the Father, not self-derived, which fits naturally with a Unitarian reading. Jesus prays to the Father in submission to God's will in Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:39**), showing a clear distinction between his will and the Father's will; he confesses that his authority and vindication will come from God, who will seat the Son of Man at his right hand (**Matthew 26:64**), locating Jesus' exaltation in God's action rather than inherent deity. At his trial, Jesus is condemned not for claiming to be God, but for confessing that he is the Messiah and Son of God (**Matthew 26:63–66**). On the cross, Jesus entrusts himself to God and experiences abandonment, echoing faithful suffering rather than divine self-possession (**Matthew 27:46**). The resurrection itself is presented as God's act of vindicating Jesus—God raises him from the dead (**Matthew 28:6**)—and the risen Jesus grounds his mission in authority that has been given to him by God (**Matthew 28:18**).

In **Mark 1–2**, Jesus is identified as God's beloved Son at his baptism (**Mark 1:11**), is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness (**Mark 1:12**), announces God's kingdom (**Mark 1:14–15**), and acts with divine authorization in forgiving sins as the Son of Man (**Mark 2:10**), pointing to authority entrusted rather than inherent. **Even as Jesus acts with remarkable authority over sickness, demons, and sin, the narrative consistently frames him as God's anointed human agent, empowered by the Spirit and obedient to the one God he proclaims.**

• END-TIMES CONTEXT

When read within its end-times context, **Matthew 26–28** shows how the coming judgment on Jerusalem and the Temple is set in motion through Israel's final rejection of Jesus, while God establishes the path forward for the faithful through the cross and resurrection. **Jesus' trial and death are not random acts of injustice, but the decisive turning point where responsibility for the coming crisis is sealed and the fate of the "old" covenant order is confirmed.** His resurrection, vindication as the Son of Man, and commissioning of his followers mark the launching of the renewed people of God who will carry his message through the turbulent years leading up to Jerusalem's fall.

Mark 1–2, read in light of this end-times horizon, shows that Jesus' early ministry was already announcing and enacting the nearness of that decisive transition. **The proclamation that God's kingdom was "at hand," the call to repentance, the gathering of disciples, and the early clashes with religious authorities all anticipate the coming confrontation and judgment later in the story.** Read together, these passages frame the cross and resurrection as the hinge of Israel's end-time crisis and renewal, with the beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry forming one unified story of warning, judgment, and restoration.