

Tuesday Evening Bible Study
Series #14: The Gospel of Mark
Introduction to Mark
Tuesday, September 18, 2018

Introduction to the Gospel according to Mark

Summary

Although Mark appears as the second Gospel of the New Testament canon, because it was thought to be a summary of Matthew, more recent scholarship identifies it as the earliest of the written gospels. It is considered to be one of the synoptic gospels. (synoptic = same view). The Gospel of Mark is about the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ, who is identified as one from Nazareth at his baptism, recognized as God's Son by fearful demonic spirits, and proclaimed as the resurrected Lord by a young man in a white robe. In Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, the reign and rule of God's kingdom has come among us.

Who wrote it?

Church tradition has attributed the authorship of Mark to John Mark, a companion of Peter, but modern scholars identify the author as an unknown first-Century Christian writing to community of other early Christians. The evangelist's intention in composing the Gospel was not to draw attention to himself, but to Jesus' proclamation of the good news (gospel) in word and deed.

When was it written?

It was probably written ca. AD 66–70, during Nero's persecution of the Christians in Rome or the Jewish revolt, as suggested by internal references to war in Judea and to persecution. Some speculate that the prediction of Jesus of the destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:1-8) date the gospel to prior to AD 70. The author used a variety of pre-existing sources, such as conflict stories, apocalyptic discourse, and collections of sayings. Certainly the death of the earliest generation of Christians around this same time also brought an urgency for the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth to be kept alive in written form for succeeding generations.

For whom was Mark written?

Mark was written in Greek. It was probably written for a Gentile audience of Greek-speaking Christians because of the author's need to explain Jewish traditions and translate Aramaic terms. Rome, Galilee, Antioch (third-largest city in the Roman Empire, located in northern Syria), and southern Syria have all been offered as alternative places of authorship. The author may have been influenced by Greco-Roman biographies and rhetorical forms, popular novels and romances, and the Homeric epics; nevertheless, he mentions almost no public figures, makes no allusions to Greek or Roman literature, and takes all his references from the Jewish scriptures, mostly in their Greek versions from the Septuagint. His book is not history in the modern sense, or even in the sense of classical Greek and Roman historians, but "history in an eschatological or apocalyptic sense," depicting Jesus caught up in events at the end of time.

How do I read Mark?

The Gospel of Mark focuses attention on the last week of Jesus' life and his death in Jerusalem. Frequent appearances of the adverb *immediately* in this Gospel express the urgency of Jesus' journey to the cross. This journey begins at the inauguration of Jesus' ministry, commencing right away with his baptism and testing in the wilderness. As Jesus repeatedly announces his coming suffering, death, and resurrection, the Gospel of Mark draws its readers into the unfolding drama of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Gospel expectantly invites its readers with its opening verse. That verse promises that the good news of the living presence of God's reign and rule breaks into our lives through every parable, miracle, teaching, or event in the life of Jesus. The Gospel leads us to the foot of the cross, where we witness the confession of the centurion. The Gospel also leads us to the empty tomb, where we witness the proclamation of the young man. In Mark, Jesus is the crucified and resurrected Christ who promises to go before us into the world with the good news.

Structure of Mark

- A. Part One: Ministry of Healing and Preaching in Galilee (1:1 – 8:26)
 - a. The Beginning of the Good News (1:1-13)
 - b. Authority and Power of Jesus (1:14 – 3:6)
 - c. Jesus in Galilee (3:7 – 8:26)
- B. Part Two: Suffering, Death, and Resurrection (8:27 – 16:8 [9-20])
 - a. Christology and Discipleship (8:27 – 10:45)
 - i. 8:27-30 serves as a pivotal point in the gospel with Peter's Confession that Jesus is the Messiah.
 - b. Ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem; Kingdoms in conflict (11:1 – 12:44)
 - c. Eschatological Discourse (13:1-37)
 - d. Suffering, death, and resurrection of the Son of Man (14:1 – 16:8)
 - i. A majority of scholars believe that the Gospel ended here originally. This is supported by early Church Fathers, such as Sts. Eusebius & Jerome.
- C. Two Controversial Endings of Mark
 - a. The Shorter Ending of Mark (Addition to 16:8)
 - i. A minority of later manuscripts have what is called the "shorter ending", an addition to Mark 16:8 telling how the women told "those around Peter" all that the angel had commanded and how the message of eternal life (or "proclamation of eternal salvation") was then sent out by Jesus himself.
 - ii. This addition differs from the rest of Mark both in style and in its understanding of Jesus.
 - b. The Longer Ending of Mark (16:9-20)
 - i. The overwhelming majority of manuscripts have the "longer ending", Mark 16:9–20, with accounts of the resurrected Jesus, the commissioning of the disciples to proclaim the gospel, and Christ's

ascension. This ending was possibly written in the early 2nd century and added later in the same century.

Themes in Mark

1. The cross.

- Both the human cause (12:12; 14:1–2; 15:10) and the divine necessity (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34) of the cross are emphasized by Mark.

2. Discipleship.

- Special attention should be paid to the passages on discipleship that arise from Jesus' predictions of his passion (8:34–9:1; 9:35–10:31; 10:42–45).

3. The teachings of Jesus.

- Although Mark records far fewer actual teachings of Jesus than the other Gospel writers, there is a remarkable emphasis on Jesus as teacher. The words “teacher,” “teach” or “teaching,” and “Rabbi” are applied to Jesus in Mark 39 times.

4. The Messianic secret.

- On several occasions Jesus warns his disciples or others to keep silent about who he is or what he has done (1:34,44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9).

5. Son of God.

- Although Mark emphasizes the humanity of Jesus (3:5; 6:6,31,34; 7:34; 8:12; 10:14;11:12), he does not neglect his deity (1:1,11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:1–11; 13:32; 15:39).

Resources

Notes from The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), 2010

Notes from HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV), 1989

“Gospel of Mark,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Mark

“Mark,” <https://www.enterthebible.org/newtestament.aspx?rid=3>

“The Gospel of Mark” in *Sacra Pagina*, Daniel J. Harrington, ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2008)

Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel according to Mark,” in *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997)