

Mark Series Overview Notes

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Author

Early church leaders were unanimous in attributing the book to John Mark, the same who is mentioned in the book of Acts. Probably written in AD 65. Scholars today feel that Mark was the first gospel. It was used by the authors of Matthew and Luke.

Written for Gentile Christians in Rome who were undergoing persecution and suffering.

Literary Characteristics:

Style

Written in the Greek language used in everyday speech. Not the language of orators or poets. The pace is fast and Mark is light on unnecessary details and verbose text. Mark makes use of the historical present tense to make the action more vivid.

Sandwich technique

Mark inserts a seemingly unrelated story in the middle of another story. The insertion is the key to understanding the two halves of the sandwich. Mark 3:20-35, 4:1-20, 5:21-43, 6:7-30, 11:12-21, 14:1-11, 14:17-31, 14:53-72, 15:40-16:8. Often used to underscore the major themes.

Irony

Mark uses dramatic irony to highlight his themes. Outsiders respond more readily than insiders, Jesus heals an outsider (leper) and becomes an outsider in the process. His response to people and situations and their response to him is not what conventions and stereotypes of the time would lead Mark's listeners to expect.

Foreshadowing

Mark frequently uses foreshadowing; he mentions to the audience something that will not be more fully revealed until later in the narrative. He also foreshadows events that will not happen in the Gospel text, but at a future point in history. The fact that he foreshadows events that are fulfilled within the text works to create trust in the audience, who then assume that the events foreshadowed beyond the text will actually come to pass. Examples of foreshadowing in Mark's Gospel include the coming of someone mightier than John the Baptist (mentioned in Mark 1:7; fulfilled in Mark 1:21-28); the arrest of John the Baptist (mentioned in Mark 1:14; fulfilled in Mark 6:14-27); the taking away of the "bridegroom" (mentioned in Mark 2:20; fulfilled in Mark 14:43-46); the plot to destroy Jesus (mentioned in Mark 3:6; fulfilled in Mark 15:37); Jesus' prophecies of his suffering and death (Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32-33; fulfilled in Mark 14:43-46); Jesus' telling the disciples to find a man with a pitcher of water (Mark 14:13; fulfilled in Mark 14:16); Jesus' prophecies that he will be betrayed by a close associate (Mark 14:18; fulfilled in Mark 14:43); Jesus' prophecy of Peter's denial (Mark 14:30; fulfilled in Mark 14:50-52, 66-72).

Questions

Mark's Gospel includes a lot of questions. These are rarely straightforward requests for information but are usually an indication of controversy; Jesus and his opponents frequently ask questions that spark debate and discussion. The questions engage the audience of the Gospel as they ponder the questions themselves. They also provide teaching opportunities for Jesus. Many of these questions, intended to entrap Jesus, end up demonstrating the wisdom of Jesus. It is easy to imagine how these questions would have captured the attention of an audience listening to the Gospel read aloud.

Organization

Mark tends to organize the Gospel by the type of material (miracles, controversies, parables), not by theme (faith, patience, repentance), or, as we might expect, by chronology. It is important for the reader to realize that the material is thus organized.

Themes

Discipleship

For Mark, discipleship means being with Jesus so that you can in turn

be empowered to continue the ministry of Jesus. To serve as Jesus serves, in humility and even in suffering (10: 42-45). To serve without regard for self. Mark defines discipleship as being with Jesus (3: 13), near him (3: 34, 4: 10), hearing him (4: 1-20), and following him (1: 16-20, 10: 52). What is interesting to me in this gospel is how Mark portrays the 12 disciples. A bit plodding, sometimes clueless, sometimes hard hearted.

Faith

Some people seem to get it right away, often Gentiles, women, or people outside his group of followers (leper, Syro-Phoenician woman, centurion, blind man). These people have great faith which seems to have no precedent. Others, like the disciples or his family or religious leaders either take a long, laborious time to come to faith or continue to resist.

Insiders/Outsiders

Among Jesus' followers is an inner group to whom he gives information about the KOG and an outer group that doesn't get the same information. "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside, everything is said in parables..." (4:11). The surprise is who belongs in each group. We would expect his family and religious leaders to be insiders, but no. We would expect Gentiles and the unclean to be outsiders, but no. Even the disciples seem to toggle back and forth in the categories. Mark even portrays Jesus as an outsider (1:45, 5:17, 8:23, 11:19, 12:8, 15:22). What Mark is trying to tell us is the kingdom of God does not conform to any expected social norms and institutions but is centered in the person of Jesus.

Gentiles

Helpful to use a map when reading Mark. In Mark, Jesus spends a huge amount of time ministering in Gentile territory. He is often in the Decapolis, east of the Sea of Galilee, feeding the 4 thousand, heals the demon possessed man. He journeys north to Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia where he heals a man who cannot speak or hear and meets the Syro-Phoenician woman of great faith (5:1-20, 7:24-37, 8:1-10). Mark portrays Gentiles as being more receptive than those from Jewish regions.

Command to Silence

In the first half of Mark, Jesus often commands people whom he has healed or onlookers to the healing, such as his disciples and demons and others, to not say anything. If he came to make himself known, why can't people tell others of the wonderful things he has done? (Which they tend to do anyway.) The reasons include: 1. He commanded people to silence so they wouldn't embrace false expectations. He didn't want people to embrace the messianic connotations of king and warrior. 2. Jesus cannot not be truly known until the cross. Only at the cross can Jesus be rightly known, not as a miracle worker, or great teacher, or answer to the pressing problems of the time, but as the Son of God.

Journey

In the very beginning of the gospel Mark uses a quotation from Isaiah to tell us the gospel is "a way" a path to follow. In the first half of the gospel Jesus is crisscrossing the sea of Galilee and making a long circuitous journey in the Gentile regions. In the Gentile territory of Caesarea Philippi, Peter makes his statement that Jesus is the Messiah and from then on Jesus directs his steps toward Jerusalem. "On the way" is a refrain in the second half of the gospel (8:27; 9:33-34; 10:17, 32, 52; 11:8). Three times "on the way" Jesus says that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer rejection and die, and then be raised from the dead (8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). The journey describes the way Jesus must go and the way his disciples must follow.

Who is this Man?

Authority of Jesus

The characteristic of Jesus that left the most lasting impression on his followers and caused the greatest offense to his opponents was his authority (*exousia*), his divine authority. In his first public appearance in Mark, he astounds the synagogue by his teaching and his power over demons. His authority is manifested as he redefines Torah, reorders political and social priorities. He challenges the traditions of the elders and Mosaic law. He claims prerogatives that only belong to God: healing, power over nature, forgives sin, etc.

Servant of the Lord

The authority of Jesus is employed not for himself but in the service of others. Mark depicts Jesus as Isaiah's suffering servant who "gives his life as a ransom for many." Echoes of the Servant of the Lord are

inserted at key junctures in Mark's portrayal of Jesus. In the baptism, the voice from heaven defines Sonship on servant categories. (Isa 42:1, 49:3). Early in his ministry Jesus shows awareness that his life will be taken (2:20). Later, Jesus understands death as an essential part of his work (10:38). He is anointed by an unnamed woman (14:38), and there are three passion predictions (8:31, 9:31, 10:33, 34). Add the parable of the beloved Son in the vineyard (12:6-8), and the Last Supper (14:24).

Son of God

The phrase "Son of God" is a proclamation that opens the gospel and a climatic confession toward the end (15: 39). In his gospel Mark establishes *that* Jesus is the Son of God, but also *what kind* of Son of God he is. In the Hellenistic world heroes and gods were elevated above the mundane and troublesome world. Jesus is the Son of God amid a troubled world. His death on the cross is the place where his mission and his identity as Son of God converge. Ironically, the cross is the first place where humanity recognizes him as God's Son (15:39).

Bible Project Videos

Bible project video overview, 10 minutes:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/mark/>

Narrative structure, 5 minutes:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-mark/>

Podcast text: <https://bibleproject.com/blog/mark-gospel-servant-messiah/>