

Gospel of Mark

Week 1

Introduction/Mark 1:1-11

I. Background on Mark

It is generally accepted that Mark is the first of the gospels to be written. The other gospels quote all but 31 verses of Mark. Despite its brevity, the gospel records more miracles than any of the rest.

While the text is technically anonymous, early church history appears to be virtually unanimous that John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas and occasional associate of the Apostle Paul, wrote the gospel. It is also generally assumed that he wrote it with a heavy perspective from the Apostle Peter. The usual dating of the book is approximately 60 AD to 70 AD, perhaps shortly after the death of Peter; the 70 AD end time is generally set for the late date because the destruction of Jerusalem is not mentioned in it.

Since the book is the earliest gospel, on one level, we should review it in the way that its original readers would have seen it...without Matthew, Luke, or John to accompany it. Of course, as modern-day Christians, we also want to view Mark as one part of the composite four gospels to understand more fully Jesus' ministry. Since the gospel writers were less inclined to order their writings chronologically than today's writers, a full chronological order is not fully possible, although many good attempts exist.

Many Biblical scholars believe that a so-called Q document preceded Mark and that all the synoptic gospels. (NOTE: Q stands for quelle which is German for source.) For this class, we will ignore the Q document as there is very little evidence of its existence other than mere speculation.

We see Mark in the NT explicitly in:

- Mark is First after the miraculous release of Peter (Acts 12:12).
- With Paul and Barnabas in the first missions trip (see Acts 12:25)
- Barnabas was the cousin of Mark (Col. 4:10).
- Mark leaves the missions trail for unspecified reasons (Acts 13:13)
- Caused the second missions trip to be separated by Barnabas and Paul (Acts 15:36-41)
- Paul says that Mark is useful to him (2 Tim. 4:11) in some of the last words written by Paul.

Of the gospels, Mark is the fastest moving and perhaps the one laden with the most emotion. For example, a common word that he uses is "immediately," meaning in a straight-forward matter. When Matthew quotes the verses used in Mark word-for-word, he often changes "immediately" to "then." Even though Mark is shorter, the periscopes in the book are often longer than similar summaries in Matthew or Luke.

II. The Beginning: Mark 1:1

Mark 1:1

1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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The counterparts for Mark 1:1-8 are Matthew 1:1-12 and Luke 3:1-18.

This verse records both a title for the book and a summary of it. From the beginning, the book leaves no doubt as to Jesus being the Son of God.

What is a gospel? Literally, the meaning is “good news.” In 1:14, we see the good news being the first words preached by Jesus. The long-awaited Messiah has come, and God’s direct reign on earth is beginning. The poor and weak appear to be the primary (but not only) target of the good news. The rich and poor have other resources, but Jesus appears to bring His gospel to those who are most in need of it. An advertising agency today would perhaps think that this is not the best way to get across one’s message to an entire society.

Certainly, the good news might also be called glad tidings. The following summarizes it:

Isa 52:7-10

7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" 8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. 9 Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

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III. The Ministry of John the Baptist: Mark 1:2-8

Mark 1:2-8

2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"— 3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" 4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

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Verses 2-3: Verses 2 and 3 are composite quote from:

Mal 3:1

3:1 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

NIV

Isa 40:3

3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

NIV

Verse 3: Straight paths in the desert would indicate that the traveling is easy. So, John is preparing the way of the LORD to make it “easier” for Him. Usually in the OT, making straight path is something that the LORD does for us. So, Elijah/John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus, but he can do it only with God’s power.

Verse 4: John the Baptist is one of the most important people in the NT. Yet because he is so intimately related to Jesus, he is also a man of mystery. The verses quoted by verse 2 above appear to relate to him (only a few verses are shown):

Mal 4:5

5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

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Matt 11:11-15

11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.

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Mark 9:12-13

12 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? 13 But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

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John 1:19-21

19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. 20 He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." 21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."

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Are there other verses in the gospels that you particularly like about John the Baptist?

Verse 5: John baptized with water those who wanted to repent and the forgiveness of their sin. Jesus will baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 6: This verse again emphasizes that John is a man of the wilderness, but it also implies a connection with Elijah which is not explicitly made until Chapter 9:

2 Kings 1:8

8 They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

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Verses 7-8: Verses 7 and 8 show one of the ways in which John comes before Jesus.

While it is not entirely clear how much John knew about Jesus and when he knew it, he makes these wonderful comparative statements, such as:

John 3:30

30 He must become greater; I must become less.

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Verse 8: The coming of the Holy Spirit is predicted in many passages in the OT, such as:

Isa 44:3

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

NIV

IV. The Baptism of Jesus: Mark 1:9-11

Mark 1:9-11

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

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The counterparts for this section is Matthew 3:13-17 and Luke 3:21-22.

Clearly as verse 11 points out, this baptism was pleasing to God.

Verse 9: Several reasons have been given for Jesus being given, although the Scriptures are not totally clear on the point:

- Confess on behalf of the nation
- Fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15)
- Inaugurate His public ministry
- Show support for John's ministry
- Identify with the penitent attitude of people, their humanness and sin
- Give us an example to be baptized

Clearly Jesus was not baptized to indicate the forgiveness of his sins.

Verse 10: It is not clear that anyone else saw the Spirit at this time.

Verse 11: As Jesus is "rising up" from the baptism, a voice from heaven is coming down, quoting:

Isa 42:1a

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;

NIV

V. Question: Can You Feel the Excitement?

As we read through the Gospel of Mark, can you not feel the excitement? If Mark is the author in the time frame noted above, he was likely 50 to 60 years old when he wrote it; he would have interacted with Jesus 30 to 40 years ago. He had had his ups and downs as a follower of Christ, but now, probably toward the end of his days, after a life of service, we can still feel his excitement as though he had just been saved.

Do you feel the excitement in your life? If you do not feel it any longer, what must you do to regain it? Start with:

Rom. 12:11

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep up your spiritual fervor by serving the Lord.

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At what level is your zeal today? What service are you performing for the Lord? What service would you like to perform?

VI. f

VII. f

VIII. f

IX. f

X. f

Mark 1:9-11

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