

FOUR PORTRAITS OF JESUS

One Jesus: Four Gospels

The Gospel ("good news") was first proclaimed by Jesus; after his resurrection, the one who spoke the Gospel became the one spoken about. The Gospel is the good news about the establishment of the reign of God. Jesus proclaims and actualises the Gospel. Jesus is the good news. It was some time after the writing of the four Gospels, accounts that the word came to be used to refer to the book which contains the Gospel (around 150 AD). Justin Martyr refers to the four books as 'the Gospels'.

The Gospel is first a matter of preaching, not of reading or writing. While the main facts of Jesus' life were common knowledge, the early witnesses to Jesus (Christians) were able to be more effective as speakers than writers. Besides, it took a long time for many in the early Church to recognize that there was going to be a history of the Church in the world, and the world was not going to end. Why bother writing if the end was near?

The teachings of Jesus were gradually collected into various groupings; there may have been an early Passion Narrative, a sequence of miracle stories, prayers, sayings. These would be necessary for instructing new converts to 'the Way' as Christianity was termed. These pre-existing materials were important, for the evangelists (Gospel writers) had to be faithful recorders of the material that came down to them, as well as being creative writers in terms of choosing and shaping their Gospels to speak to the life and needs of their own community.

All wrote in Greek which was the common language of their world.

Gospel Symbols

Christians like to make symbols to represent their beliefs. For example, each of the writers of the Gospels has been given his own symbol. All four symbols have their source in Ezekiel 1:6-11.

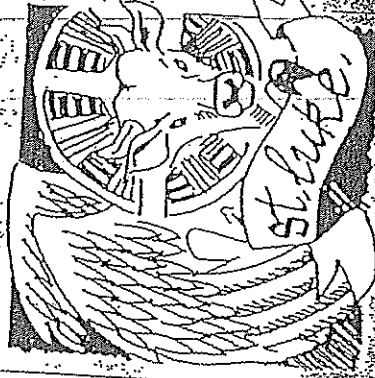


Matthew is depicted as a man because he begins his Gospel by relating the genealogy of Jesus. There the emphasis is on the humanity of Jesus; hence, the designation of the evangelist by a human figure.

Mark begins his Gospel by telling of John the Baptist: 'A voice cries in the wilderness'. Since a lion is heard in the wilds, the lion was taken to symbolize Mark.



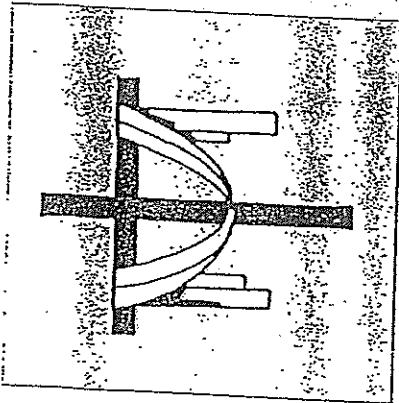
John's Gospel emphasises the divinity of Christ. His portrayal of Jesus is both lofty and sublime, like the eagle who soars gracefully above the heavens.



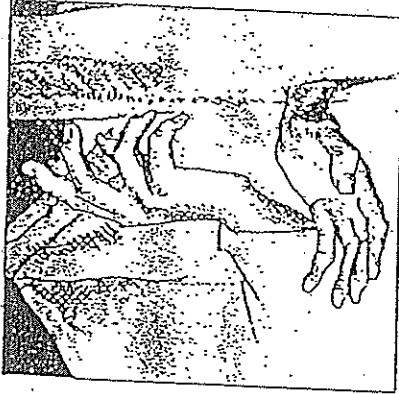
Luke is depicted by an ox, because his Gospel begins with the story of Zachary, a priest. As a priest he offered the customary sacrifice in the Temple; an ox. The theme of sacrifice also appears in Luke's portrayal of Jesus' death.

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From *The New Testament* p.78,
by Michael Pennock, Ave Maria Press, Indiana USA 1982

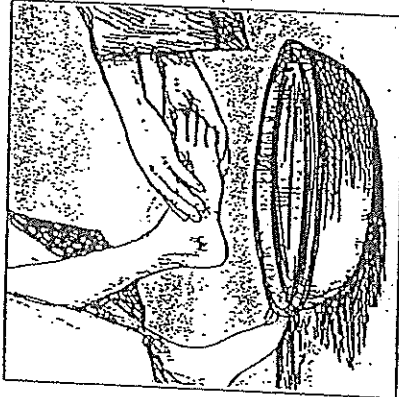


Mark wrote probably for a group of persecuted Christians suffering in Rome under the Emperor Nero (54-68 AD). They were mostly Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians, tempted to avoid the element of the Cross or suffering in their life. Mark's Gospel is so dominated by the Cross that it has even been called "a passion narrative with a long introduction." (Kahler) It is a "no frills" Gospel that begins - and ends - abruptly; Jesus moves about Galilee energetically, then sets his face towards Jerusalem for his final journey. Jesus tells people not to broadcast his great, healing actions (Messianic secret). This is because a Christ of glory is not the Christ Mark wishes to proclaim. It is the crucified Christ who is truly the Son of God. The Gospel asks the question "Who is Jesus?" and the only satisfactory answer is given by a Gentile centurion who recognizes in the broken, dying figure on the Cross, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

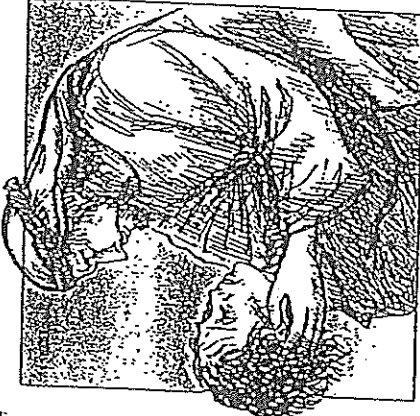


Matthew wrote for a very different group of Christians; he was probably a Jewish Christian writing for Jewish Christians who lived in Antioch in Syria. It is a much longer Gospel than Mark, though it uses almost all of Mark as a source and draws heavily on Old Testament quotations. It was written around the year 85 AD. We can see Matthew's central concern is Jesus the Teacher because his Gospel contains five great teaching blocks:

- 1) The Sermon on the Mount (ch.5-7);
 - 2) The Missionary Sermon (ch.10);
 - 3) The Parable Sermon (ch.13);
 - 4) The Church Leadership Sermon (ch.18);
 - 5) The End of the World Sermon (ch.24-25).
- Around these we have an account of Jesus' birth and his death/resurrection. The Gospel may be called the charter of a community organizing itself to live through history; to do that, it needs the authoritative teaching of the new Moses, who is Jesus, and the community



John's Gospel is very different from the other three, which may be "seen together" (synoptic). Jesus repeatedly goes to Jerusalem (not just once) as in Luke's Gospel. John has different stories - Cana, Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman, raising Lazarus, the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning and not the end of Jesus' ministry, no Eucharistic narrative in the Last Supper but the Washing of the Feet instead. Jesus, in John, comes to bring life and light into our human condition: "I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). That life, in fact salvation itself, lies in either choosing for or against Jesus. John is writing for a group of people, of Jewish and Gentile background, who have lost their source of life in the Jewish synagogues, liturgical feasts and traditions. Jesus, in John, offers a new religious reality that replaces all that Judaism had to offer. Ephesus is a possible final location for the origin that nurtured this Gospel



Luke wrote around the same time as Matthew, and also used Mark's Gospel as a source, but he wrote for Gentile Christians somewhere in the Roman Empire, possibly in the more wealthy cities. Luke stresses both the universal importance of the good news and the special role of Israel within salvation history. The Gospel of Luke is part one of a two part story of the spread of the good news from Nazareth to Jerusalem (Gospel) and from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts of the Apostles). Luke's Gospel portrays a Jesus of compassion, tenderness, and great forgiveness; we see this in unique stories such as the Lost Son (15:11-32), in the tender concern for the degraded and downcast, especially women (7:11-17; 15:8-10).

(Source: *Kierulff Faith First*)

S3 – Work of the evangelists (65-90 CE)

The Gospel of Mark

- Was written first
- Mark's Gospel was used by both Matthew and Luke when writing their Gospels
- Was written in Rome for a persecuted and suffering community
- Mark presented a suffering and misunderstood Jesus, mirroring the experience of this community
- Date of the Gospel is approx. 50-67 CE, about 30 years after the death of Jesus

Four Portraits of Jesus

1. Explain the meaning of the first sentence, 'the one who spoke the Gospel became the one spoken about'. 1
2. Why is Jesus the 'Good news'? 1
3. Explain why the accounts of Jesus were spoken initially? 1
4. What is so important about the passion narrative, miracle stories, prayers and sayings in relation to the ministry of Jesus? 3
5. Who are the evangelists? 1
6. Explain why each evangelist has a different symbol. 1
7. For each evangelist name the symbol and explain why they are recognised as such. 8
8. Why doesn't Mark want to glorify Jesus? 1
9. How is Matthew different to Mark's Gospel? 2
10. Explain why John's Gospel is different to the synoptic trio. 1

HAND IN

Christians like to make symbols to represent their own beliefs.

Design your own symbol and write a paragraph explaining the significance.

Title Twenty Three: Understanding the Gospel Story

Part Four: Four Portraits of Jesus

Mark - A Gospel in a Hurry

Author

We do not know who wrote the Gospel which bears the name of Mark. Early Church tradition, based on the somewhat unreliable historian Papias, thought it was the John Mark of Acts, the disciple of Peter (1 Peter 5:13), but internal evidence does not support this view. In fact, the differences in the background and situation of John Mark, when compared with the impressions the Gospel gives us of its author, are too marked for an identification of Mark the evangelist with John Mark of Acts (cf. Brown & Meier, 1982: 191-197, and Doohan, 1986: 10-11). The most we can say is that Mark was writing for a community that may have known the influence of Peter until his martyrdom sometime between 64 and 67 CE.

Date

Internal evidence suggests that the Gospel was probably written between 65-70, after the death of Peter and towards or at the end of the four-year war between Israel and Rome which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70. Mark 13 has echoes of this struggle and of the destruction of Jerusalem, as well as mentioning earthquakes (there were three in Nero's reign, which came to an end in 68) and famine (the collapse of Jerusalem was accompanied by famine).

Place

According to tradition, the Gospel was written in Rome. Some scholars have been puzzled by the lack of urban imagery in the Gospel (compared with the Gospel of Matthew, for example) and have suggested a more rural location to the north of Palestine. However, given the internal evidence of the Gospel, Rome is still the most favoured location.

Intended Community

On internal evidence, it is clear that Mark was writing for a predominantly Gentile community (i.e. Christians of non-Jewish origins). There is little concern to show connections with the Old Testament. Mark explains Jewish customs (cf. 7: 3-4; 14: 12; 15: 42), and translates Aramaic words (cf. 3:17; 5:41; 7:11; 10:46). There are more Latinisms in Mark's Gospel than in any other, and it would seem that he is writing for people who knew and used Latin.

Background of the Community

The atmosphere was one of conflict for a community constantly under threat of persecution by the erratic Roman emperors, especially Nero, who had already killed two of their leaders in Rome by 67. The community would have been distressed by the news of the impending destruction, or final destruction in 70, of Jerusalem and its Temple - the place where Christianity had its roots. No doubt some people were asking: is this the end of time? The final event leading to the Parousia? (In Mark 13:5-6 and 21-22, there are indications that Mark was reacting against "parousia pretenders" - men actually claiming to be the risen Christ returning at the end of time.)

Sources

Before Mark wrote his Gospel, the words and actions of Jesus had been reflected on, in some instances grouped together, and used as the basis of preaching or teaching for over thirty years. Mark seems to have chosen from among the traditions circulating in his community:

1. Probably an early *passion narrative* (arrest, trial, death of Jesus). This narrative was filled with Old Testament references (as is Mark 15) to help believers understand that Jesus went to his cross "in accordance with the Scripture", and to help Jewish converts (grounded in the Jewish Scriptures) to believe in a crucified Messiah.

2. An *account of the Lord's Supper* (Paul also used a similar account when writing earlier to the Corinthians: 1 Cor 11: 23-26).
3. A cycle of *miracle stories* (Chapters 5 and 7).
4. *Controversy stories*. Mark carefully frames these between miracle stories of cures of paralysis.
5. A collection of *parables* (Mark 4).
6. *Apocalyptic writing* (Mark 13) - a style of writing that belonged to the late Old Testament period (e.g. Daniel) and to earliest Christianity.

The author of the Gospel of Mark brought these materials together, imposing a geographical and chronological framework on the "Good News about Jesus Christ" - a framework followed by both Matthew and Luke (but not by John). This framework is more theological than historical, presenting a view of the ministry of Jesus from a particular post-resurrection perspective influenced by his (Mark's) own and his community's faith experience.

Structure

Preparation for Public Ministry	1:1-13
The Galilean Ministry	1:14-7:23
Journeys outside Galilee	7:24-10:52
The Jerusalem Ministry	11:1-13:37
The Passion Narrative	14:1-15:47
The Resurrection Narrative	16:1-8 (16:9-20 later addition).

The structure of the Gospel is inverted parallelism or chiasm in which the first section of the Gospel parallels with the last, and the second with the fourth, with the journey to Jerusalem as the centre or hinge of the chiasm:

- a. Preparatory events
- b. Ministry: Galilee
- c. Journey to Jerusalem
- d. Ministry: Jerusalem
- e. Concluding events: burial.

Style

Mark's Gospel has been called "a Gospel in a hurry". It is sprinkled with expressions such as "straightaway" Jesus did this and "at once" he did that (there are forty such expressions). Mark is an accomplished storyteller, with an eye to detail and a directness which has emotional impact and draws the reader into the experience. Mark's Jesus is a vivid, human Jesus.

Mark does not use the polished Greek of Luke, but rather everyday, colloquial Greek. As has been said, he translates Aramaic words and uses more Latinisms than any other Gospel. His Gospel has only two speeches or discourses (4:2-34; 13:5-36). He repeats particular words or phrases within an episode to emphasise the point (e.g. forgiveness of sin 2:5, 7, 9, 10).

Mark also uses a repetition pattern of three: three commissioning stories (1:16-20; 3:13-19; 6:7-13), three passion-resurrection predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), three episodes of Jesus at prayer (1:35; 6:46; 14:32-42), three episodes on the mountain (3:13; 6:46; 9:2). He uses parallelism, too, including inverted parallelism or chiasm (e.g. the arrangement of the five controversy stories 2:1 to 3:6).

Theological Slant and Concerns

Past, present and future all flow together in the Gospel of Mark: the past of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, outside Galilee, and going to Jerusalem; the present of the ministry of Jesus in and through

his Church; the future of the ministry Jesus will exercise when he comes soon as Son of Man. The writer thinks in terms of a drama that began in the past, continues in the present which the community is experiencing, and will reach a climax in the near future with the imminent coming of the end. Thus past, present and future tend to merge in his story.

Mark is concerned for *Gentiles*, e.g. 13:10; 13:27; 14:9. There are references to Gentiles in the miracle stories in Mark 5 and 7 (the Gerasenes are Gentiles). The centurion in 15:39 is a Gentile; he confesses Jesus as Son of God.

Mark uses *geography* for theological purposes. Galilee is a key place for Jesus' preaching and becomes a point of departure for going to Tyre and Sidon to meet the Gentiles. Ultimately, after the Resurrection (16:7) Galilee becomes the gateway for spreading the Good News. Conversely, Jerusalem is a city shut in on itself that rejects Jesus and puts him to death. In Mark's story, the lake, mountains and wilderness take on rich theological symbolism that goes beyond traditional Jewish understandings of the significance of these places.

The overall image of Jesus is that of the Anointed One, the *Messiah* - a suffering Messiah. The Gospel is of sufficiently early date to reflect the difficulty the Church encountered in its preaching of a suffering rather than a triumphant Messiah. Mark is reminding his readers, constantly faced with the possibility of persecution, that to be a disciple of Jesus means sharing in suffering and rejection before sharing in glory. It is only after the Resurrection that the disciples know who Jesus really is and what discipleship means.

From its very beginning the Gospel moves towards the culminating point of the *Passion*. Mark immediately introduces John the Baptist (1:4), then records his arrest (1:14) and later links Jesus with John the Baptist (6:14ff.), subtly indicating that what happened to John will happen to Jesus. Mark includes a number of controversy stories of conflicts that centre around Jewish structures and practices: the Sabbath, cleaning, fasting, almsgiving - the boundaries by which the Jews identified themselves. From Mark 8 onwards, there are indications that Jesus was convinced that his ministry would end in his death (8:32-33; 9:30-32; 10:35-45; 14:34)

Mark presents the Passion as the culminating point in Jesus' experience of rejection and abandonment. It is also the point where, in response to the High Priest's question, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?", Jesus answers "I am" (14:16-62) - thus turning the trial, says Doohan (1986: 87) into "an epiphany of the Lord to the worshipping community".

At the beginning of the Gospel, Mark introduces Jesus as the *man from Nazareth* (1:9). Jesus of Nazareth is the man who goes to the cross. From beginning to end, Mark's story is of a very human Jesus with strong emotions.

Mark is quite explicit about the meaning of *discipleship* (8:34-35). Some have suggested that one of the primary purposes behind the writing of this Gospel was a clarification of discipleship (cf Doohan, 1986:93), no doubt prompted by the situation of the Christians in Rome, whose world was collapsing around them. Mark often focuses on the uncertainty and fear that Jesus' disciples experienced, at the same time addressing the need of his community to understand the nature and the challenge of discipleship. It is significant that Mark has Jesus present his main teaching on discipleship on the way to Jerusalem (to his death) and that this teaching is framed between two stories of Jesus curing the blind (8:22-26; 10:46-52). He is gradually opening their eyes to see who he is and to understand the true nature of his Messiahship.

The *community of disciples* gathered around Jesus constitutes the Church for Mark. He does not use the word "Church" and is not preoccupied with its organisation and structure. He uses simple images to express his understanding of the Christian community, such as boat (3:9; 4:1), flock (6:34, 14:27) temple - the new temple of God which replaces the old (14:58; 15:29).

Mark has Jesus begin his ministry with the words "The kingdom of God is close at hand" (1:15). His Gospel has been called a history of the *Kingdom*: he speaks of the requirements for entry (10:13-31) and membership (4:1-34).

The nature of the reign of God and human responses to it are presented in the parable of the sower and instruction on its meaning (4:1-34).

Title Twenty Three: Understanding the Gospel Story

Part Four: Four Portraits of Jesus

Communities of the Gospels (Cont.)

Mark probably wrote for a group of persecuted Christians who had suffered in Rome under the Emperor Nero (54-68CE). They were mostly Gentile Christians who were tempted to avoid suffering in their life.

Mark's Gospel theme is about the suffering Christ, the crucified Christ (see Mark 9:30-32). It is so dominated by the Cross, that it has been called 'a passion narrative with a long introduction' (Kahler).

The Suffering Christ of Mark's Gospel

It is a 'no frills' gospel that begins and ends abruptly. Jesus moves about Galilee energetically, then sets his face towards Jerusalem for his final journey. Jesus tells people not to broadcast his great, healing actions (this is referred to as the Messianic Secret). A 'Christ of glory' is not the Christ that Mark wishes to proclaim. It is the crucified Christ who is truly the Son of God.

The Gospel's theological question is 'Who is Jesus?' and the only satisfactory answer is given by a Gentile centurion who recognises in the broken, dying figure on the Cross, 'In truth this man was a Son of God' (Mark 15:39).

Structure of Mark's Gospel

1. Preparation for the Public Ministry
Chapter 1:1-14
2. Ministry in Galilee
Chapters 1:14-7:23
3. Ministry outside Galilee
Chapters 7:24-10:52
4. Ministry in Jerusalem
Chapters 11-13
5. Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus
Chapters 14-16

The Gospel of Mark begins with John the Baptist, a voice 'crying out in the wilderness'. As lions were common in the wild, Mark is depicted as a lion.

Some Texts Unique to the Gospel of Mark

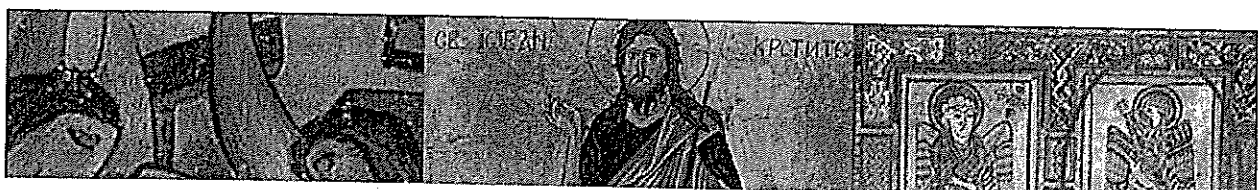
Parables

Seed growing secretly 4:26-28

Miracles

Healing of deaf man 7:31-37

Healing of blind man at Bethsaida 8:22-26



The "gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1)

Each gospel account gives us a portrait of Jesus, his mission and teaching. Each is different in style, length, and emphasis. But they all have a common thread and purpose -- the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Among the four gospels, Mark's account is unique in many ways. It is the shortest account and seems to be the earliest. Both Luke and Matthew use much of Mark's text. Luke's account contains over half of the verses in Mark's account (some 350 verses out of a total 660 verses in Mark). Unlike Luke and Matthew who begin their accounts with the events surrounding the birth of the Messiah, Mark begins his account with Jesus' public ministry and the mission of John the Baptist. Mark leaves no doubt as to who Jesus was. In the very first sentence of his account he proclaims that Jesus is the "Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Jesus was not simply a man among men, but one who caused great wonder, amazement, and awe upon those who encountered him. "They were *astonished* at his teaching" (Mk 1:22); "they were all amazed" (Mk 1:27); "they were utterly astounded" (Mk 6:51); "the disciples were amazed at his words" (Mk 10:24), etc.

Mark displays both Jesus' divinity and his humanity. For example, Mark tells us that Jesus is "the carpenter" (Mk 6:3). Matthew softens it a bit by saying that Jesus is the "carpenter's son" (Matt. 13:55). Mark even tells us about Jesus' emotions. Jesus was moved with "compassion" (Mk 6:34); he "sighed" (Mk 7:34; 8:12); he "marveled" at the unbelief of his own townsfolk (Mk 6:6); he "looked" upon the rich young man and "loved him" (Mk 10:21). Mark also adds vivid details that the other gospel writers leave out. For example, he describes Jesus' tenderness as he took the little children "in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them" (Mk 10:16). On another occasion Mark describes Jesus "asleep on a cushion" in the stern of the boat as the apostles feared for their lives when caught in the storm at sea (Mk 4:38).

Mark's gospel was most likely intended to be read aloud in the Christian assembly, rather than privately. It was composed for the ear more than the eye, especially with its use of constant repetitions, summaries, recapitulations and variations on a theme. The word "again" is used no less than 26 times which serves to remind the ears of the previous occasion when something occurred. Mark's gospel is more direct in language, even blunt at times. For example, Mark tells us that Jesus' relatives "went to seize him, for people were saying, 'He is beside himself'" (Mk 3:21). Mark portrays Jesus in action and urgent action at that. In the first chapter alone we can sense the urgency and immediacy of Jesus' work and mission. Mark uses the word "immediately" no less than eight times. For example, he says the "Spirit *immediately* drove him out into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). "And *immediately* he called them" (Mk 1:20); "and *immediately* on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught" (Mk 1:21); "and *immediately* the leprosy left him" (Mk 1:42).

The ceaseless activity and urgency of Jesus' mission

Mark stresses Jesus as "Teacher" and as the "Servant of God". Jesus is regularly addressed as "Teacher" by his disciples (Mk 4:38) and by those who seek his help (Mk 5:35). He also uses the Hebrew form of teacher, "Rabbi" (Mk 9:5). Ironically Mark gives little of Jesus' teaching

compared with Luke and Matthew. Mark mainly stresses what Jesus did. He depicts Jesus' ceaseless activity and his power over sickness, disease, death, and the work of evil spirits.

One technique Mark frequently uses is to "sandwich" a point or story which serves as a "filling" between two pieces of "bread". For example, Jesus' cleansing of the Temple is "sandwiched" between two incidences with Jesus cursing a barren fig tree (see Mark 11:12-20). The story on the inside gives light to the events surrounding it by way of comparison, contrast, or commentary. For other examples, see Mark 3:22-30; 5:21-43; 6:6-30; 14:1-11; 14:54-72.

Mark also forms groups of three, often for emphasis. Mark gives three boat scenes with the disciples (Mk 4:35, 6:45, 8:14); three predictions of the passion, three commands to "keep awake and watch" ((8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34) matched by the three times the tired disciples are mentioned as sleeping. Peter denies Jesus three times; Pilate asks the crowd three questions; and there are three time references at the crucifixion (the third, sixth, and ninth hours mentioned in Mark 15). This seems to be a deliberate pattern of Mark to give emphasis and urgency to Jesus' task and mission.

"Good news" for today!

The word "gospel" literally means "good news". The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and the freedom he has won for us through his death and resurrection. The gospel is God's word for us today! It's a living word that has power to change, transform, and bring freedom and healing to those who accept it as the word of God. Are you hungry for God's word? And do you receive it with expectant faith and trust?

"Lord Jesus, you are the fulfillment of all our hopes and desires. Your Spirit brings us grace, truth, life, and freedom. Fill me with the joy of the gospel and inflame my heart with love and zeal for you and for your kingdom".

Gospel of Mark

Author: Although the Gospel of Mark does not name its author, it is the unanimous testimony of early church fathers that Mark was the author. He was an associate of the Apostle Peter, and evidently his spiritual son (1 Peter 5:13). From Peter he received first-hand information of the events and teachings of the Lord, and preserved the information in written form.

It is generally agreed that Mark is the John Mark of the New Testament (Acts 12:12). His mother was a wealthy and prominent Christian in the Jerusalem church, and probably the church met in her home. Mark joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but not on the second because of a strong disagreement between the two men (Acts 15:37-38). However, near the end of Paul's life he called for Mark to be with him (2 Timothy 4:11).

Date of Writing: The Gospel of Mark was likely one of the first books written in the New Testament, probably in A.D. 57-59.

Purpose of Writing: Whereas Matthew is written primarily to his fellow Jews, Mark's gospel appears to be targeted to the Roman believers, particularly Gentiles. Mark wrote as a pastor to Christians who previously had heard and believed the Gospel (Romans 1:8). He desired that they have a biographical story of Jesus Christ as Servant of the Lord and Savior of the world in order to strengthen their faith in the face of severe persecution and to teach them what it meant to be His disciples.

Key Verses: Mark 1:11: "And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

Mark 1:17: "'Come, follow Me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'"

Mark 10:14-15: "He said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.'"

Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Mark 12:33: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Mark 16:6: "'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.'"

Mark 16:15: "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.'"

Brief Summary: This gospel is unique because it emphasizes Jesus' actions more than His teaching. It is simply written, moving quickly from one episode in the life of Christ to another. It does not begin with a genealogy as in Matthew, because Gentiles would not be interested in His lineage. After the introduction of Jesus at His baptism, Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee and called the first four of His twelve disciples. What follows is the record of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Mark's account is not just a collection of stories, but a narrative written to reveal that Jesus is the Messiah, not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well. In a dynamic profession, the disciples, led by Peter, acknowledged their faith in Him ([Mark 8:29-30](#)), even though they failed to understand fully His Messiahship until after His resurrection.

As we follow His journeys through Galilee, the surrounding areas, and then to Judea, we realize what a rapid pace He set. He touched the lives of many people, but He left an indelible mark on His disciples. At the transfiguration ([Mark 9:1-9](#)), He gave three of them a preview of His future return in power and glory, and again it was revealed to them who He was.

However, in the days leading to His final trip to Jerusalem, we see them bewildered, fearful and doubting. At Jesus' arrest, He stood alone after they fled. In the following hours of the mock trials, Jesus boldly proclaimed that He is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One, and that He would be triumphant at His return ([Mark 14:61-62](#)). The climactic events surrounding the crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection were not witnessed by most of His disciples. But several faithful women did witness His passion. After the Sabbath, early in the morning of the first day of the week, they went to the tomb with burial spices. When they saw the stone had been rolled away, they entered the tomb. It was not the body of Jesus they saw, but an angel robed in white. The joyful message they received was, "He is risen!" Women were the first evangelists, as they spread the good news of His resurrection. This same message has been broadcast throughout the world in the following centuries down to us today.

Connections: Because Mark's intended audience was the Gentiles, he does not quote as frequently from the Old Testament as Matthew, who was writing primarily to the Jews. He does not begin with a genealogy to link Jesus with the Jewish patriarchs, but begins instead with His baptism, the beginning of His earthly ministry. But even there, Mark quotes from an Old Testament prophecy regarding the messenger—John the Baptist—who would exhort the people to "prepare the way for the Lord" ([Mark 1:3](#); [Isaiah 40:3](#)) as they awaited the coming of their Messiah.

Jesus does refer to the Old Testament in several passages in Mark. In [Mark 7:6](#), Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their superficial worship of God with their lips while their hearts were far from Him and refers to their own prophet, Isaiah, to convict them of their hardheartedness ([Isaiah 29:13](#)). Jesus referred to another Old Testament prophecy which was to be fulfilled that very night as the disciples would be scattered like sheep without a shepherd when Jesus was arrested and put to death ([Mark 14:27](#); [Zechariah 13:7](#)). He referred again to Isaiah when He cleansed the Temple of the money-changers ([Mark 11:15-17](#); [Isaiah 56:7](#); [Jeremiah 7:11](#)) and to the Psalms when He explained that He was the chief Cornerstone of our faith and of the Church ([Mark 12:10-11](#); [Psalm 118:22-23](#)).

Practical Application: Mark presents Jesus as the suffering Servant of God ([Mark 10:45](#)) and as the One who came to serve and sacrifice for us, in part to inspire us to do the same. We are to minister as He did, with the same greatness of humility and devotion to the service of others. Jesus exhorted us to remember that to be great in God's kingdom, we must be the servant of all ([Mark 10:44](#)). Self-sacrifice should transcend our need for recognition or reward, just as Jesus was willing to be abased as He lay down His life for the sheep.

Extract from Understanding the Gospel – Douglas Moo

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The Contribution of Mark

One might be tempted to mimic the early church and wonder why one should bother with Mark at all. Those who do not consider the gospel an inferior extract of Matthew and/or Luke may well find Mark's significance to lie almost entirely in his supplying to these more verbose evangelists the basic raw material of their own gospels. On this view, Mark's significance could be considered mainly historical: he was the first to compose a gospel, the first to set forth an account of the ministry of Jesus in this peculiar and largely unparalleled genre. But that accomplishment in itself should not be underrated. Mark is the creator of the gospel in its literary form an interweaving of biographical and kerygmatic themes that perfectly conveys the sense of meaning of that unique figure in human history, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Furthermore, by tying the significance of Jesus for the church so tightly to a specific series of historical occurrences in Palestine in the third decade of the first century, Mark has ensured that the church, if it is to be true to its canonical documents, never abandons the real humanity of the Christ whom it worships. By reminding Christians that their salvation depends on the death and resurrection of Christ, Mark has inextricably tied Christian faith to the reality of historical events. Mark's very organisation of this history makes a point in this regard. The structure of the gospel has been understood in various ways. Philip Carrington suggested that a synagogue lectionary sequence lies at the basis of its structure.

As we also noted above when discussing the purpose of the gospel, another central theme in Mark is discipleship. The Twelve figure very prominently in Mark and serve in general as a pattern for the disciples whom Mark addresses in his gospel. To be sure, the Twelve are not always presented as models to be emulated: their conspicuous failure, though present to some degree in the other gospels, is especially prominent in Mark. Mark portrays the disciples as hard of heart (e.g. 6:52), spiritually weak (e.g. 14:32–42), and incredibly dim-witted (e.g. 8:14–21). As Guelich puts it, Mark presents the disciples as both 'privileged and perplexed'.

Perhaps in both these ways they are models for the disciples of Mark's day and of ours: privileged to belong to the kingdom, yet perplexed about the apparent reverses suffered by that kingdom when Christians suffer. In another way Mark perhaps wants implicitly to contrast the situation of the Twelve, seeking to follow Jesus before the cross and the resurrection, with that of Christian disciples at his time of writing: the latter, however, follow Jesus with the help of the powers of the new age of salvation that has dawned.

The Identity of Jesus

'But who do you say that I am?' Throughout Mark's account of the life and death of Jesus, he presents his readers with the challenge of answering this question for themselves. The gospel, from beginning to end, is about the identity of Jesus. At the opening of the gospel the author presents his account as the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. At the centre-point of the gospel, Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi proclaims that 'You are the Messiah'. And at the cross the sign and the centurion also affirm and acknowledge this same identity. Mark presents Jesus as the Messiah, the one who will come after Elijah, the one who fulfils the Old Testament prophecies, the one who will deliver his people. Jesus is the new Moses who inaugurates the new exodus, and who establishes a new covenant for the forgiveness of sins by shedding his own blood. From his own lips he forgives sinners and demonstrates power over the elements, declarations that testify to his deity. Tied up with these questions of the identity of Jesus is the death of Jesus. Of all the gospels, Mark is overwhelmed by the fact that the Messiah must suffer (a fact that Peter cannot grasp) – indeed, the majority of the text is devoted to the events of the passion. Jesus is at pains to point out that suffering and death is an intricate part of the role he must fulfil. He will die not because the authorities did not like him, but because the Messiah must suffer. In 10:45, Jesus identifies why this must be so – he must give his life as a ransom for many. His life laid down in sacrificial death will be a payment for others, alone on the cross he would be the substitute bearing the sins of many. Yet Jesus knew that the cup he was to drink was a cup of judgement, the cross would leave him forsaken by God, and willingly he submitted to his Father's will. The staggering effect of his death would be the opening up of a way into God's presence as the curtain in the temple was torn in two (15:38). Yet even his own disciples, initially, find this offensive; that the Son of Man *must* suffer is a scandal and an enigma. Jesus, however, is resolute as to the necessity of his suffering and his willingness to accomplish the Father's plan. Before this, Jesus' teaching, miracles and parables have provoked a reaction. The demons recognise his authority and want to flee from him. The authorities realise eventually that some of the parables are told against them (12:1–12). Ultimately, the lack of understanding by some is an indication that the parables have brought judgement. Those who have ears to hear do so, those who do not (and they are the ones who should have done) judge themselves.

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