

Introduction to Mark

Lecture by Steve Gregg

I. Perceived significance:

- Until recent history, the most neglected gospel by scholars—now the most studied
- Once believed to be an abbreviated version of Matthew
- Now generally considered the first, because considered the source of others

II. Authorship:

A. Anonymous, like all the gospels. Early attributed to John Mark.

- Nicknamed “stump-fingered” according to the Muratorian Fragment (AD 170)
- John Mark first mentioned in Acts 12:12 (his mother’s house)
- Went to Antioch from Jerusalem w/ cousin Bamabas (& Saul) after famine visit (Acts 12:25)
- Accompanied Bamabas & Saul at beginning of 1st missionary journey (Acts 13:5)
- Left the mission at Perga of Pamphylia to return home (Acts 13:13)
- Paul wouldn’t take him on the 2nd missionary journey; he went w/ Bamabas (Acts 15:36-39)
- Later a companion with Paul, in Rome (Colossians 4:10/ Philemon 24/ 2 Timothy 4:11)
- Later still, a companion of Peter, also (probably) in Rome (1 Peter 5:13)
- Mark was associated with three Christian leaders (Bamabas, Paul, Peter) and with three major centers of Christianity (Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome)
- Eusebius says he was the founder of the church in Alexandria (Eccl.Hist. 111:39)
- Jerome said he was first bishop of Alexandria, but Alexandrian fathers are silent on this
- Mark was too insignificant to be regarded as the author, if it was not actually the case.
- May be the young man mentioned in Mark 14:51-52

B. Associated with Peter’s preaching by Papias, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria

- The most Aramaic of the gospels, outline coincides with Peter’s preaching in Acts 10:36-43
- Uniquely adds “and Peter” at 16:7
- Vivid details give the impression of first-hand account (e.g., 1:14-20, 29-34)
- Depictions of disciples unflattering (especially Peter)—would not have been, if not true

III. Circumstances of writing:

A. Written (probably) in Rome to a Roman audience (mention of Rufus—15:21 w/ Rom. 16:13)

- More “Latinisms” than any other book of N.T. [Uses *modius* for “bushel”(4:21); *census* for “tribute” (12:14); *speculator* for “executioner” (6:27); *centurio* for “centurion” (15:39,44). Even uses a Latin term (*quadrans*) to explain a Greek word (12:42)].
- Jewish customs are explained for the readers, as if they are unfamiliar (7:3-4)
- Aramaic expressions are translated into Greek—e.g., *Talitha Koumi* (5:41); *ephphatha* (7:34)

B. Date of writing

- Irenaeus (170) says written after death of Peter. Clement of Alexandria (195) says written while Peter still lived. May have been begun in Peter’s lifetime and finished after he died.
- Frequent use of Aramaic terms suggests early date
- Many scholars say AD 50-60, while others say AD 60-70.
- Some say after AD 70 (13:1-37)

IV. Purpose?

- Evangelistic: To present the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1)?
- Christological: To present the human and divine sides of Jesus?
- Historical: To preserve the stories told by Peter to prevent their being lost?

V. Contents:

- Little emphasis on teaching—no sermon on the Mount, only 4 parables (of possible 30 known)
- Emphasis on preaching and the gospel (1:1,14; 6:13; 8:35; 10:29; 13:9f; 14:9)
- No genealogy, birth narrative, childhood stories, ministry prior to John’s imprisonment
- 2/5 deals with Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem and passion
- No resurrection appearances (apart from the disputed ending—16:9-20)

VI. Characteristics:

- Episodal, impressionistic—“Like a snapshot album devoted to one person, it gives a series of characteristic poses of Jesus, without attempting close continuity between them.” (Tenney)
- Rough Greek style—Use of historical present (151 times) mixed with past tenses
- Gospel of action—“immediately” (over 40 times)
- Many vivid first-hand reminiscences
 - The breaking up of the roof (2:4); demoniacs falling down (3:11); the boat “now filling” with water (4:37); the green of the grass (6:39).
- Focus on Jesus’ emotions: compassion (1:41; 6:34; 8:2); indignation (3:5; 8:2; 10:14); distress and sorrow (14:33-34); sighing (7:34; 8:12)
- 23 references to crowd reactions (e.g., amazed, puzzled, afraid, hostile, astonished)
- Gentile sympathies (11:17; 13:10; 14:9)
- Less favorable depiction of apostles than other gospels
 - a. Their frustration with Jesus (5:31) is omitted by Matthew; softened by Luke
 - b. Their dullness about resurrection predictions (9:10) omitted by Matthew & Luke
 - c. Their impatience with children being brought (10:13-14) omitted in other gospels
- High Christology—called “Son of God”
 - a. By Mark (1:1)
 - b. By the Father (1:11; 9:7)
 - c. By demons (3:11; 7)
 - d. By Himself (13:32; 14:61f)
 - e. By the centurion (15:39)
- Abrupt ending (in the short version; there are several alternate endings)

VII. Sections of the Book:

1. Period of preparation (1:1-13)

[John’s baptism and wilderness temptation]

2. Galilean Ministry (1:14—8:26)

A. Chapters 1-5: Demonstrations of authority: over demons (1:19-22; 3:11, 20-30; 5:1-20); to forgive (2:1-12); over Sabbath (2:23-28; 3:1-6); nature (4:35-41); death (5:35-43)]

1. Calling the fishermen; ministry in synagogue, at Peter’s house and beyond (1:14-45)
2. Five conflicts with Pharisees (2:1—3:6)
3. Futile attempts to withdraw lead to more ministry; choosing the twelve (3:7-35)
4. Parables discourse followed by stilling storm and helping demoniac (4:1—5:20)
5. Miracles done in Capernaum (5:21-43) Woman with issue of blood & Jairus’ daughter

B. Chapter 6:1—7:23: Additional emphasis on conflict: with townsmen (6:6); with Herod (6:27-29); with Pharisees (7:1-23)]

1. Fruitless ministry in Nazareth (6:1-6)
2. Sending out the twelve (6:7-13)
3. Herod’s reaction (6:14-29)
4. Feeding 5000 (6:30-44); walking on water (6:45-52)
5. Ministry in Genesaret (6:53-56)
6. Conflict over traditions of men (7:1-23)

C. *Chapter 7:24—8:26: Ministry in Tyre, Decapolis, Dalmanutha and Bethsaida*

1. In region of Tyre and Sidon: Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24-30)
2. In Decapolis: Deaf-mute man (7:31-37); feeding 4000 (8:1-9)
3. In Dalmanutha: Pharisees seek sign (8:10-12)
4. Crossing to Bethsaida: Dullness of the disciples (8:13-21)
5. In Bethsaida: two-stage healing of blind man (8:22-26)

3. Private ministry with disciples (8:27—9:50)

[Caesarea Philippi; transfiguration; one unavoidable exorcism; announcements of His death]

4. Perea Ministry (chapter 10)

[Question of divorce; blessing children; rich ruler; request of Zebedee's sons; Bartimaeus]

5. Judean Ministry (chs.11-13)

A. *Chapter 11:1-26: Making a scene*

[Triumphal entry (11:1-11); Cursed fig tree (11:12-14, 20-26); Cleansing temple (11:15-19)]

B. *Chapter 11:27—12:44: Confrontations with the religious rulers*

1. Question of authority (11:27-33)
2. Vineyard parable (12:1-12)
3. Tribute to Caesar? (12:13-17)
4. The Sadducees' question (12:18-27)
5. The greatest commandment (12:28-34)
6. Jesus questions them (12:35-37)
7. Beware of scribes (12:38-40)
8. The widow puts in her two cents (12:41-44)

C. *Chapter 13: The Olivet Discourse*

6. The Passion Narrative (chs.14-15)

[Anointing at Bethany (14:3-9); Judas' plot (14:10-11); the Last Supper (14:12-25); Gethsemane (14:26-52); trials before Jews and Pilate (14:53—15:20); crucifixion (15:21-41); burial (15:42-47)]

7. Resurrection (chapter 16)

[Various alternative endings—see below]

VIII. Long or short ending?

Short ending has Mark abruptly cut off with 16:8; long ending includes verses 9-20.

Some 6th, 7th and 8th century manuscripts append a few additional verses to the shorter ending.

Arguments against inclusion of verses 9-20:

1. These verses are missing from the early Greek manuscripts, *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* (early fourth century), as well as some early Latin, Syriac, Armenian, and Georgian manuscripts;
2. Some early fathers (e.g. Origen and Clement of Alexandria) did not seem to be familiar with them;
3. Eusebius and Jerome say that these verses are missing from most of the manuscripts available to them in their time;
4. Non-markan vocabulary (of the 183 words in the long ending, 53 are not found elsewhere in Mark; 21 are not found elsewhere in the New Testament);
5. The transition from verse 8 to verse 9 is rough, not smooth (subject of sentence in v.9);
6. Mary Magdalene is identified in more detail in verse 9 than in verse 1 (as if she had not been mentioned previous to v.9)

Arguments against ending at verse 8:

1. Mark would then end without recording any resurrection appearances;
2. Mark would then end with only women having heard the angels' report, but left bewildered and frightened and not telling anyone else about it;
3. It would make Mark the only known book in Greek literature to end with the word *gar* ("because");
4. Verse 7 predicts Jesus' meeting the disciples in Galilee, but its fulfillment is unrecorded, making it the only prediction in Mark whose fulfillment goes unmentioned;
5. An alternative short ending adds the following after verse 8:
Then they briefly reported all this to Peter and his companions. Afterward Jesus himself sent them out from east to west with the sacred and unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life. Amen.
(NLT)
6. Yet another ending, found in one ancient manuscript, adds, after verse 14:
And they excused themselves, saying, "This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not permit God's truth and power to conquer the evil spirits. Therefore reveal your justice now." This is what they said to Christ. And Christ replied to them, "The period of years of Satan's power has been fulfilled, but other dreadful things will happen soon. And I was handed over to death for those who have sinned, so that they may return to the truth and sin no more, and so they may inherit the spiritual, incorruptible, and righteous glory in heaven."

Arguments for inclusion of verses 9-20:

1. They are found in the Syriac *Peshita* (dated from mid-2nd to late-4th century);
2. They are included in the Old Latin Version (prior to the Vulgate), which dates from AD 150-170, the source of the Waldensian Bible;
3. The Gothic translation, from AD 350, includes the long ending;
4. Irenaeus (AD 170) quoted from the long ending, and Tatian (AD 175) included it in his harmony of the Gospels, the *Diatessaron*;
5. Tertullian (AD 215) refers to Mark 16:19; Hippolytus (AD 235) twice quotes 16:18-19;
6. As for "non-Markan" terminology, all of the "unique" words are forms of words found elsewhere in Mark. Mark has 102 unique words outside the long ending.
Compare the other Gospels:
 - a. Luke 1:1-12 has 20 words not found elsewhere in the New Testament;
 - b. Matthew has 137 unique words; Luke has 312; John has 114
7. As for the rough transition from verse 8 to verse 9, Mark has other abrupt story changes in 14:53-55 and 14:65-66;
8. The more detailed reference to Mary in verse 9 does not prove that a later writer added it, since that later writer could see as easily as could Mark, that she had already been mentioned in verse 1.