

A WINTER BIBLE STUDY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Tuesday February 23, 2021: Session 1 - Readings

Mark 1:1-13 (NRSV)

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

*“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;*

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, *“The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

The Baptism of Jesus

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven,

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

The Temptation of Jesus

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

“Good News” *“euangelion”* (Grk: εὐαγγέλιον) meaning “glad tidings”, “good news”. **“Gospel”**: from the Old English “god” meaning “good” and “spel” meaning “news, a story.”

Peek at the Greek: euangelion (From the Study Book)

Despite being the shortest of the four Gospels, Mark uses the term *euangelion* (“Gospel”) more than all of the others combined. It appears seven times (1:1, 14, 15, 8:35, 10:29, 13:10, 14:9) compared to Matthew’s four. Neither Luke nor John uses the word in their accounts. Clearly, Mark intends to emphasize the “Gospel” of Jesus to his readers. Rather than being simply a recycled philosophy or set of doctrines, this good news was unique – revolutionary even – and sourced in the Son of God made flesh. Mark’s emphasis to his readers is true for us today—the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, provides the hope we long for.

For more about “Gospel” and “Gospels” click here:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel>

“Drove him out”

Other translations use: “sent”(NIV), “driveth”(KJV), “impelled”(NASB). The idea is that Jesus didn’t choose to go.

Peek at the Greek: ekballo. (From the Study Book)

In verse 12, Mark says that the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness. He uses the term *ekballo*, which means, “force to leave.” The word appears fifteen other times throughout Mark’s gospel, most often in cases of exorcism where a demon is expelled. However, the idea here is not that Jesus was forced into the wilderness against his will, but rather he went as a result of divine mandate, as with the other uses of the term in Mark. In other words, Jesus went in obedience to the Father. Way back in Genesis, in the beginning of the Bible, God makes a man and a woman and asks them to obey him. The Creator-God promises them everything: life, happiness, power, friendship, and rulership over all the earth. They just have to trust and obey. But they didn’t. Jesus obeyed the directive of his Father out of love and trust.

BACKGROUND ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Introduction to Mark: (from the NIV Study Bible)

Author:

Although there is no direct internal evidence of authorship, it was the unanimous testimony of the early church that this Gospel was written by John Mark (“John, also called Mark,” (Acts 12:12,25; 15:37). The most important evidence comes from Papias (c. a.d. 140), who quotes an even earlier source as saying: (1) Mark was a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things said and done by the Lord; (2) this tradition did not come to Mark as a finished, sequential account of the life of our Lord, but as the preaching of Peter—preaching directed to the needs of the early Christian communities; (3) Mark accurately preserved this material. The conclusion drawn from this tradition is that the Gospel of Mark largely consists of the preaching of Peter arranged and shaped by Mark (see note on Acts 10:37).

John Mark in the New Testament:

It is generally agreed that the Mark who is associated with Peter in the early non-Biblical tradition is also the John Mark of the NT. The first mention of him is in connection with his mother, Mary, who had a house in Jerusalem that served as a meeting place for believers (Acts 12:12). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem after the famine visit, Mark accompanied them (Acts 12:25). Mark next appears as a “helper” to Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5), but he deserted them at Perga in Pamphylia (see map, p. 2273) to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Paul must have been deeply disappointed with Mark’s actions on this occasion, because when Barnabas proposed taking Mark on the second journey, Paul flatly refused, a refusal that broke up their working relationship (Ac 15:36–39). Barnabas took Mark, who was his cousin (Col 4:10), and departed for Cyprus. No further mention is made of either of them in the book of Acts. Mark reappears in Paul’s letter to the Colossians written from Rome. Paul

sends a greeting from Mark and adds: “You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him” (Col 4:10; see Phm 24, written about the same time). At this point Mark was apparently beginning to win his way back into Paul’s confidence. By the end of Paul’s life, Mark had fully regained Paul’s favor (see 2Ti 4:11 and note).

Date of Composition:

Some, who hold that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a major source, have suggested that Mark may have been composed in the 50s or early 60s. Others have felt that the content of the Gospel and statements made about Mark by the early church fathers indicate that the book was written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. See essay and chart, p. 1943.

Place of Origin:

According to early church tradition, Mark was written “in the regions of Italy” (Anti-Marcionite Prologue) or, more specifically, in Rome (Irenaeus; Clement of Alexandria). These same authors closely associate Mark’s writing of the Gospel with the apostle Peter. The above evidence is consistent with (1) the historical probability that Peter was in Rome during the last days of his life and was martyred there, and (2) the Biblical evidence that Mark also was in Rome about the same time and was closely associated with Peter (see 2Ti 4:11; 1Pe 5:13, where the word “Babylon” may be a cryptogram for Rome).

Recipients:

The evidence points to the church at Rome, or at least to Gentile readers. Mark explains Jewish customs (7:2–4; 15:42), translates Aramaic words (3:17; 5:41; 7:11,34; 15:22,34) and seems to have a special interest in persecution and martyrdom (8:34–38; 13:9–13)—subjects of special concern to Roman believers (and to Peter as well; cf. 1 Peter). A Roman destination would explain the almost immediate acceptance of this Gospel and its rapid dissemination.

Introduction to Mark: (from the Study Book)

1. Background

When it comes to studying any book of the Bible, it's good to start with some background. Let's take a brief look at the historical context and purpose behind the Gospel of Mark.

Author

Of the four gospels, Mark is easily the shortest. It's also anonymous. The gospel itself does not specifically name "Mark" as its author, but the bulk of church history since the second century has affirmed it as so. Most likely, the same John Mark who traveled with Paul during his missionary journeys wrote this gospel. For more information about John Mark, see Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 14:51–52; 15:37–39; Col. 4:10; Phlm. 24; 2; Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13.

Purpose

Writing from Rome in the first century, Mark penned his Gospel following two major themes: First, a thorough look at Jesus and, second, the true nature of discipleship. Since it was written to a largely Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, Mark went out of his way to explain Jewish customs and described Jesus as both the Jewish Messiah ("Son of David") and Savior of the Gentiles. Even more, he emphasized the suffering and death of Jesus as the means by which we enter into a right relationship with God by faith. And the path of Jesus is the path we follow in true discipleship.

Recipients:

Mark wrote to Gentiles. John the Baptist spoke to Jews. Both wanted people to understand that Jesus was the most important person anyone could ever meet.

Other Perspectives on the Gospel of Mark:

Reference Websites with General Overviews:

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/mark.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Mark

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Gospel-Mark>

https://www.jstor.org/stable/3155250?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

Mark: The Simple Truth

(M. A. P. Making the Bible Meaningful, Accessible, Practical; by Nick Page)

Who: There is no named author in the Gospel, but tradition ascribes the book to John Mark. John Mark lived in Jerusalem with his mother Mary during the early Church times (Acts 12:12). His home was a meeting place for the first Christians and it has been speculated that it was the location of the Last Supper. Later he accompanied Paul and Barnabas (was was also Mark's cousin) on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:4-13). Eventually he lived in Rome, where he was probably with Peter (1 Peter 5:13). It seems likely then, that if we accept Mark as the author, this Gospel was written in Rome while Mark was working alongside Peter. This theory is backed up by references from early Church historians (Papias of Hierapolis writing in AD 130 records that an old man told him that Mark wrote down Peter's recollections of Jesus' life), as well as by the amount of Latin terms that creep into the Gospel.

When: Sometime between AD 58 and 65, on a Thursday.

What: Mark's is the most action-packed Gospel, mainly because it is the shortest. There is nothing about Jesus' birth and upbringing, and no details about his age or the length of his ministry. The Gospel begins with John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism. It also ends the most abruptly – with no resurrection appearance, just two women, an empty tomb and an angel with a message from God. Although some versions of Mark include alternative, longer endings, these are probably editorial additions to the original Gospel. Mark's theme is simple: Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is recognized not only by his Jewish followers, but also by people like the Roman centurion as Christ is on the Cross. This factor is important, because Mark was probably writing for a predominantly Gentile, Roman audience. So Mark is careful to explain Jewish customs and translate Aramaic words and phrases.

Why: To tell the story of Jesus to a predominantly Roman audience.