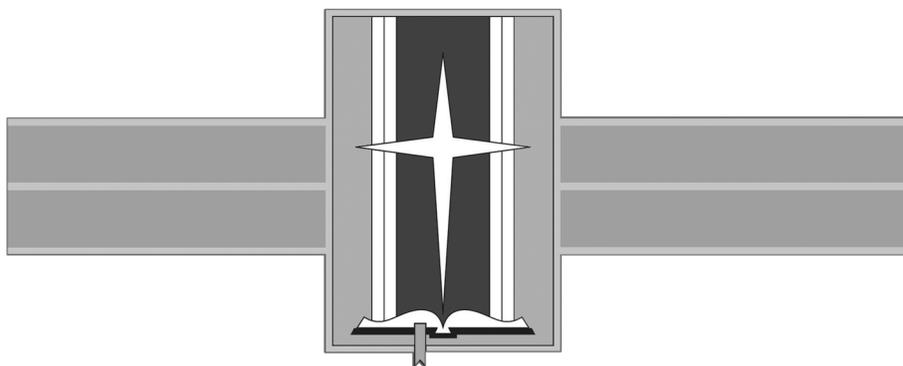


# THE NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY



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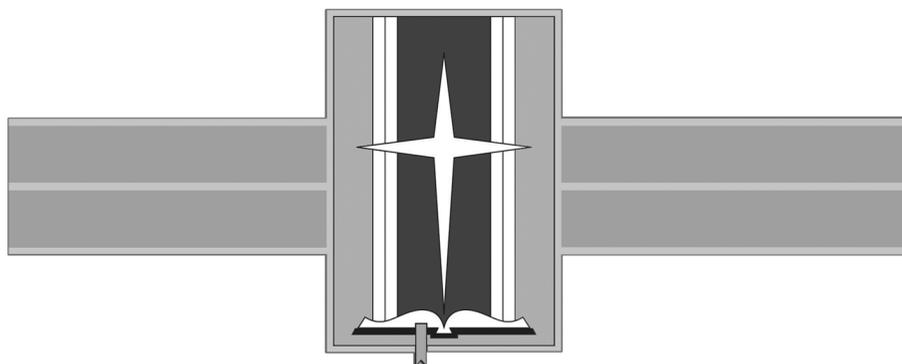
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# THE NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY



Volume  
23

MARK

James A. Brooks



Nashville, Tennessee

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To *Beverly*



## Editors' Preface

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God's Word does not change. God's world, however, changes in every generation. These changes, in addition to new findings by scholars and a new variety of challenges to the gospel message, call for the church in each generation to interpret and apply God's Word for God's people. Thus, THE NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY is introduced to bridge the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This new series has been designed primarily to enable pastors, teachers, and students to read the Bible with clarity and proclaim it with power.

In one sense THE NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY is not new, for it represents the continuation of a heritage rich in biblical and theological exposition. The title of this forty-volume set points to the continuity of this series with an important commentary project published at the end of the nineteenth century called AN AMERICAN COMMENTARY, edited by Alvah Hovey. The older series included, among other significant contributions, the outstanding volume on Matthew by John A. Broadus, from whom the publisher of the new series, Broadman Press, partly derives its name. The former series was authored and edited by scholars committed to the infallibility of Scripture, making it a solid foundation for the present project. In line with this heritage, all NAC authors affirm the divine inspiration, inerrancy, complete truthfulness, and full authority of the Bible. The perspective of the NAC is unapologetically confessional and rooted in the evangelical tradition.

Since a commentary is a fundamental tool for the expositor or teacher who seeks to interpret and apply Scripture in the church or classroom, the NAC focuses on communicating the theological structure and content of each biblical book. The writers seek to illuminate both the historical meaning and the contemporary significance of Holy Scripture.

In its attempt to make a unique contribution to the Christian community, the NAC focuses on two concerns. First, the commentary emphasizes how each section of a book fits together so that the reader becomes aware of the theological unity of each book and of Scripture as a whole. The writers, however, remain aware of the Bible's inherently rich variety. Second, the NAC is produced with the conviction that the Bible primarily belongs to the church. We

believe that scholarship and the academy provide an indispensable foundation for biblical understanding and the service of Christ, but the editors and authors of this series have attempted to communicate the findings of their research in a manner that will build up the whole body of Christ. Thus, the commentary concentrates on theological exegesis, while providing practical, applicable exposition.

THE NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY's theological focus enables the reader to see the parts as well as the whole of Scripture. The biblical books vary in content, context, literary type, and style. In addition to this rich variety, the editors and authors recognize that the doctrinal emphasis and use of the biblical books differ in various places, contexts, and cultures among God's people. These factors, as well as other concerns, have led the editors to give freedom to the writers to wrestle with the issues raised by the scholarly community surrounding each book and to determine the appropriate shape and length of the introductory materials. Moreover, each writer has developed the structure of the commentary in a way best suited for expounding the basic structure and the meaning of the biblical books for our day. Generally, discussions relating to contemporary scholarship and technical points of grammar and syntax appear in the footnotes and not in the text of the commentary. This format allows pastors and interested laypersons, scholars and teachers, and serious college and seminary students to profit from the commentary at various levels. This approach has been employed because we believe that all Christians have the privilege and responsibility to read and to seek to understand the Bible for themselves.

Consistent with the desire to produce a readable, up-to-date commentary, the editors selected the New International Version as the standard translation for the commentary series. The selection was made primarily because of the NIV's faithfulness to the original languages and its beautiful and readable style. The authors, however, have been given the liberty to differ at places from the NIV as they develop their own translations from the Greek and Hebrew texts.

The NAC reflects the vision and leadership of those who provide oversight for Broadman Press, who in 1987 called for a new commentary series that would evidence a commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture and a faithfulness to the classic Christian tradition. While the commentary adopts an "American" name, it should be noted that some writers represent countries outside the United States, giving the commentary an international perspective. The diverse group of writers includes scholars, teachers, and administrators from almost twenty different colleges and seminaries, as well as pastors, missionaries, and a layperson.

The editors and writers hope that THE NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY will be helpful and instructive for pastors and teachers, scholars and

students, for men and women in the churches who study and teach God's Word in various settings. We trust that for editors, authors, and readers alike, the commentary will be used to build up the church, encourage obedience, and bring renewal to God's people. Above all, we pray that the NAC will bring glory and honor to our Lord, who has graciously redeemed us and faithfully revealed himself to us in his Holy Word.

SOLI DEO GLORIA  
The Editors



## Author's Preface

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During the first half of my Christian life, I probably had less interest in the Gospel according to Mark than in Matthew, Luke, or John. I now know that my attitude was similar to that of most Christians during most of Christian history. My interest in Mark was first aroused in 1975 when I was asked to conduct a doctoral seminar on that Gospel at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where I taught at that time. Since then I have frequently been drawn back to it. I have come to realize that although it is the shortest Gospel and has very little material which is not in Matthew and/or Luke, it has a unique point of view and a powerful message. Therefore when I was asked to write the commentary on Mark for *The New American Commentary*, I readily accepted.

I want to thank Mike Smith, the first editor of the series, and the consulting editors for the invitation. I want to thank the editors for their many helpful suggestions. I want to thank my wife, Beverly, who has a theological degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and unusual insight into things spiritual and with whom I discussed many points of interpretation in the commentary, for her suggestions and encouragement. I want to thank Carlton Winbery, my student at New Orleans Seminary and now chairman of the religion department at Louisiana College, for his help with computer problems. I want to thank the librarians at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and at Bethel Theological Seminary—two schools where I taught during the period of writing—for securing the necessary materials for me. And I want to thank you, dear reader, for considering what I have written. I ask not that you agree with me at every point. In fact, I believe that God will be most honored if you would consider my opinion and that of other commentators and then make up your own mind as did the Bereans long ago (Acts 17:11).



# Abbreviations

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## Bible Books

Gen	Isa	Luke
Exod	Jer	John
Lev	Lam	Acts
Num	Ezek	Rom
Deut	Dan	1,2 Cor
Josh	Hos	Gal
Judg	Joel	Eph
Ruth	Amos	Phil
1,2 Sam	Obad	Col
1,2 Kgs	Jonah	1,2 Thess
1,2 Chr	Mic	1,2 Tim
Ezra	Nah	Titus
Neh	Hab	Phlm
Esth	Zeph	Heb
Job	Hag	Jas
Ps ( <i>pl.</i> Pss)	Zech	1,2 Pet
Prov	Mal	1,2,3 John
Eccl	Matt	Jude
Song of Songs	Mark	Rev

## Commonly Used Reference Works

AB	<i>The Anchor Bible</i>
CD	Cairo (Genizah text of the Damascus Document)
EBC	<i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
<i>Her</i>	<i>Hermeneia</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
INT	<i>Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies [New Series]</i>

LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NAC	<i>New American Commentary</i>
NIC	<i>New International Commentary</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTM	<i>The New Testament Message</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
UBSGNT	<i>United Bible Societies Greek New Testament</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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# Mark

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## INTRODUCTION OUTLINE

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1. Mark in the Early Church
2. Modern Study of Mark
3. The Priority of Mark?
4. A New Literary Genre?
5. Authorship
6. Place of Writing and Initial Audience
7. Date
8. Occasion and Purposes
9. Structure

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## INTRODUCTION

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Mark is the shortest of the Gospels. In one recent edition of the Greek New Testament, it consumes thirty-one pages as opposed to fifty-one for Matthew, fifty-four for Luke, and forty for John. It has less unique material than any other Gospel. About 92 percent of it is paralleled in Matthew, about 48 percent in Luke, and about 95 percent in Matthew and Luke combined. Even though Mark frequently mentioned that Jesus taught, this Gospel contains less of his teaching than any other. It records no resurrection appearances.<sup>1</sup> The quality of Mark's Greek is inferior to that of Matthew and Luke. Mark contains a number of candid statements about the humanity and self-imposed limitations of Jesus and the dullness of the disciples. These could be misunderstood and cause offense. Therefore, throughout most of Christian history, Mark has been the least popular of the Gospels. Popularity and importance, however, are not synonymous; and a purpose of this commentary will be to show that the importance of Mark is as great as that of the other Gospels.

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<sup>1</sup>Assuming that the Gospel originally ended with 16:8 (see the commentary).

### 1. Mark in the Early Church

If indeed Mark was the first Gospel to have been written, Matthew and Luke quickly recognized its value as a source of information in writing their own Gospels. The first person to mention the Gospel of Mark was Papias about A.D. 120–130. His testimony is important enough to quote in full.

The elder also said: “Mark was the interpreter of Peter and wrote accurately but not in order whatever he remembered about the things which were said or done by the Lord.” He [Mark] neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but later, as I said, [he relied upon] Peter who adapted his teachings to the needs [of his hearers] without setting forth an orderly account of the Lord’s sayings. Therefore Mark did not err in writing various things as he remembered them, for he made it his first priority not to omit or falsify anything which he heard.<sup>2</sup>

When making his canon list, Marcion (ca. A.D. 145) rejected Mark. But Tatian (ca. A.D. 170) employed Mark in constructing his *Diatessaron*, a new account of the life and teaching of Jesus that was made by weaving together the four individual Gospels. Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 155) mentioned the Memoirs of Peter that contained the words “named Boanerges, which means ‘sons of thunder.’”<sup>3</sup> These words are found only in Mark 3:17. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. A.D. 180) wrote that Mark was the disciple and interpreter of Peter and that he wrote the Gospel after Peter’s death.<sup>4</sup> Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 200) said that the Gospels with the genealogies (Matthew and Luke) were written first and that Mark was a follower of Peter and wrote in Rome during Peter’s lifetime at the request of the Christians there.<sup>5</sup> Tertullian (ca. A.D. 210) described Mark as an “apostolic man” who was the interpreter of Peter and who edited a Gospel.<sup>6</sup> Origen (d. 254) wrote: “The Second [Gospel] is according to Mark, who did as Peter instructed him.”<sup>7</sup> The so-called Anti-Marcionite Prologue (ca. fourth cent.), which is found in various manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate, described Mark as the interpreter of Peter who wrote in Italy after Peter’s death. The so-called Monarchian Prologue (also fourth cent.), which is found in other Vulgate manuscripts, stated that Mark was a disciple of Peter and bishop of Alexandria and that he wrote his Gospel in Italy. Jerome (d. A.D. 420) claimed that Mark was the interpreter of Peter and the first bishop of Alexandria.<sup>8</sup> Augustine (d. A.D. 430) believed that the order of writing was Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Concerning the second of

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<sup>2</sup>Cited ca. A.D. 325 by Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.15.

<sup>3</sup>Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 106.

<sup>4</sup>Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1.

<sup>5</sup>Clement of Alexandria quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* 6.14.5–7.

<sup>6</sup>Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.2.5.

<sup>7</sup>Origen quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* 6.25.5.

<sup>8</sup>Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, Prologue 6.

these he wrote: “Mark followed him [Matthew] closely and appears to be his imitator or abstracter.”<sup>9</sup>

Mark was the least quoted Gospel by ancient and medieval Christian writers, although it is often difficult to determine which Gospel is being quoted where parallel passages exist. No one appears to have written a commentary on the Gospel of Mark until the late fifth century when Victor of Antioch did so. Mark was used seldomly in the lectionary cycle. It was never placed first in the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, and sometimes it was third or fourth rather than second.

## 2. Modern Study of Mark

About the middle of the nineteenth century, a great change took place in the status of Mark. Careful study of the interrelationships of the Gospels, i.e., study of the Synoptic problem, led most to the conclusion that Mark rather than Matthew was the first Gospel to have been written. With this claim came another, that Mark is the most historical of the Gospels. (The latter of these is often referred to as the “Markan hypothesis.”) Late in the nineteenth century, therefore, Mark ostensibly became the basis of a rash of “lives of Jesus” by classic liberal scholars. About the turn of the century, however, A. Schweitzer, in his monumental work *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906), showed that these scholars had not based their “lives” on Mark but on their own preconceived notions of Jesus as a liberal, ethical teacher. Schweitzer claimed that the Gospels do not contain the right kind of and enough information to write a biography of Jesus. As a result the “old quest of the historical Jesus” ceased.<sup>10</sup>

About the same time, various attacks were made on the historicity of Mark, a prime example being W. Wrede, who claimed that Mark invented the idea of a “messianic secret” in order to explain the embarrassing fact that Jesus was not recognized as Messiah during his lifetime. About two decades later the form critics K. L. Schmidt, M. Dibelius, and R. Bultmann argued that Mark collected a number of short, independent accounts of the deeds and sayings of Jesus and invented a framework for them in order to produce a continuous account (form criticism is the analysis of a text according to typical and identifiable forms by which people express themselves linguistically). From their perspective, therefore, the Markan outline, which Matthew and Luke closely followed, has no historical or geographical value. As a result Mark was dethroned and had to take a place beside—but not below as in the ancient and medieval churches—the other three Gospels.

<sup>9</sup>Augustine, *Agreement of the Gospels* 1.2.4.

<sup>10</sup>Ironically Schweitzer’s own view of Jesus as a fanatical preacher of the end of the world was no more satisfactory than the ethical “lives.”

Radical form critics, such as Bultmann, were exceedingly skeptical about the historicity of all the Gospels. Bultmann even claimed that historical facts have no value because Christian commitment should not be to anything in the past but to “authentic existence” in the present. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, there was a reaction against such skepticism; and a “new quest of the historical Jesus” began. This quest attempted to determine which of the sayings and deeds ascribed to Jesus in Mark and the other Gospels were historical. Various criteria of authenticity were established, such as dissimilarity from Judaism and Hellenism, coherence, and multiple attestation. To say that the “new quest” is continuing probably is correct, although some speak of a “third quest.”<sup>11</sup> In scholarly circles Mark continues to enjoy a status equal to that of the other Gospels; and in the new, three-year lectionary system it is given a rightful place.

The modern study of Mark includes some recent theories that deal with its occasion and purpose. S. G. F. Brandon claims that Jesus was a Zealot and that Mark was written just after the Jewish revolt to cover up that fact, to shift the blame of the crucifixion from the Romans to the Jews, and to show the Romans that the Christian community in Rome was not Jewish and had nothing to do with the revolt.<sup>12</sup> All the Gospels indicate, however, that Jesus tended to avoid the title Messiah or Christ. Inasmuch as the early church was not reluctant to ascribe that title to him (cf. Acts and the Epistles), the testimony of the Gospels must be accepted as historical. Jesus no doubt avoided the title because of its political overtones, and such avoidance is one indication that he rejected the nationalistic aspirations of the Jews. Likewise his preaching of nonresistance is firmly established by the critical criterion of dissimilarity from Judaism.

P. Carrington<sup>13</sup> and M. D. Goulder<sup>14</sup> think Mark was written to provide lectionary readings for use in public worship. Similar is the thesis of B. Standaert that Mark was written to be read on Easter eve to candidates for baptism.<sup>15</sup> Against these views there is no evidence that Christian writings were read as Scripture until the second century. This is not to imply that the Gospels or epistles were not read publicly as they were circulated.

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<sup>11</sup>The “third quest,” such as it is, employs historical and archaeological materials to show what Jesus must have been as a first-century Jew. Even Jewish scholars have engaged in this “quest” in an effort to reclaim Jesus for Judaism. One should realize, however, that Jesus transcended his national heritage.

<sup>12</sup>S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1957); “The Date of the Markan Gospel,” *NTS* 7 (1961–62): 126–41; and *Jesus and the Zealots* (New York: Scribner’s, 1967).

<sup>13</sup>P. Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the Markan Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1952).

<sup>14</sup>M. D. Goulder, *The Evangelist’s Calendar* (London: SPCK, 1978).

<sup>15</sup>B. Standaert, *L’Evangile selon Marc: Composition et Genre Littéraire* (Nijmegen: Stichting Studentenpers, 1978).

W. Marxsen, one of the earliest Gospel scholars to employ redaction criticism in the study of Mark, maintains that the Gospel was written in Galilee about A.D. 66 to persuade the Jerusalem church to flee the doomed city and go to Galilee to await the return of the Lord.<sup>16</sup> This theory is ingenious, but it is extremely doubtful that one would write a fully developed Gospel for such a purpose or that Matthew and Luke would have employed the Gospel if that had been its purpose.

T. J. Weeden argues that Mark was written ca. A.D. 80 to refute a false Christology and a false concept of the Christian life, namely that Jesus was a divine man similar to other such demigods in the Greco-Roman world and that the Christian life consists of following his illustrious example and triumphing over everything through the power of the Spirit. Mark supposedly did this by attributing the false Christology and false concept of discipleship of his opponents to the original disciples of Jesus and attacking them. Mark's own view was that Jesus and true discipleship are best understood in terms of suffering.<sup>17</sup> One may agree with the last claim without accepting the others. There is no evidence that the disciples ever claimed to be divine men. Some scholars now doubt whether there was a well-established concept of divine men in the first century or earlier.

In a similar way R. Martin maintains that Mark wrote to refute a Gnostic overemphasis on Paul's concept of a spiritual, divine Christ. He did so by emphasizing an earthly, human Jesus.<sup>18</sup> J. D. Kingsbury, however, denies that Mark wrote to correct a false Christology and argues that he conceived of Jesus as the Davidic Messiah-King. From Kingsbury's perspective the title "Son of God" should be interpreted as in the Old Testament to refer to a king of Israel. "Son of Man" is not a confessional title but a functional, public, polemical one.<sup>19</sup>

W. Kelber sets forth the thesis that Mark was written in Galilee shortly after the Jewish revolt to show that the family of Jesus, the original disciples, and Christian prophets in Jerusalem erred in associating the return of the Lord with the fall of that city. According to Kelber, Mark's own view was that Jesus would return later in Galilee.<sup>20</sup> If this is so, why is so much of Mark not related to eschatology?

<sup>16</sup>W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*, trans. J. Boyce (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969).

<sup>17</sup>T. J. Weeden, "The Heresy That Necessitated Mark's Gospel," *ZNW* 59 (1968): 145–58; and *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

<sup>18</sup>R. Martin, *Mark, Evangelist and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972). This book is also a good survey of the history of Markan studies. An even better one is S. P. Kealy, *Mark's Gospel: A History of Its Interpretation from the Beginning until 1979* (New York: Paulist, 1982).

<sup>19</sup>J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>20</sup>W. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); and *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

E. Trocmé,<sup>21</sup> like Weeden and Kee (see below), thinks that Mark is polemical, but for him the issue is ecclesiology. Mark represented a progressive movement that had broken away from the conservative, self-centered Jerusalem church. Mark believed that a true disciple is not concerned with securing a place of prominence, as were the original disciples and the family of Jesus, but with following Jesus' example in missions and other kinds of service.<sup>22</sup> But there is no convincing evidence that Mark had any concern with the Jerusalem church. Other explanations are possible for his treatment of the disciples.

H. C. Kee employs modern sociology in his study of Mark and concludes that it was written in southern Syria shortly before the fall of Jerusalem for a charismatic, apocalyptic community that was estranged from society. A purpose was to promote itinerant evangelism in view of the approaching end.<sup>23</sup> There is much of value in Kee's study, and it is one of the more judicious of those being reviewed. Nevertheless the apocalyptic element in the Gospel is small, and this consideration raises serious questions about the theory.

E. Best has taken the position that Mark was written in Rome ca. A.D. 70 by someone named Mark, but not by the John Mark of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. The work was not polemical or apologetic and was not connected with any historical event, such as the Neronian persecution or the Jewish revolt. Rather, the Gospel was a pastoral adaptation of various traditions about Jesus, including some Petrine ones, to the needs of the writer's church. Mark was a conservative redactor who did not create traditions but adapted the ones he received. His main concerns were to show that true discipleship involves following Jesus in suffering and death and in mission.<sup>24</sup> We would question Best's position on authorship and date, and we would question the value of so much effort to distinguish Mark's own redaction from his sources.<sup>25</sup> Otherwise there is much value in his understanding of Mark.

D. Rhoads and D. Michie employ narrative analysis in their study of Mark, as do also the following studies. Above all else Mark is a story that is to be treated as a whole. The writer presents himself as an omniscient narrator who controls the material in order to get the "ideal reader" to respond properly by

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<sup>21</sup>E. Trocmé, *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975). It may be a necessary part of his view that Trocmé believed that the original Mark consisted only of chaps. 1–13, which were written in the 40s or 50s. Chaps. 14–16 were added ca. A.D. 85.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

<sup>24</sup>E. Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981); and *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983).

<sup>25</sup>Redaction critics are far too optimistic about their ability to distinguish tradition (what the Evangelist received from his sources) and redaction (what he himself composed). As a result little effort is expended in the present commentary to isolate Mark's redaction.

seeing the advent of the reign of God in Jesus and by following him. The dominant motif in Mark's story is the journey of Jesus and his disciples. The book gives much attention to analyzing the characters (Jesus, the authorities, the disciples, and the "little people") and the conflict.<sup>26</sup> Mark is indeed a narrative and should be studied as such, but it is more than a narrative. It is also history and theology, which tend to be ignored by narrative criticism.

A. Stock argues that Mark is most closely related to the genre of Greek tragedy. Its purpose was to persuade the reader to identify with Jesus in his suffering.<sup>27</sup> That Mark has some points of contact with Greek tragedy few would deny, but it is most unlikely that one whose literary ability leaves something to be desired would have been influenced by a highly developed Greek literary form.

V. K. Robbins's thesis is that Mark is most closely related to Greco-Roman stories of disciple-gathering teachers whose integrity leads to their death but whose teaching is carried on by their disciples.<sup>28</sup> Jesus certainly was a teacher, but he was also a healer and a redeemer from sin. Nor does the gathering of disciples seem to have been his or Mark's major concern as Robbins would have us believe.

It should be obvious from this brief survey of some of the more important studies of the last forty years that modern scholarship has not come to a consensus about the authorship, date, place of writing, destination, occasion and purpose, and literary genre of Mark. Some of the studies have missed completely the meaning of Mark, but most have made some contribution to its understanding. A frequent fault has been to try to interpret the whole of Mark in terms of one theme or emphasis. Mark is too complex to permit that. Furthermore, the inability of contemporary criticism to agree suggests that traditional understandings of and approaches to Mark's Gospel remain valid. A presupposition of the present commentary is that the best in traditional interpretation and the best in modern, critical interpretation should be combined in a serious study of the Gospel.

### 3. The Priority of Mark?

The opinions of Clement (Matthew and Luke were written before Mark and John) and Augustine (the order of writing was Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) have been noted. Augustine's view prevailed until the last half of the

<sup>26</sup>D. Rhoads and D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

<sup>27</sup>A. Stock, *Call to Discipleship: A Literary Study of Mark's Gospel* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982). G. C. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), had earlier identified Mark as an example of Greek tragedy. Both writers deny, however, that Mark deliberately wrote a tragedy.

<sup>28</sup>V. K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

nineteenth century when the priority of Mark was established by C. H. Weisse and H. J. Holtzmann. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, their arguments were reinforced by J. C. Hawkins and B. H. Streeter so that Markan priority became one of the “assured results” of biblical criticism.

Among the traditional arguments for the priority of Mark are the following. First, Mark is the shortest of the Gospels. It is much easier to conceive of Matthew and Luke expanding Mark by adding birth narratives, much more about Jesus’ teaching, and accounts of resurrection appearances than to conceive of Mark abbreviating Matthew or Matthew and Luke by leaving out so much that is so appealing while at the same time expanding their individual accounts. Second, both Matthew and Luke occasionally differ from Mark’s order, but they never agree against Mark in the order of the pericopes and only occasionally do they agree against him in their wording (a pericope is a term designating the self-contained literary units or sections of the Gospels). The best explanation for this phenomenon is that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark as a source. And third, Matthew and Luke appear to improve upon Mark in various ways. As already indicated, their language (vocabulary, style, grammar) is superior. Matthew especially compressed Mark’s individual accounts, something that is often accomplished by rewriting. And Matthew and Luke do not have many of the candid statements of Mark that could be misunderstood and cause offense. Believing that Matthew and Luke improved upon Mark is much easier than thinking Mark impaired the account of Matthew alone or the accounts of Matthew and Luke.

Between the end of the nineteenth century and 1964, only an occasional objection was raised to the priority of Mark and to the two-document hypothesis of Synoptic relationships of which it is the foundation. (The two-document hypothesis holds that Mark wrote first and that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark and a collection of the sayings of Jesus usually referred to as Q as their most important sources.) Some of these objections were by Roman Catholic scholars who until 1943 were required to support Matthean priority. In 1964 W. R. Farmer published *The Synoptic Problem*. In it he attacked the traditional arguments for the priority of Mark and the two-document hypothesis, especially as summarized by Streeter, and in which he argued for the theory put forth late in the eighteenth century by J. J. Griesbach. The Griesbach or Farmer or two-Gospel hypothesis claims that Matthew wrote first, that Luke used Matthew, and that Mark used both Matthew and Luke.

The priority of Matthew is supported by ancient tradition and the reflection of Jewish Christianity in that Gospel. Furthermore, the theory best explains the so-called minor agreements in wording of Matthew and Luke against Mark. It cannot, however, explain two concerns. One is how Matthew and Luke could have so little in common if the latter was dependent upon the former. In fact,

many indications are that Matthew and Luke worked independently.

The other concern is why Mark would have been written if only 5 percent of it was different from its sources, Matthew and Luke. Farmer and his growing number of followers have offered various explanations. One is that for the most part Mark accepted only those accounts found in both Matthew and Luke. This, however, implies a question in Mark's mind about the authenticity of the accounts that did not have dual support. Such doubts are most unlikely. Furthermore, in a number of instances Mark is paralleled by only Matthew or only Luke. Still another consideration that weighs against the Griesbach hypothesis is that redaction criticism has thrived on the assumption of Markan priority but has accomplished very little on the basis of Matthean priority (redaction criticism seeks to determine the theological concerns of an author by studying how he used and shaped his sources).

The question of Markan priority has not been settled, but to the present commentator it appears to be much more likely than Matthean priority. In fact, if Mark was the first Gospel, it ought to be interpreted with a minimum of references to the other two Synoptics. This will be the procedure of the present commentary.

#### **4. A New Literary Genre?**

Mark is not a biography or history in the modern sense. It does not deal exhaustively with such things as family background, influences on Jesus, psychological analysis of Jesus, or periods of his life. Mark's primary purpose was not to set forth historical facts as objectively as possible. His purpose was to describe Jesus in such a way as to promote loyalty to him and his teaching.

Although contemporary scholars are unanimous that Mark is not a biography or history, they are divided about whether it corresponds to any ancient genre of literature. It has something in common with ancient lives, acts, memoirs, and tragedies—especially the first—but it does not correspond exactly to any of them. Mark and the other Gospels represent a unique combination of the deeds and teachings of a great person, a combination that is not even paralleled in the later apocryphal gospels. It is probably correct, therefore, to claim that Mark created a new type of literature. If this is true, his literary accomplishment was great despite the fact that his work does not represent the highest quality of literature.

#### **5. Authorship**

The Gospel itself is anonymous. The *text* says nothing about the identity of the author. One must turn instead to ancient tradition. The title was attached to the Gospel probably about the middle of the second century when the Gospels were collected and a means of distinguishing them became necessary. The title indicates that someone named Mark was the writer. Because of its

early date and universal acceptance, the title is a much more significant piece of evidence than is usually recognized.

By far the most important individual testimony is that of Papias, as has been noted. It requires several comments. The elder who was his authority cannot be identified, but he was an apostle or a disciple of the apostles. By citing and commenting on the statement of the elder, Papias seems to have been defending Mark against charges that he was not an eyewitness and that he did not write in chronological order. He did so by associating Mark with Peter. The statement amazingly anticipates by eighteen centuries the claims of form critics that the Gospels are not chronological and that the teachings of Jesus were adapted to the needs of the early Christian communities. For present purposes, however, the most significant point is that about A.D. 120–130 a churchman quoted an earlier authority to the effect that someone named Mark wrote the Gospel that bears that name.

Some modern critics have rejected the testimony of Papias as worthless and have claimed that all subsequent testimonies are dependent upon him. Some have claimed that Papias fabricated his attribution of the Gospel to Mark and Peter during the heat of battle with the Gnostics. It is doubtful, however, that Papias could have gained much by ascribing a Gospel to such an obscure person as Mark. The association of Mark with Peter is attested independently in 1 Pet 5:13. That Papias was the early church's only source of information about the Gospel is hard to believe, and that Papias was the only source for the title attached to all manuscripts is impossible to believe. Therefore the testimony of Papias remains a significant factor in the discussion of authorship.

The remainder of the external evidence can be summarized by saying that the early church was unanimous that Mark was the author of a Gospel. All but Augustine claimed further that Mark wrote in association with Peter. Some contemporary scholars are persuaded by the ancient tradition and embrace Markan authorship. A weighty consideration in their minds is that Mark was not a prominent person in the primitive church; indeed, he had tarnished his reputation by leaving Paul and Barnabas in the middle of a missionary campaign (Acts 13:13). It is most unlikely that the church would have attributed a Gospel to him without strong evidence that he wrote it. Other contemporary scholars, however, put no stock in church tradition and claim that the author cannot be known. A mediating position is that the book was written by someone named Mark, but not the John Mark of Acts. A major consideration in favor of this claim is that Mark was one of the most common Roman names.

Many contemporary scholars agree that Mark does not reflect any testimony of Peter. This conclusion grows out of the denial by form critics of any role of eyewitnesses in the Gospels. The claim is preposterous! Explaining the existence of the early church and the writing of the New Testament without any influence of eyewitnesses is almost as difficult as doing so without any

influence of the earthly Jesus. Another reason for ruling out Peter is that Mark appears to have employed material that was handed down through various lines of oral tradition. Nevertheless, the large amount of concern for Peter and the less-than-flattering image of Peter in Mark may be an indication that Peter was one source among others. Various passages could be recollections of an eyewitness. Petrine influence cannot be proved or disproved, but it should be acknowledged as a possibility. Even if that part of the tradition were false, the part about Mark being the author could still be correct. Neither can that be proved or disproved; but when everything is considered, it appears to be the most probable view.

If the Gospel were written by the John Mark of Acts, what is known about him? We are uncertain whether he was the young man of 14:51–52. Acts 12:12 implies that his mother was a person of means who had a house large enough for a meeting of a group of Christians (many Palestinian houses had but one small room). Acts relates how Paul and Barnabas took him from Jerusalem to Syrian Antioch (12:25), how they included him on the mission to Cyprus (13:5), how he left them at Perga (13:13), and how Paul refused to take him on a second missionary endeavor and Barnabas took him instead back to Cyprus (15:37–39). Colossians 4:10 indicates he was Barnabas’s cousin and that he was with Paul (in Rome?) at the time of writing. Philemon 24 indicates that he was with Paul (in Rome?) at the time of the writing of that letter. Second Timothy 4:11 expresses Paul’s desire to have Mark join him in Rome. First Peter 5:13 associates him with Peter in Rome. The late tradition that he became bishop of Alexandria in Egypt has been mentioned. Hippolytus of Rome (d. A.D. 235) described him as “stump-fingered.”<sup>29</sup> The *Paschal Chronicle* (seventh cent.) claimed that he died a martyr’s death. The validity of the last three traditions is impossible to determine.

## 6. Place of Writing and Initial Audience

The early church located the writing and destination of the Gospel in Italy or more specifically Rome. The only exception was Chrysostom (d. A.D. 407) who opted for Egypt.<sup>30</sup> His view, however, probably represents a misunderstanding of the tradition that Mark once served as bishop of Alexandria. Various data seem to support a Roman setting. If in fact the Prison Epistles were written by Paul from Rome, Col 4:10 and Phlm 24 connect Mark with Rome in the early 60s. First Peter 5:13 connects Mark with Peter in Rome in the early 60s (assuming the word “Babylon” earlier in the verse is a code word for Rome and assuming Peter wrote or commissioned the letter). Second Timothy 4:11 suggests that Mark would soon be going to Rome. A comparison of Mark

<sup>29</sup>Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies* 7.30.

<sup>30</sup>Chrysostom, *Homily on Matt.* 1.

15:21 with Rom 16:13 may connect the Gospel with Rome (assuming that the same Rufus is in mind in both passages and assuming that Rom 16 went to Rome and not Ephesus).

In addition to the tradition that connects Peter with Mark in Rome in the writing of the Gospel, additional independent tradition indicates that Peter died a martyr's death in Rome during the persecution of Nero (A.D. 64–65). Still further, a number of Latinisms in the book could favor Rome, although Latin was certainly spoken outside of Italy. The recent tendency to place the writing of Mark in Palestine or Syria is inseparably connected with particular theories about the occasion and purpose. Rome remains the most likely place for the origin and original readership of this work.

Quite aside from the geographical location of the recipients, something needs to be said about their ethnic background. Many indications exist that they were Gentile rather than Jewish Christians. The strongest evidence of this is that the writer often explains Jewish customs. The Gentile background of the recipients is an argument against a Palestinian setting for the writing and initial use of the book.

## **7. Date**

The tradition that circulated in the early church dated the writing of Mark's Gospel either shortly before or shortly after Peter's death in A.D. 64 or 65. Although a large segment of contemporary scholarship disregards the tradition, there is widespread agreement that Mark was written between A.D. 65 and 75. Crucial in the minds of most is the relationship of Mark to the Neronian persecution in Rome during A.D. 64–65 and/or to the Jewish revolt against Rome between A.D. 66 and 70 (actually the last resistance at Masada was not crushed until A.D. 73 or 74). The Gospel mentions neither, but it is difficult to evaluate the significance of this because the remainder of the New Testament is silent also, even though some of the books almost certainly were written after these events.

This commentary regards the allusions to persecution (e.g., 8:34–38; 10:38–40) as too general for Mark to have been written in Rome after the outbreak of the Neronian persecution, an event that must have dominated the church there for at least a decade after A.D. 64–65. The Gospel reflects apprehension of persecution or other trouble, but it does not reflect a persecution in progress or one in the very recent past. Also, quite apart from any supernatural insight on his part, there is no reason Jesus could not have predicted the persecution of his followers. This commentary does not take chap. 13 to indicate that the Jewish revolt had begun. If these presuppositions are correct, and if Mark was written in Rome as seems most likely, it must have been written shortly before the beginning of the persecution of Nero and therefore in A.D. 63 or the first half of A.D. 64. If in fact Peter had any input, an earlier



date is not likely because it is improbable that he went to Rome before A.D. 62 (he is not mentioned in the Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—which probably were written from Rome between A.D. 60 and 62; nor is he mentioned in Paul’s letter to Rome about A.D. 56–57).

### **8. Occasion and Purposes**

Assuming Mark was written about A.D. 63 or 64 from Rome, reconstructing its circumstances is difficult because so little is known about the Christian community there at the time. The expulsion of the Jews—and Jewish Christians—was a decade and a half in the past. Paul had recently been a prisoner in Rome but evidently had few contacts with synagogue or church, in part at least because associating with him was dangerous. Although the Neronian persecution had not begun, it is unlikely that it was the result only of the fire of the summer of A.D. 64. Quite likely the authorities already had been making hostile gestures toward Christians. As a result the church at Rome felt threatened. The threat of persecution may constitute the occasion for writing Mark.

Mark had more than one purpose in writing. The purposes can be inferred from the contents. Mark’s first concern was simply to collect and arrange various individual traditions of the deeds and teachings of Jesus. A growing desire emerged for an orderly and connected *written* account. Isolated stories were no longer adequate. Oral tradition, although still preferred by some, was no longer satisfactory for others. Probably a broad outline—but not a full chronology—of the life of Jesus was available to Mark. If so, he may have arranged the various individual accounts into it in order to develop various themes.

Mark clearly was not content merely to give an account of the life and teaching of Jesus. He wanted to set forth his own understanding of Jesus and thus develop his Christology. He wanted to do so in such a way as to minister to the needs of his own church. He used and applied the accounts at his disposal—something Christian teachers and preachers have been doing ever since. Mark’s concept of Jesus was that he was fully human and fully divine, both Son of Man and Son of God. Furthermore he was both the Jewish Messiah (Christ, Son of David) and the Lord of the Gentiles. Such a balanced Christology as Mark’s weighs against the theory that he was battling a heresy. Mark was especially concerned to emphasize the suffering and death of Jesus as a ransom for sinners.

Mark is more than a book about Jesus. It is also a book about being a disciple of Jesus. For Mark discipleship was following Jesus in suffering and mission. He saw in the first disciples the same kinds of triumphs and failures that characterized the disciples in his own church, and therefore he set forth the former as examples of virtues to imitate and vices to avoid. The book therefore has a practical orientation.

The final major purpose for which Mark wrote was to clarify Jesus' teaching about the future. The crucial item is that no one can know when Jesus will return or when the end of the age will take place. One must not hasten to connect these things with any particular historical event, e.g., the past attempt of Caligula to set up his image in the Jerusalem temple, the past expulsion of Jews and Christians from Rome by Claudius, the coming persecution of Nero, or the coming Jewish revolt and destruction of the temple. Instead of preoccupation with the end, the faithful must devote themselves to discipleship in the present.

## 9. Structure

Traditional outlines of Mark use geographical terminology, e.g., Galilean ministry, ministry beyond Galilee, journey to Jerusalem, and last ministry in Jerusalem. From the perspective of form criticism, this approach makes primary what was secondary for Mark. If a redaction/composition critical perspective can be accepted in which Mark assembled independent units of tradition into a unified narrative in order to achieve a theological purpose, the divisions of his narrative must be related to that purpose. As already seen, however, contemporary scholarship has not been able to agree on the purpose. Nevertheless, a significant number of scholars have been able to agree on the approximate location of the divisions by using summary statements in the book.

First division:	1:1 or 1:14 through 3:6 or 3:19
Second division:	3:7 or 3:20 through 6:6, 6:13, or 6:29
Third division:	6:7, 6:14, or 6:30 through 8:21, 8:26, or 8:30
Fourth division:	8:22, 8:27, or 8:31 through 10:45 or 10:52
Fifth division:	10:46 or 11:1 through 13:37
Sixth division:	14:1 through 15:47 or 16:8.

Those who start the first division with 1:14 treat 1:1–13 as an introduction, and those who end the sixth division with 15:47 treat the remainder as a conclusion.<sup>31</sup> Despite the growing agreement about these divisions, the use of sum-

<sup>31</sup> Among those who adopt such a scheme are N. Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 146–61; idem, with D. C. Dulling, 2nd ed. (1982), 239–54; F. G. Lang, "Kompositionsanalyse des Markusevangeliums," *ZTK* 74 (1977): 1–24; E. Schweizer, "The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark," *Int.* 32 (1978): 387–99, who combined the last two, thus leaving five; D. J. Harrington, *Mark*, NTM (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1979), 4:1; L. Williamson, Jr., *Mark*, INT (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), vii–ix; G. Mangatt, "The Gospel of Mark: An Exegetical Survey," *Bible Bhashyam* 9 (1983): 229–46; W. W. Wessel, "Mark," EBC, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:615–17; and J. Carmody et al., *Exploring the New Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 107–08, who made chap. 13 a separate division, thus making seven. Perrin made his divisions where summary statements and geographical notices coincide, but his analysis has been criticized

mary statements seems arbitrary and selective, though it does give us some clue of the author's purpose and structure.

Somewhat different is the structure of V. K. Robbins.<sup>32</sup> Robbins's divisions are 1:14–3:6; 3:7–5:43; 6:1–8:26; 8:27–10:45; 10:46–12:44; 13:1–15:47. He argues that each of these is introduced by a three-step progression in which Jesus went to a new place with his disciples, engaged in interaction with the disciples or others, and as a result of the interaction summoned his disciples anew. The six introductory, three-step progressions are 1:14–20; 3:7–19; 6:1–13; 8:27–9:1; 10:46–11:11; 13:1–37. A question arises whether other instances of three-step progression are in Mark and whether chap. 13 is too long to serve as an introductory or transitional passage.

Still another approach is that of C. S. Mann.<sup>33</sup> He divides the book into two major units (1:16–8:21; 8:22–16:8) and each major unit into three segments. Each of the segments is divided on the basis of chiasmic or inverted parallelism (e.g., a, b, c, b', a', in which a in some way corresponds to a', etc.). The chiasmic structure, however, will stand up only if one allows Mann's sometimes inaccurate description of the contents of the segments.

In my opinion Mark arranged his work into three major divisions by subject matter and by introducing and concluding the middle division with a giving-of-sight miracle. The middle division deals primarily with discipleship and more particularly with the "blindness" of the disciples who fail to see Jesus' role as a suffering and serving Messiah. The enclosure of this division with stories about Jesus healing blind men is highly significant, especially when one realizes that these are the only instances of curing blindness in Mark. Beyond the major divisions Mark apparently did not intend subdivisions other than the individual pericopes, which he arranged in a logical but not always chronological order. Also included are an introduction and conclusion.

Although Mark certainly did not intend it as a title in the modern sense, the statement in 1:1, "the gospel about Jesus Christ," is a summary of the contents of the book and therefore should be used as the theme on which to base the outline. For this purpose the word *gospel* should be translated "good news."

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by C. W. Hedrick, "The Role of 'Summary Statements' in the Composition of the Gospel of Mark," *NovT* 26 (1984): 289–311, because many other summary statements and geographical notices do not happen to come together and because the "summary statements" do not summarize what precedes or follows.

<sup>32</sup>Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 19–51.

<sup>33</sup>C. S. Mann, *Mark*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986).

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*OUTLINE OF THE BOOK*

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- I. Introduction: The Beginning of the Good News (1:1–13)
  1. The Preparation of John (1:1–8)
  2. The Baptism of Jesus (1:9–11)
  3. The Temptation of Jesus (1:12–13)
- II. The Good News about Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God (1:14–8:21)
  1. Introduction (1:14–15)
  2. The Calling of the First Disciples (1:16–20)
  3. A Day of Ministry in Capernaum (1:21–39)
    - (1) Teaching in the Synagogue and Exorcising an Evil Spirit (1:21–28)
    - (2) The Healing of Simon's Mother-in-Law (1:29–31)
    - (3) The Healing of the Crowds at Sunset (1:32–34)
    - (4) The Departure from Capernaum and a Tour of Galilee (1:35–39)
  4. The Cleansing of a Leper (1:40–45)
  5. The Conflicts with the Scribes and Pharisees (2:1–3:6)
    - (1) Over the Forgiveness of a Paralytic (2:1–12)
    - (2) Over Associating with Tax Collectors and "Sinners" (2:13–17)
    - (3) Over Fasting (2:18–22)
    - (4) Over Picking Grain on the Sabbath (2:23–28)
    - (5) Over Healing the Man with the Shriveled Hand on the Sabbath (3:1–6)
  6. The Popularity of Jesus (3:7–12)
  7. The Call of the Twelve (3:13–19)
  8. The Family of Jesus (3:20–21,31–35)
  9. The Accusation of Demon Possession and the Warning against the Unforgivable Sin (3:22–30)
  10. The Parable Discourse (4:1–34)
    - (1) The Parable of the Soils and Its Interpretation (4:1–9,13–20)
    - (2) The Purpose of Parables (4:10–12,21–25)
    - (3) The Parable of the Seed Growing Spontaneously (4:26–29)
    - (4) The Parable of the Mustard Seed (4:30–32)
    - (5) Conclusion (4:33–34)
  11. A Collection of Miracle Stories (4:35–5:43)
    - (1) The Stilling of the Storm (4:35–41)
    - (2) The Exorcising of the Demons from the Wild Man of Gerasa (5:1–20)
    - (3) The Raising of Jairus's Daughter (5:21–24a,35–43)
    - (4) The Healing of the Woman with a Hemorrhage (5:24b–34)
  12. The Rejection at Nazareth (6:1–6a)
  13. The Mission of the Twelve (6:6b–13,30)

14. The Reaction of Herod to Jesus and John (6:14–29)
15. The Feeding of the Five Thousand (6:31–44)
16. The Walking on the Lake (6:45–52)
17. The Healings at Gennesaret (6:53–56)
18. The Disputes over Scribal Tradition (7:1–23)
  - (1) Concerning Unwashed Hands (7:1–8)
  - (2) Concerning the Corban Vow (7:9–13)
  - (3) Concerning Kosher Food (7:14–23)
19. The Exorcising of a Demon from the Daughter of a Syrophenician Woman (7:24–30)
20. The Healing of the Deaf Man with a Speech Impediment (7:31–37)
21. The Feeding of the Four Thousand (8:1–10)
22. The Demand for a Sign (8:11–13)
23. The Failure to Bring Bread and a Warning against Leaven (8:14–21)
- III. The Good News about Jesus' Teaching on Discipleship (8:22–10:52)
  1. Introduction: The Healing of the Blind Man at Bethsaida (8:22–26)
  2. The Confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (8:27–30)
  3. The First Passion and Resurrection Prediction (8:31–33)
  4. The Cost of Discipleship (8:34–9:1)
  5. The Transfiguration (9:2–10)
  6. The Question about Elijah (9:11–13)
  7. The Exorcising of a Demon from a Deaf and Mute Boy (9:14–29)
  8. The Second Passion and Resurrection Prediction (9:30–32)
  9. The Discussion about Greatness (9:33–37)
  10. The Question about the Independent Exorcist (9:38–41)
  11. A Warning against Offenses (9:42–50)
  12. The Journey to Jerusalem (10:1–45)
    - (1) The Teaching about Divorce (10:1–12)
    - (2) The Blessing of the Children (10:13–16)
    - (3) The Inquiry of the Rich Man and Jesus' Teaching about Wealth and Rewards (10:17–31)
    - (4) The Third Passion and Resurrection Prediction (10:32–34)
    - (5) The Ambition of James and John (10:35–45)
  13. Conclusion: The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus at Jericho (10:46–52)
- IV. The Good News about Jesus' Death (11:1–15:47)
  1. The Entry into Jerusalem (11:1–11)
  2. The Cursing of the Fig Tree (11:12–14,20–25)
  3. The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple (11:15–19)
  4. Controversies in the Temple (11:27–12:40)
    - (1) About Jesus' Authority (11:27–33)
    - (2) About the Rejection of Israel: The Parable of the Wicked Tenant Farmers (12:1–12)
    - (3) About the Payment of Taxes (12:13–17)

- (4) About Marriage at the Resurrection (12:18–27)
- (5) About the Greatest Commandment (12:28–34)
- (6) About the Identity of David’s Son (12:35–37)
- (7) About the Evils of Scribism (12:38–40)
5. The Widow’s Gift (12:41–44)
6. The Eschatological Discourse (13:1–37)
  - (1) The Destruction of the Temple (13:1–4)
  - (2) False Signs of the End of the Age (13:5–13)
  - (3) True Signs of the End of the Age (13:14–23)
  - (4) The Return of the Son of Man and the Gathering of His Elect (13:24–27)
  - (5) The Certainty of the Fact but Uncertainty about the Time of the Return (13:28–37)
7. The Plot to Kill Jesus (14:1–2,10–11)
8. The Anointing at Bethany (14:3–9)
9. The Institution of the Lord’s Supper (14:12–26)
10. The Prediction of Desertion and Denial (14:27–31)
11. The Agony in Gethsemane (14:32–42)
12. The Arrest (14:43–52)
13. The Jewish Trial (14:53,55–65)
14. The Denial of Peter (14:54,66–72)
15. The Roman Trial (15:1–15)
16. The Mockery of the Soldiers (15:16–20)
17. The Crucifixion (15:21–41)
18. The Burial (15:42–47)
- V. Conclusion: The Good News about the Empty Tomb (16:1–8)  
[Appendix: An Ancient Attempt to Supply a More Appropriate Ending for the Gospel (16:9–20)]



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 SECTION OUTLINE
 

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- I. INTRODUCTION: THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS (1:1–13)
1. The Preparation of John (1:1–8)
  2. The Baptism of Jesus (1:9–11)
  3. The Temptation of Jesus (1:12–13)

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 I. INTRODUCTION:  
 THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS (1:1–13)
 

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The introduction presents Jesus, the main character of the following narrative, as an extraordinary person who was proclaimed by a prophet whose mission had been foretold in Scripture, who at the beginning of his own ministry was commended by a voice from heaven, and who withstood the assaults of Satan. The three items in the introduction are linked by references to the Spirit.

The introduction also establishes the two levels on which the narrative is written, that of the readers and/or hearers<sup>1</sup> and that of the characters. From the beginning the readers/hearers know things the characters—specifically the disciples—did not. They know the true identity of Jesus, that he is the Son of God (v. 1). This implies that they were already Christians, as does the emphasis on discipleship. The time line of the characters ends with 16:8, but, as we will see, that of the readers/hearers continues beyond the close of the book.

### 1. The Preparation of John (1:1–8)

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup>It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
 who will prepare your way”—

<sup>3</sup>“a voice of one calling in the desert,  
 ‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
 make straight paths for him.’”

<sup>4</sup>And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>And this was his message:

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<sup>1</sup>That most of the recipients were illiterate is highly probable. Therefore Mark was written more to be heard than read.

**“After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup>I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

1:1 “The gospel about Jesus Christ” well describes the entire work. Mark did not intend it as a title of his book, however, because until about A.D. 150 the word “gospel” was used to refer to the Christian message, not to books that contained one aspect of that message, and because he preceded the expression with the word “beginning.” For Mark the beginning of the good news (the meaning of the Greek word *euangelion* translated “gospel”) about Jesus Christ was the preaching of John,<sup>2</sup> who is alluded to in the quotation in vv. 2–3 and explicitly referred to in vv. 4–8 (cf. Acts 1:22). This could better be seen if the NIV had placed a comma rather than a period at the end of v. 1 and had translated the Greek word meaning *just as* (*kathōs*) at the beginning of v. 2. Mark may also have been thinking of a new beginning comparable to that of Gen 1:1. Of course the Greek words literally meaning *gospel of Jesus Christ* (*euangeliou Iēsou Christou*) could also refer to the message Jesus proclaimed, but there is comparatively little of that in Mark.

The “gospel” is an important subject in Mark. The word *euangelion* appears seven times (also 1:14–15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; and 14:9. Cf. also 16:15) versus only four times in Matthew and none in Luke and John (but Matthew has the cognate verb once and Luke ten times). By his frequent use of the term, Mark emphasized the freshness and even revolutionary character of the message of Jesus. This message offered hope to the neglected and oppressed.

The name “Jesus” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Joshua” (both words have been anglicized), which means *Yahweh* (or simply *God*) *saves*. As a common name in the first century, it was shared by two or three other persons who are mentioned in the New Testament: Barabbas (Matt 27:16–17, NRSV, NEB), Jesus Justus (Col 4:11), and Joshua (Acts 7:45; Heb 4:8, KJV; see explanation above). Josephus referred to about twenty different persons who had the name. Mark used it eighty times without stressing the theological significance of the name.

The Greek word “Christ” is the equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah” (again both are anglicized) and is actually translated “Messiah” in some passages by the NRSV, NEB, REB, and GNB. Both mean *the anointed one*, i.e., a person commissioned by God for a special task. In the Old Testament priests (Exod

<sup>2</sup>An alternative interpretation is that v. 1 should be connected with vv. 14–15 (vv. 2–13 would then be looked upon as having been intercalated between vv. 1, 14–15). Bracketing or intercalation is a frequent Markan literary device (cf. comments on 3:20ff.), but it is doubtful that he would have used it so early in the narrative or so clumsily as to leave vv. 2–13 without a context. Still another possibility is that the “beginning” consisted of Jesus’ baptism and temptation as well as John’s preaching.

29:7, 21), prophets (1 Kgs 19:16), and kings (1 Sam 10:1) were anointed for special tasks. Mark did not describe Jesus as a priest, and he said very little explicitly about him as a prophet (cf. 6:4,15; 8:28); but in 15:2,9,12,18,26,32 he described him as the king of the Jews/Israel. In the first century some Jews looked forward to an anointed king who, they hoped, would restore the kingdom of David and consummate the age. The term “Christ” or “Messiah” was originally a title, but by Mark’s day it was on the way to becoming a proper name (cf. 9:41). The word appears only seven times in Mark (here; 8:29; 9:41; 12:35; 13:21; 14:61; 15:32; also 1:34 as a variant reading), probably reflecting accurately the reluctance of Jesus to employ it or to accept it when used by others because of its nationalistic connotations. The only instance where Jesus used it with reference to himself is 9:41 and there in an oblique way. For Mark and his readers/hearers Jesus was the one above all others who was anointed by God for the greatest task of all times. Evidently at his baptism (1:9–11) Jesus was formally anointed for his special mission.

The words “the Son of God” are omitted by one of the earliest and best Greek manuscripts, two other manuscripts of medium quality, two versions (translations) of medium value, and some nine early Christian writers who quote the verse. The textual evidence, however, heavily favors authenticity, and the omission may have been accidental due to six consecutive words in the Greek text having the same ending. Elsewhere Mark used the title at 3:11 and 5:7 in the confession of evil spirits and in 15:39 in the climactic confession of the centurion. To these ought to be added “Son of the Blessed One” in the question of the high priest in 14:61 and “Son” alone in the very important divine attestations of 1:11; 9:7.

Still further allusions to Jesus as Son occur in 12:6; 13:32. Although the demons confessed Jesus as Son of God in Mark, the disciples never did. Jesus did not explicitly refer to himself as Son, but the idea is implicit in 12:6; 13:32. Although not frequently used, the title comes at crucial points in the narrative and obviously is an important one, perhaps the most important one. That the title appears near the beginning and end of the Gospel, bracketing the entire book so as to emphasize this truth to the readers/hearers, is especially significant. Although used of angels (Job 1:6), the nation Israel (Hos 11:1), and Davidic kings (2 Sam 7:14) in the Old Testament and of rulers, deliverers, and healers in the Greco-Roman world, Mark doubtless used it to refer to the unique relationship of Jesus to the only true God.

The very first sentence therefore evidences that Mark’s Gospel is more than a narrative of events. It is also a theology, primarily a Christology. Although the characters in the story struggle with Jesus’ identity, the readers/hearers know from the beginning that he is the promised Messiah and the very Son of God.

**1:2–3** “Isaiah the prophet” (40:3) supplies only that part of the quotation in v. 3. The part in v. 2 is from Mal 3:1, perhaps with an allusion to

Exod 23:20 as well (the same word means *angel* and *messenger*). As a result many medieval scribes substituted “in the prophets.” This reading is found in the KJV and NKJV, which are based on the medieval Greek text rather than on the earliest and now regarded best manuscripts as is the NIV. Mark and other biblical writers simply did not employ the technical precision of modern research. It was not necessary for their purpose. Furthermore, both quotations are adapted in order to apply them to John. In Isaiah “the Lord” was God, but in Mark’s quotation it is Jesus; Isaiah has “for our God,” but Mark substitutes “for him,” i.e., Jesus. Jesus and the New Testament writers often reinterpreted the Old Testament text in order to apply it to their own situation, in addition to quoting it loosely from memory. Malachi 4:5 probably identifies the “messenger” of Mal 3:1 as Elijah. Mark 9:11–13 almost certainly identifies John as the Elijah-like person who precedes Christ in his suffering. Also John’s preaching of repentance in v. 4 (cf. 1 Kgs 18:37; Mal 4:6) and the description of him in v. 6 (cf. 2 Kgs 1:8) recall Elijah. The significance of the quotation is that both John and Jesus appeared as a result of divine providence. Mark quoted from the Old Testament infrequently, and elsewhere his citations are part of a quotation of one of his characters, usually Jesus.

“Lord” is not a major Christological title in Mark. Jesus is addressed as such only in 7:28, but there the word may mean nothing more than *Sir* (so NRSV, NEB, REB, GNB). Jesus probably alluded to himself as “Lord” in 11:3, although some think this refers to the owner of the colt or that the meaning there is *teacher*, and in 12:36–37, where he quoted and commented on Ps 110:1. The word also appears as a variant reading with fair attestation in 1:40 and 10:51. Mark’s little use of the term probably indicates accurate reporting of the situation during Jesus’ lifetime. Only after his resurrection was Jesus widely acclaimed as Lord. Elsewhere the word refers to God, various pagan gods, the master of slaves, managers, and the emperor. Therefore when Jesus is the referent, the term suggests his deity, dominion, and direction.

**1:4** John is introduced abruptly. Certainly the original readers/hearers already knew something about him. The locale of his ministry was the “desert,” more specifically the uninhabited, barren gorge of “the Jordan River” (v. 5). The “desert” is a major theme in the introduction (vv. 3,4,12,13). In the Bible it is more than a geographical place; it is the place where God meets, reveals himself to, tests, and saves his people. The most distinct aspect of John’s ministry was his baptism or immersion of those who had repented of their sins, confessed them (v. 5), and as a result received forgiveness. Obviously the baptism symbolized the cleansing from sin that repentance effects. Evidently it was a new rite. Unlike the self-baptism of Jewish proselytes, it was administered to Jews by another person. Unlike the washings of the Essenes at Qumran, it was not self-administered, repeated, or confined to those who were already pious.

Baptism is not a major subject in Mark. Outside of the introduction, allusions to the baptism of John occur in 6:14,24,25; 8:28 (these allusions are clearer in Greek, where John is called “the Baptizer”), and a clear reference is in 11:30. The baptism of Jesus is briefly described in 1:9–10. Baptism symbolizes being overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit in v. 8 and by suffering and death in 10:38–39. But nothing corresponds to Matt 28:19 or John 4:1–2. Nor did Mark indicate how or when the prediction of v. 8 was fulfilled, though Mark’s readers would recognize Jesus as the more powerful, coming one who baptizes with the Spirit.

John’s message, like that of the prophets, consisted first of a call to repentance. The Greek word translated “repentance” literally means *change of mind*, but its New Testament meaning has been greatly influenced by that of several Old Testament words so that it refers to returning to God and changing one’s whole course of life. The word translated “forgiveness” means *sending away* or *remission*.

**1:5–6** The first sentence in v. 5 admittedly exaggerates, but it does accurately reflect the popularity of John. (No early Christian would have invented that.) As already suggested, v. 6 connects John with the prophets in general and Elijah in particular (cf. 2 Kgs 1:8). Mark wanted to suggest as early as possible that discipleship involves withdrawal from the world and sacrifice.

**1:7–8** John’s message concerned not only a way of life and a rite symbolizing that way of life but a person. The concepts of a coming one and a powerful one have messianic implications. The concept of baptism “with the Holy Spirit” (v. 8) fulfills Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 11:19; 36:26–27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–29. Mark never described Jesus as baptizing with the Spirit and elsewhere said comparatively little about the Spirit. Outside of the introduction, where the Spirit is mentioned three times, the only references are 3:29 (“blasphemes against the Holy Spirit”); 12:36 (“David . . . by the Holy Spirit declared”); and 13:11 (“it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit”). Presumably the reader is left to understand that the baptism with the Spirit takes place after the close of the narrative. At various places Mark’s account points beyond itself by leaving promises unfulfilled. Mark did not make a practice of reading into the life of Jesus things that took place or became prominent later.

## 2. The Baptism of Jesus (1:9–11)

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

Mark said nothing about Jesus’ ancestors, his family (but note 3:31–35; 6:3), or his childhood and youth. The Gospel is concerned only with Jesus’ ministry and death.

The most striking aspects of Mark's account of the baptism are its brevity and lack of apology. Although classified as a legend by R. Bultmann and a myth by M. Dibelius, the historicity of this account cannot be reasonably doubted. So potentially embarrassing is the idea that the Christian Lord was baptized by a Jewish prophet in a rite that for others symbolized repentance for their sins that the early church would never have invented the story. Matthew (3:15) felt the necessity of making some explanation, and the second-century Gospel of the Nazarenes went even further by having Jesus say, "In what way have I sinned so that I should go and be baptized by him, unless what I have said is [the result of] ignorance?"<sup>3</sup> Mark evidently saw no problem, and this probably reflects the early date of his Gospel. Mark's primary purpose in recording the baptism appears to have been to show divine approval of Jesus. He said nothing about what the experience meant to Jesus. Was it the beginning of his messianic consciousness? Was it the occasion of his call? Most likely it signaled the beginning of his ministry. Nor did Mark indicate what the event meant to John. Did it confirm to him that Jesus was the more powerful one of v. 7?

**1:9** "At that time" (cf. the similar expressions in 8:1; 13:17,24) is one of Mark's somewhat vague indications of chronology. Obviously it refers to the time when John was baptizing. "Nazareth" was such an obscure village it is not mentioned in the Old Testament, Josephus, or rabbinic literature. Matthew 2:23; Luke 2:39-40; 4:16 indicate it was Jesus' hometown. Mark probably implies that. The "Jordan" is one of the most overrated rivers in the world. Only a hundred and five air miles separate the river's sources in northern Palestine from where it empties into the Dead Sea. Even with its meandering between Lake Galilee and the Dead Sea, it is only a little over two hundred miles long. Only in flood stage is it more than a hundred feet wide or ten feet deep, and it can be forded easily in numerous places. None of the Gospels gives any indication where along the Jordan the baptism took place. The traditional site is near the southern terminus.

**1:10** The NIV does not translate the word meaning *immediately* at the beginning of v. 10. Mark used this characteristic term forty-two times to heighten dramatic tension. Its omission in the NIV exemplifies a problem with "dynamic equivalence" translations where producing good English style is more important than word-for-word reproduction of the original.<sup>4</sup> Inasmuch as the word "baptize" means *to immerse*, the expression "coming up out of the water" almost certainly refers to *from beneath the water* rather than *upon the*

<sup>3</sup>As quoted by Jerome, *Against Pelagius* 3.2.

<sup>4</sup>A very literal translation (e.g., NASB) does not result in appealing English. Both careful reproduction of the original and idiomatic English are important, and a good translation keeps a fine balance between the two. In the present commentator's opinion the RSV does the best job of this.

*bank*. In the latter part of v. 10 and in v. 11 Mark's theological concern becomes apparent. First, by implying that Jesus alone saw and heard the supernatural manifestations, Mark provided the first intimation of his secrecy motif. The true identity of Jesus is concealed from the characters of the story, but not from the readers/hearers. Second, by using the expression "heaven being torn open," he suggested divine intervention and new revelation after a period of silence (cf. Isa 64:1). The expression seems to imply the advent of a new age in which things will be quite different from the old. The same word with the same implication is used again in 15:38 in connection with the tearing of the temple curtain. The dramatic opening of heaven may suggest further that God is accessible to an extent not previously known. The descent of the Spirit is suggested by Isa 61:1, but the source of the comparison of the Spirit to a dove is uncertain because the Old Testament never, and rabbinic literature but rarely, makes the association. Perhaps the source is meditation upon Gen 1:2.

**1:11** Here the word "heaven" exemplifies the Jewish practice of using substitutes for the divine name. God himself spoke!<sup>5</sup> The first part of the heavenly pronouncement reflects Ps 2:7, an enthronement psalm used for the coronation of kings of Israel. There may also be an allusion to the beloved son Isaac, who was intended for a sacrificial death (Gen 22:2). By identifying Jesus as God's Son, Mark recognized him as the true King of the new people of God, the new Israel, which was later called the church. The second part alludes to Isa 42:1, which is part of the first of the Servant Songs, the most famous of which is 52:13–53:12. Therefore Mark also recognized Jesus as the true Servant of the Lord.

Mark's treatment of the baptism, though very brief, is important from a theological standpoint. The Gospel opens with a statement that Jesus is the Son of God. At the baptism God himself affirmed that Jesus is his Son. The purpose of both passages—and especially the second—is to inspire the readers/hearers to acknowledge Jesus as Son of God and to love and take pleasure in him.

### 3. The Temptation of Jesus (1:12–13)

<sup>12</sup>At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, <sup>13</sup>and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Conflict between Jesus and various representatives of evil (Satan, the demons, nature, the Jewish leaders, and even the disciples) is a prominent

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<sup>5</sup>Some, however, have claimed that it was the *Bath Qol*, the "daughter of the voice," a mere echo of the divine voice during the period after prophecy had ceased. With the appearance of John and Jesus, however, prophecy revived.

feature of Mark. Such conflict inevitably results from an attempt to establish the kingdom of God. Again one is astounded by Mark's brevity. Did Mark intend to contrast the testing of Jesus and that of Adam or of Israel in the desert? No confident answers can be given.

**1:12** This time (contrast v. 10) the NIV translates the word meaning "at once" or "immediately" (*euthys*). Mark used the verb *ekballō* a total of seventeen times, most often about exorcisms so that something stronger than "sent . . . out" is needed, something like "drove . . . out" (RSV, NRSV, REB) or "impelled" (NASB). The idea is that of divine necessity, not that Jesus was reluctant to go. The "desert" was the place of John's preaching (vv. 3–4); it was also the place of Jesus' temptation.

**1:13** The "forty days" recalls Moses on the mountain (Exod 24:18; 34:28), Elijah's journey to the sacred mountain (1 Kgs 19:8), Jesus' instruction of his disciples (Acts 1:3), and perhaps even Israel's forty years in the wilderness (especially Deut 8:2). The word translated "tempted" also means *tested*, and that is probably the primary idea here. "Satan" is the anglicized form of the Greek transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning *adversary*. Only Mark indicates that Jesus was "with the wild animals." Commentators divide over whether the animals were favorably disposed toward him and, therefore, symbolize the tranquility of the messianic kingdom after the defeat of Satan or whether they were hostile toward him and symbolize the forces of evil. Mark was concerned with the test itself, not its result. The intertestamental Jewish concept of the desert as the haunt of demons further supports the latter view. Mark did not indicate whether the angels "attended" or "ministered to" (RSV) Jesus during or after the temptation or whether they helped him resist, fed him, or witnessed what he did. Nor did Mark state that Jesus was victorious, perhaps because he looked upon Jesus' entire life as a continuing struggle with Satan. Perhaps the episode was recorded partly to encourage the original readers/hearers in their trials and temptations.

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 SECTION OUTLINE
 

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## II. THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS' PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD (1:14–8:21)

1. Introduction (1:14–15)
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12. The Rejection at Nazareth (6:1–6a)
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19. The Exorcising of a Demon from the Daughter of a Syrophenician Woman (7:24–30)
20. The Healing of the Deaf Man with a Speech Impediment (7:31–37)
21. The Feeding of the Four Thousand (8:1–10)
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## — II. THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS' PROCLAMATION — OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD (1:14–8:21)

The primary concern of the first major division in Mark is Jesus' proclamation and demonstration of the nearness of the kingdom of God. The proclamation was by preaching and teaching; the demonstration, by miracles. These further establish the identity and authority of Jesus. The first division is set in Galilee and the surrounding regions. Mark pictured Jesus as constantly moving from place to place, something that emphasizes the urgency of this message about the kingdom of God. Some of the travel was in Gentile territory, foreshadowing the Gentile mission that took place after the events of the narrative but before its writing.

### 1. Introduction (1:14–15)

<sup>14</sup>After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup>“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

This statement, by far the most important summary statement in the book, introduces and summarizes the first division and perhaps the entire book.

**1:14** Mark placed the beginning of Jesus' ministry after the imprisonment of John, although he did not describe John's imprisonment and death until 6:14–29. Actually the word Mark used (*paradidōmi*) means *to hand over* and is used to refer to the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in 9:31; 10:33; 14:21,41. Its use with reference to John suggests that his death foreshadowed that of Jesus.

The use of the passive voice implies that what was done was in accordance with God's purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Mark located the major portion of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, the northern part of Palestine, which had a larger Gentile element than did Judea. The word translated "went" could better be translated "came" (RSV, NRSV, NASB, NEB) because it identifies Jesus as the *coming one* of v. 7. The "good news [*euangelion*, the same word translated "gospel" in v. 1] of God" is a shorthand way of indicating the kingdom of God (v. 15). Indeed most later manuscripts add the words "of the kingdom" (KJV, NKJV)—a correct interpretation, but not the original text. God is the source of the gospel.

**1:15** The word translated "time" (*kairos*) means a *favorable, opportune, or significant time* as opposed to mere *chronology*. Here Mark referred to the time appointed by God for the fulfillment of his promises. The period of preparation, that of ancient Israel and John, was complete. The divinely appointed time had come. The prophecies were being fulfilled in Jesus.

The expression "kingdom of God" appears fourteen times in Mark (also 4:11, 26,30; 9:1,47; 10:14,15,23,24,25; 12:34; 14:25; 15:43). According to the Synoptic Gospels, it was the major subject of Jesus' message. In first-century Judaism it described a future, earthly kingdom in which God through Israel would rule over the nations. With the possible exceptions of 14:25 and 15:43, however, in Mark it refers to a present, spiritual kingdom rather than a future, earthly one. Therefore the expression refers to the kingly rule, the reign, the dominion, the sovereignty of God in the hearts of people. "Realm" in the sense of sphere of influence might be a better translation, but it too is subject to misunderstanding. "Reign" probably is the best translation.

Jesus claimed that the kingdom, which to most Jews seemed far in the future, had drawn near with his appearance. On linguistic grounds either "is near" or "is at hand" (RSV, NASB) or "has come near" (NRSV) is a better translation than "has come" (cf. use in 14:42). One of the former alternatives is preferable on theological grounds as well. The reign of God began to take place in the life and ministry of Jesus, but it was not fully manifested then and will not be until Jesus returns. Therefore a present, mystical kingdom does not rule out the possibility of a future, earthly one. Mark, however, says little about that. Jesus, like John (cf. v. 4), preached repentance, but the distinctive element in his message was faith or commitment or trust. The necessity of faith is a major subject in Mark, underscoring the theological motivation of the writing. Note especially the commands to believe in 1:15; 5:36; 11:22,24 and the rebuke of unbelief in 4:40; 6:6; 9:19. Note also how faith is commended in 2:5; 5:34; 9:23; 10:52; 11:23.

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<sup>1</sup>This use is called the "divine passive." It probably had its origin in the reluctance of the Jews to use the sacred name *Yahweh*. It was one of many substitutes for the divine name.

## 2. The Calling of the First Disciples (1:16–20)

<sup>16</sup>As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” <sup>18</sup>At once they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>19</sup>When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup>Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

By beginning Jesus’ ministry with this account, Mark showed that the disciples were qualified to be witnesses of his entire ministry. He showed the importance of discipleship. He showed the way in which all should respond to Jesus’ summons: promptly and completely. He showed the inseparable relationship of discipleship and Christology. And he showed that Jesus takes the initiative in making disciples: they do not seek him, but he seeks them.

**1:16** “Lake Galilee” (GNB) is a much more accurate description of the thirteen-by-eight-mile body of water than the traditional “Sea of Galilee.” In fact, the same word near the end of the verse is translated “lake” in the NIV. Mark referred to the first of the two persons seen by Jesus as Simon six times, Peter eighteen times, and Simon Peter once. Mark contains more references to Peter in proportion to length than any other Gospel, perhaps showing a special interest in him, but not proving Peter was a source of information. Mark mentioned Andrew elsewhere only in 1:29; 3:18; 13:3.

**1:17** The idea of following Jesus is frequent in Mark and denotes discipleship. Actually Mark used several different Greek words alone or in combination that are difficult to distinguish in translation. The idea is that of responding to a summons, attachment to a person, acceptance of authority, and imitation of example. The implication of continuation and pursuing a goal also is included. According to Acts, Christianity later came to be known as “the Way.” The purpose of the summons was to make the two fishermen “fishers of men.” The idea of God calling persons to fish for people is found in the Old Testament, most clearly in Jer 16:16; but there the purpose was to bring people to judgment. Here it was to escape judgment. Note that Mark pictured Jesus as an example of what he required of others.

**1:18** Mark said nothing about any previous encounter; and even if he had known of one, he might not have recorded it. He showed the ideal response to the command of Jesus. It should be immediate. Here some intimation of the cost of discipleship is shown, for Simon and Andrew evidently left a lucrative business and perhaps also their families to follow Jesus (cf. 1:29).

**1:19** James and John are mentioned together nine times in Mark with James’s name appearing twice in two of the passages. John alone is mentioned in 9:38. They also were “called,” another term closely related to discipleship.

Mark used it only once with reference to discipleship (2:17).

**1:20** If the action of Simon and Andrew illustrates prompt response, that of James and John illustrates complete response. Following Jesus is costly and sometimes even involves severing family ties.

The disciples do not again appear in so favorable a light as they do here. The treatment here, however, is sufficient to refute the claim that Mark attacked his opponents by portraying the disciples as their representatives. A much more likely interpretation views his sometimes negative treatment of the disciples as for pastoral rather than polemical purposes, i.e., to show that even the original disciples had faults and yet were used by Jesus. The same is true of later disciples.

### 3. A Day of Ministry in Capernaum (1:21–39)

This section introduces the reader/hearer to some of the major elements of Jesus' ministry: preaching, teaching, exorcising demons, healing the sick, prayer, and instructing the disciples.

#### (1) *Teaching in the Synagogue and Exorcising an Evil Spirit (1:21–28)*

<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup>The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. <sup>23</sup>Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup>“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

<sup>25</sup>“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” <sup>26</sup>The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

<sup>27</sup>The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup>News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

This typical exorcism story consists of an encounter with a demon (v. 23), the demon's defense (v. 24), the exorcism itself (vv. 25–26), and the effect on the observers (vv. 27–28).

**1:21** There must be a period of time between vv. 20 and 21 because what is in vv. 16–20 could not have taken place on a Sabbath. Although not mentioned in the Old Testament, Capernaum, meaning *village of Nahum* or *village of consolation*, was an important town on the northwest shore of Lake Galilee. Capernaum was on the main road between Egypt and Mesopotamia, in the tetrarchy (*rule of a fourth part* or any petty kingdom) of Herod Antipas and near the border of the tetrarchy of Philip, and the site of a toll station. Jesus seems to have made Capernaum his headquarters during much of his Galilean ministry. Today some impressive ruins of a second- or third-century synagogue

remain there. This synagogue may have been built on the same site as the one of Jesus' day, which probably was destroyed in the rebellion of A.D. 66–70. The synagogue was a place of informal worship and instruction. It may have originated during the Babylonian exile, but there is no archaeological evidence for synagogues until the third century B.C. and little literary evidence until the first Christian century (though one should see Deut 33:4, LXX; Ps 74:8; and *Pss. Sol.* 10:7).

It was a common practice for visiting teachers to be invited to read the Scripture and/or speak, a custom from which Paul as well as Jesus benefited. That Jesus was invited to speak indicates he had already established a reputation as a teacher and that this was not one of the first events in his ministry. Jesus was recognized as a teacher even by his opponents (cf. 12:19), although there is no evidence that he had received any formal training. Certainly he was not a typical rabbi.

Fifteen times Mark indicated that Jesus taught (also v. 22; 2:13; 4:1–2; 6:2,6,34; 8:31; 9:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:14,35; 14:49), and twelve times he referred to him as a teacher (see references in comments on 4:38). He did not give much of the content of Jesus' teaching. Here Mark gave none.

**1:22** The reason for the astonishment was that Jesus taught on the basis of his own authority and not by citing previous scholars as did the other teachers of that day. Mark used several different Greek words to indicate that Jesus made a profound impression by his teaching or miracles (a different word is used in v. 27 but is translated in the same way by the NIV). The combination of teaching and miracle in one account shows that Jesus was powerful in both word and deed.

The word usually translated “scribes” is found twenty-one times in Mark and is regularly translated “teachers of the law” by the NIV. They were not copyists but scholars and therefore experts in the interpretation of the law. Their interpretations, which in the time of Jesus existed only in oral form and are therefore called the oral tradition (cf. 7:5–13), constituted a second law that came to be as important as the written, or Mosaic, law. Ezra was the first such scribe mentioned in Scripture (Ezra 7:6,11,12,21).

**1:23** Mark used the terms “evil [literally “unclean”] spirit” and “demon” to refer to the same entity. Demons were evil in themselves, and they made the persons they affected both ceremonially and morally unclean. As difficult as the concept of the demonic is for most people today, it cannot be satisfactorily treated as a primitive explanation for various kinds of physical and psychological illness. A better explanation is that there is much less evidence of the demonic today because Jesus won a decisive, although not yet total, victory over it. The Greek can be translated “he cried out” or “it cried out.” Which one is chosen matters little because the man and the evil spirit had become identified.

**1:24** The questions sought to put Jesus on the defensive and force him to justify his action (cf. Judg 11:12; 2 Sam 16:10; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13; 2 Chr 35:21). The second sentence, however, could be an assertion rather than a question: “You have come to destroy us!” The demon tried unsuccessfully to oppose Jesus by employing his name. Note how the demon spoke through the man, sometimes for himself and sometimes for demons in general. “Holy One of God” probably is a messianic title, although there is very little attestation for that. In the Old Testament God is usually the Holy One. Here the title implies that Jesus has a special relationship with God. In v. 24 the demon acknowledged the true identity of Jesus (cf. v. 34)—something the disciples were slow to do. In fact, only at the crucifixion did a human being confess Jesus as the Son of God, and he was not one of the disciples (15:39).

**1:25–26** Although silencing the demon was common in exorcisms, commands of silence are so prominent in Mark that v. 25 should be looked upon as the first intimation of the so-called “messianic secret.” Where demons are involved, an adequate explanation might be that even true testimony from satanic beings could only discredit Jesus in the eyes of most.<sup>2</sup> Another explanation must be sought, however, where his disciples (8:30; 9:9) and those who had been healed or who had been witnesses of healings (1:44; 5:43; 7:36; and a variant reading at 8:26) were silenced. Jesus likely did not want to be known primarily as a wonder-worker or at all as a political or military deliverer because such a reputation would compromise his main mission of redemption (cf. 10:45). Even so the problem remains of why, if he did not want to be widely known for his miracles, he kept performing them in public and why the silence kept being violated (1:45; 7:24,36). In 5:19 Jesus even commanded a person to go home and tell how his demons had been expelled. A possible answer is that in the Bible generally and in Mark’s presentation of Jesus specifically there is tension between the known and the unknown, between the revealed and the veiled. Until the cross and resurrection the true nature of Jesus could not be fully known.

**1:27–28** As is typical of miracle stories, the effect on the witnesses is described. Again Mark stressed the authority of Jesus, a major reason for recording the event. Verses 16–20 emphasize the authority of Jesus’ words; vv. 21–28, the authority of his deeds. Whether “with authority” goes with the preceding “new teaching” as in the NIV, NRSV, and NASB or with the following “He even gives orders” (cf. RSV, GNB) is uncertain.

Miracles obviously play an important role in this Gospel. Mark recorded seventeen individual miracles of Jesus and summarized others. In doing so he devoted more space in proportion to total length than any other Gospel. Nevertheless he did not attempt to employ them as compelling proof of the

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Paul’s rejection of the testimony of the demon-possessed girl (Acts 16:16–18).

deity or authority of Jesus. They become “proof” only when accompanied by faith. They are signs of the advent of the kingdom of God. Especially do the exorcisms denote the breaking down of the reign of Satan and the establishing of the reign of God.

**(2) *The Healing of Simon’s Mother-in-Law (1:29–31)***

**<sup>29</sup>As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup>Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup>So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.**

**1:29–31** Here Mark set forth the shortest miracle story in the Gospels. As do most miracle stories, it indicates the setting, the nature of the disease, the request for healing, the healing itself, and the effect on the person healed; but it does not describe the symptoms, give any words of the healer, or describe the effect on the witnesses. Many traditional commentators think the story is a reminiscence of Peter. First Corinthians 9:5 also indicates that Peter (i.e., Cephas) was married and that he took his wife with him at church expense on his missionary journeys. Clement of Alexandria claimed that Peter’s wife preceded him in martyrdom.<sup>3</sup> By indicating that Peter was married, Mark seems to have implied again that discipleship sometimes involves leaving one’s family for a while at least. The account, however, primarily illustrates again the power and authority of Jesus. Verse 31 suggests the quickness and completeness of the cure. The mother-in-law is presented simply as a model of discipleship, which requires lowly service from all, male and female. By including accounts of the healing of women as well as men, Mark implied that Jesus was concerned about all people, including those who had a lowly place in society. What the NIV translates “helped . . . up” really means *raised* and often refers to the resurrection both of Jesus and believers. The early church may have seen in the story a foreshadowing of Jesus’ power to raise from the dead at the last day.

**(3) *The Healing of the Crowds at Sunset (1:32–34)***

**<sup>32</sup>That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. <sup>33</sup>The whole town gathered at the door, <sup>34</sup>and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.**

**1:32–34** This Markan summary indicates that there were many other healings and exorcisms that are not described in detail. Both v. 32 and v. 34 distinguish between ordinary illnesses and demon possession—a further indi-

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<sup>3</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.11.63, cited also in Eusebius, *Church History* 3.30. *Stromata* 3.6.52 merely indicates that Peter had a family.

cation that primitive, unscientific understanding is not a sufficient explanation of the latter.

Verse 32 accurately reflects that the Sabbath ended at sundown and that after that time it would have been lawful for Jews to walk any distance and to carry sick persons. The imperfect in v. 32 could be translated “kept on bringing.” No distinction should be made between the “all” of v. 32 and the “many” of v. 34. The latter is a Semitism that means “all who were many.” “The whole town” of v. 33 is a typical Markan hyperbole (cf. v. 5). The command to be silent is set forth again in v. 34 even more clearly than in v. 25.

#### (4) *The Departure from Capernaum and a Tour of Galilee (1:35–39)*

<sup>35</sup>Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. <sup>36</sup>Simon and his companions went to look for him, <sup>37</sup>and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

<sup>38</sup>Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” <sup>39</sup>So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Obviously this account had no independent existence but depends on the three previous items. The four probably circulated as a unit before Mark’s time. Here Mark established the autonomy of Jesus, who would not be controlled by the crowds or disciples.

**1:35** The word translated “solitary place” (*erēmos*) is the same that is translated “desert” in 1:3,4,12,13 and perhaps suggests the same kind of spiritual testing described in the last two. There was no desert near Capernaum, and obviously Jesus wanted to find a secluded place apart from the crowds and even the disciples. The imperfect tense suggests prolonged prayer. In only two other places did Mark indicate that Jesus prayed, in 6:46 before walking on the water and in 14:32–42 in Gethsemane. All three were times of crisis when Jesus was tempted to take an easy way rather than that of suffering and death.

**1:36** Mark perhaps referred to “Simon and his companions” (Andrew, James, and John? Cf. vv. 16–20) rather than the disciples because they did not act as disciples should (though Mark did not use the term disciple at all until 2:15). The verb translated “went to look for” usually means *to pursue with hostile intent*. Of course it reflects Mark’s point of view, not that of the disciples.

**1:37** Here Mark indicated the error of the disciples. They wanted Jesus to take advantage of his growing popularity and perform more miracles. However, Jesus’ primary mission was not to be a miracle-worker but a redeemer. The disciples failed to understand that the popularity itself made Jesus want to withdraw. The people of Capernaum apparently had no interest in Jesus beyond his miracles or any interest in coming under the reign of God. The verb Mark chose near the end of v. 37 (*zētousin*) is filled with

irony. Whatever Aramaic verb the disciples used, they meant it in a good sense. Everywhere else in Mark, however, the Greek verb, which is not the same as in v. 36, translated “looking for” means *to seek with evil or inappropriate intention*. Mark recognized that the acclaim of the crowd was not good. Verse 37 is the first instance in Mark where the disciples failed to understand the mission of Jesus.

**1:38** Jesus’ answer contains an ambiguity. The last statement could be translated literally, “For this [purpose] I have come out.” The question is whether the reference is to leaving Capernaum, going into all of Galilee, or having come from God. Luke’s parallel (4:43) takes the third possibility, and Mark probably meant the same thing (cf. Mark 1:24).

**1:39** This Markan summary characterizes Jesus’ ministry as one of synagogue preaching and exorcisms. “Their synagogues” possibly reflects the separation of the church and synagogue in the time of Mark, or it may have been a reference to Galilean synagogues.

#### 4. The Cleansing of a Leper (1:40–45)

<sup>40</sup>A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

<sup>41</sup>Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” <sup>42</sup>Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

<sup>43</sup>Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: <sup>44</sup>“See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” <sup>45</sup>Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

The pericope on the cleansing of the leper combines a miracle and a pronouncement story (see vv. 43–44).<sup>4</sup> No reference is made to time and place, and it could have happened anytime during Jesus’ ministry. Mark probably included it here to provide a climax to the preceding healing narratives and an appropriate transition to the five controversies that follow—appropriate in that it raises the question of the validity of the law.

**1:40** Widespread agreement exists among commentators that in the Bible “leprosy” is a general term covering various chronic skin diseases and is not limited to Hansen’s disease as is the contemporary use of the word (“a man suffering from a dreaded skin disease,” GNB). Without treatment in a hot climate many skin diseases were vicious. Not only was the disease painful and

<sup>4</sup>A pronouncement story (V. Taylor’s term) is a brief narrative the primary purpose of which is to provide a context for an important pronouncement of Jesus. M. Dibelius preferred the term “paradigm” and R. Bultmann “apothegm.”

debilitating but it rendered the victims religiously and socially unclean. They were required to live outside of cities and towns, have no contact with anyone, and declare themselves unclean when anyone approached. The law regarding leprosy is found in Lev 13–14. The Bible never speaks of healing leprosy, always of cleansing it. Part of the reason may be the loathsome nature of the disease, but a more likely explanation is that leprosy is a symbol of sin that must be cleansed. The episode implies that Jesus can forgive sin and therefore prepares for 2:1–12.

The account further implies that, contrary to the law, the man approached very near to Jesus. By the statement “If you are willing,” Mark probably did not intend to suggest any doubt on the leper’s part. What probably is the best Greek manuscript of Mark, several other manuscripts of lesser value, and several ancient translations omit the words translated “on his knees,” but this omission probably is a harmonization with Matt 8:2.

**1:41–42** This verse contains a more important textual problem. The vast majority of textual witnesses, including those usually considered the most reliable, have a word meaning *filled with compassion*. Only one Greek manuscript, four Old Latin manuscripts, and one early Christian writer—all of medium value—have a word meaning *having become angry* (“In warm indignation,” NEB; “Jesus was moved to anger,” REB). Why scribes would have changed the latter to the former is easy to see, but that they would have changed the former to the latter is inconceivable. Despite the massive external attestation for “filled with compassion,” internal considerations are so strong that “having become angry” probably is the original. Furthermore, several other references in Mark refer to Jesus being angry, although they use different words (see 3:5; 10:14). Whether Jesus was “filled with compassion” or “moved to anger,” he displayed human emotion. Mark had no reservations about depicting the humanity of Jesus.

The question then arises, About what or with whom was Jesus angry? Was he angry with the leper? Most interpreters insist that such a thing would be out of character for Jesus, and certainly the idea that Jesus was angry with the leper for interrupting him or approaching him contrary to the law may be set aside. Most who adopt the variant reading take the position that Jesus was angry with the strangely unnamed religious authorities for being unable or unwilling to help the man or that Jesus was angry with the entire evil order in which suffering has such a prominent part. Before a decision can be made about the object of Jesus’ wrath, the stern verbs of v. 43 need to be considered. Jesus was perhaps angered that the leper doubted that the God active in Jesus’ ministry desired his cleansing (cf. Jesus’ reaction to doubt in 9:22–23).

Before leaving v. 41 we should observe that even if “with compassion” is not the original reading, the compassion of Jesus comes out clearly in the fact that he touched the leper. Such a thing was unheard of and made Jesus cere-

monially unclean. Ritual uncleanness, however, was of no consequence to Jesus in comparison with human need. At many points he is depicted as being indifferent to ritualistic prescriptions. To the Jewish leaders, however, such an attitude was a threat to the established order and could not be condoned.

**1:43** The NIV and most translations obscure the problems in this verse. What the NIV translates “with a strong warning” (*embrimēsamenos*) is a verb that in classical Greek sometimes meant *to snort*. Etymologically it means *to have strong feeling within*. Among other possible translations are “to be angry,” “to scold,” and “to warn.” The verb translated “sent . . . away” usually means *to cast out* and is often used with reference to expelling demons (vv. 34, 39). Unless Mark used the verbs in this verse with milder-than-usual meanings, it appears that Jesus was angry with the man and that he cast him out (of a house or synagogue?). It is highly probable therefore that v. 41 also indicates that Jesus was angry with the leper. If anyone except Jesus had been involved, few would ever have suggested any other interpretation. Why then was Jesus so angry with the man that he threw him out? Jesus may well have realized that the man would disobey his command to be silent and that this would greatly hinder his ministry. Furthermore Jesus—and Mark—wanted to make very plain that his primary ministry was not healing but redemption. This interpretation, as difficult as it may seem, is quite in keeping with the candor Mark displayed elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

**1:44** Here we find another example of the “messianic secret.” In the last part of v. 44 Jesus is pictured as upholding the law, an appropriate balance to the subsequent conflict stories where he appears to have violated it. The early church may have found this account useful in disputes with Jews to show that Jesus did not indiscriminately violate the law. Whether the man had to go to Jerusalem is uncertain. Presumably a priest anywhere could declare him cleansed, but sacrifices could be made only in the temple.

Still another problem is the meaning of the last item in the verse. The word “them” probably refers to the priests, even though the word “priest” earlier in the verse is singular. Alternatively, it could refer to the people generally; but in this case there is no antecedent for the pronoun. In Greek the testimony can be either “to them” or “against them.” If the former, evidence of the healing is presented; but this is so obvious that it need not be stated. If the latter, the priests who do not recognize the power of God at work in Jesus produce evidence against their worthiness to hold the office. In 6:11 the same three words certainly mean *against them*, and that is probably the idea here.

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<sup>5</sup>Another interpretation is that the account has become jumbled in the course of transmission either before it came to Mark or after it left him, that originally Jesus was angry with a demon for oppressing the man and that he cast it out. Aside from the absence of any reference to a demon in the existing text, leprosy is not elsewhere ascribed to demons.

**1:45** This verse contains the first instance of disobedience to the command to be silent, unless the word “he” refers to Jesus. The word “preach” (*kēryssō*, translated “talk freely” by the NIV) usually refers to the proclamation of the gospel, and the word “word” (*logos*, translated “news” by the NIV) often refers to the word of God; but they sometimes have a more general meaning as the NIV properly understands. The context requires that the reference be to the leper. Why would Jesus preach widely if the result were that he could no longer enter a city? No confident answer can be given. In any event the secret cannot be kept. So overpowering was Jesus that not even his own command could hide him!

### 5. Conflicts with the Scribes and Pharisees (2:1–3:6)

In this section Mark, or possibly some collector of tradition before Mark, brought together five conflict stories that introduce various opponents of Jesus and the early church. The arrangement is almost certainly topical rather than chronological. The encounters could have happened at any time during Jesus’ ministry. Each contains an important pronouncement by Jesus (2:10,17,19,28; 3:4). Mark, first, prepared for his passion narrative by showing how the religious authorities opposed Jesus throughout his ministry (note especially 3:6) and, second, preserved material that was valuable in polemics with Jews and others in his own day. Christians of all ages have had opponents and have had to defend their beliefs. This passage has given and continues to give some direction in doing so.

#### (1) *Over the Forgiveness of a Paralytic (2:1–12)*

<sup>1</sup>A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. <sup>2</sup>So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. <sup>3</sup>Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. <sup>4</sup>Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

<sup>6</sup>Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, <sup>7</sup>“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

<sup>8</sup>Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’ <sup>10</sup>But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .” He said to the paralytic, <sup>11</sup>“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” <sup>12</sup>He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”