

QUESTION MARK

Understanding the Gospel of Mark

Douglas Moo

Introduction

The Gospel of Mark is a text read by academics, scholars, Christian people, and the person on the street! It is a text that raises many important questions, both scholarly and theological. This booklet aims to act as an introduction to these issues, explaining what they are, and perhaps more importantly, what the gospel is about. This work is aimed at theological students, but hopefully many will profit from it. The main body of the work was written by Douglas Moo, and is taken from Carson, Moo and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Leicester/Grand Rapids: Apollos/Zondervan, 1992) with the kind permission of the author and the publishers. That book is an excellent introduction to the whole of the New Testament. We hope this booklet helps and encourages you to read Mark, and may perhaps lead you on to read the rest of the Bible.

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MARK

Contents

Mark's story of Jesus' ministry is action oriented. Recounting little extended teaching of Jesus, Mark shifts scenes rapidly, 'immediately', is almost a standard linking word in Mark). Jesus is constantly on the move, healing, exorcising demons, confronting opponents, and instructing the disciples. This fast-paced narrative is punctuated by six transitional paragraphs or statements, which divide Mark's account into seven basic sections.

Preliminaries to the ministry (1:1-13). While it could be the title of the entire gospel, Mark 1:1 is probably the heading for 1:1-13, the preliminaries to the ministry: the 'beginning' (*arche*) of the 'good news' about Jesus Christ consists in the ministry of John the Baptist, the eschatological forerunner (1:2-8), Jesus' baptism by John (1:9-11), and Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness (1:12-13).¹

First part of the Galilean ministry (1:16-3:6). The important summary in 1:14-15 Jesus' entrance into Galilee, proclaiming the good news that the time of fulfilment had come and that the kingdom was near is the first of the six transitional sections. It introduces Jesus' ministry in Galilee (1:16-8:26) and, more immediately, the opening events in that period of ministry (1:16-3:6). After Jesus' call of four disciples (1:16-20), Mark gives us a glimpse of a typical day in Jesus' ministry, including teaching in the synagogue, exorcisms, and healings (1:21-34). The extraordinary nature of these events attracts great crowds of people, but Jesus insists on moving from Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee (where these events took place), to other towns in Galilee (1:35-39). After another healing story (1:40-45), Mark narrates five events that focus on Jesus' controversy with Jewish leaders: controversies over his claim to be able to forgive sins (2: 1-12), over his fellowship with 'tax collectors and "sinners"' (2:13-17), over his disciples' failure to fast regularly (2:18-22), and

¹ For this view of Mark 1:1, along with nine others, see C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 34-35.

over the Sabbath (2:23–28 and 3:1–6). The section climaxes with the plot of the Herodians to take Jesus' life.

Second part of the Galilean ministry (3:13–5:43). Mark's second transitional passage focuses on Jesus' immense popularity and emphasises Jesus' ministry of healing and exorcism (3:7–12). It introduces the third major section of the gospel, in which, Jesus continues the Galilean ministry. Mark here focuses especially on the kingdom (3:13–5:43). Like the second section, this one also begins with a narrative about the disciples – in this case, Jesus' appointment of twelve of them to be 'apostles' (3:13–19). There follow further stories about the growing opposition to Jesus on the part of both Jesus' family (3:20–21, 31–34) and 'the teachers of the law' (3:22–30). Jesus uses parables to explain this opposition as part of 'the mystery of the kingdom of God' (4:1–34). The section comes to a climax with four miracles, each of them representing a type of Jesus' miracles: the calming of the storm (a nature miracle, 4:35–41); the casting out of a 'legion' of demons from a man in the region of the Gerasenes (an exorcism, 5:1–20); the healing of a woman with a flow of blood (a healing, 5: 25–34); and the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead (a resurrection, 5:21–24, 35–43).

The concluding phase of the Galilean ministry (6:7–8:26). The story of Jesus' movement away from the region of the Sea of Galilee, where so much of the action of 1:16–5:43 takes place, to his hometown of Nazareth in the hill country of Galilee (6:1–6) is Mark's third transitional text. In the ensuing fourth section of his gospel (6:7–8:26), Mark amplifies notes that he has sounded in the two previous sections Jesus' amazing feats of power, his criticism of certain Jewish customs, and the growing opposition to him. He also initiates what will become an important theme in the gospel: the disciples' lack of understanding. The disciples are again featured at the beginning of this section, as Jesus sends the Twelve out on a mission (6:7–13). The rumour that Jesus is John the Baptist returned from the dead, mentioned along with other popular estimates of his person, leads Mark to include here a flashback explanation of John's death at the hands of Herod Antipas (6:14–29). After the return of the Twelve, the press of the crowds forces Jesus and his disciples into the wilderness, where the five thousand are fed (6:30–44). This

is followed by Jesus' miraculous walking on the water, as he meets the disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee (6:45-52). At Gennesaret, on the western shore of the Sea, Jesus heals many people (6:53-56) and, shortly afterward, explains the real nature of impurity in response to Jewish criticism (7:1-23). Jesus then leaves Galilee (and Israel) for the regions of Tyre and Sidon to the North, where he commends the faith of a Gentile woman (7:24-30). Very quickly, however, we find him back in the regions around the Sea of Galilee, healing (7:31-37), feeding the four thousand (8:1-13), teaching without much success the 'blinded' disciples (8:14-21), and, with considerably greater success, healing a physically blinded man (8:22-26).

The way of glory and suffering (8:27 – 10:52). Mark's gospel reaches its climax with Peter's recognition of Jesus' messiahship (8:27-30). It forms the fourth major transition in the gospel, as the emphasis shifts from the crowds and the power of Jesus displayed in miracles to the disciples and the cross. The ensuing fifth section of the gospel (8:27 – 10:52) has at its heart the thrice-repeated sequence of (1) Jesus' prediction of his death, (2) the disciples' failure, and (3) teaching about the cost of discipleship (8:31-38; 9:30-37; 10:32-45). In addition, we have in this section the transfiguration (9:1-13), the driving of a demon out of a young lad (9:14-29), and teaching about putting others first (9:38-50), divorce (10:1-12), humility (10:13-16), and the difficulty of combining wealth with discipleship (10:17-31). The section concludes, as Jesus nears Jerusalem, with his giving sight to Bartimaeus in Jericho (10:4b-52).

Final ministry in Jerusalem (11:1 – 13:37). Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem marks the beginning of the next major stage in the gospel: the days of confrontation with various Jewish groups and authorities preceding the passion (11:1 – 13:37). Jesus' public entry into the city, with its messianic overtones (11:1-11), sets the stage for the confrontation; and the cleansing of the temple (11:12-19), a strike at the heart of Judaism, forces the issue. The withering of the fig tree, in addition to being a lesson in faith, is also an acted parable of judgement upon Israel (11:20-25). It is thus no surprise that we find 'the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders' challenging Jesus' authority (11:27-33), or Jesus telling a parable in which the Jewish leaders' rebelliousness to God is a prominent

theme (12:1–12). Jesus is further questioned about the appropriateness of paying taxes to a Gentile ruler by ‘the Pharisees and Herodians’ (12:13–17), about implications of the doctrine of resurrection by the Sadducees (12:18–27), and about the greatest commandment in the law by a teacher of the law (12:28–34). Finally, Jesus takes the initiative, asking about the interpretation of Psalm 110:1 in an effort to force the Jews to consider his claims to be Messiah (12:35–40). After Jesus’ commending of a widow’s sacrificial giving (12:41–44) comes the Olivet discourse, in which Jesus encourages the disciples to be faithful in light of coming suffering and as they look toward to his triumphant return in glory (13:1–37).

The passion and empty-tomb narratives (15:1 – 16:8). The last section of Mark’s gospel has two parts: the passion narrative (chs 14–15) and the story of the empty tomb (ch. 16). Mark leads into the passion narrative with his only mention of a definite date: it is two days before the Passover when the chief priests and teachers of the law plot Jesus’ death (14:1–2). The narrative of Jesus’ anointing in Bethany is found here for topical reasons (for it took place ‘six days before the Passover’; see John 12:1–8), namely, the anointing of Jesus’ head points to his royal dignity (14:3–9). As Judas provides a means of arresting Jesus quietly, Jesus arranges for himself and the disciples to celebrate Passover together (14:12–26). After this meal, during which he uses elements of the Passover ritual to refer to his death, Jesus and the disciples leave the city for Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus agonisingly prays and is then arrested (14:27–52). There follows the series of judicial proceedings and trials: a night-time hearing before the supreme Jewish council, the Sanhedrin (14:53–65), during which Peter denies the Lord (14:66–72), a quick morning trial before the Sanhedrin (15:1), and the decisive trial before the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate (15:2–15). Pilate sentences Jesus to death by crucifixion; he is mocked by the soldiers and executed at Golgotha (15:16–41). The burial takes place that same day (15:42–47). But the despair of the women who saw him buried gives way to awe at the empty tomb and the angel’s announcement of the resurrection (16:1–8).

Author

Like the other three gospels, Mark is anonymous. The title, 'According to Mark' (*kata Markon*),² was probably added when the Gospels were collected and there was need to distinguish Mark's version of the gospel from the others. The gospel titles are generally thought to have been added in the second century but may have been added much earlier.³ Certainly we may say that the title indicates that by AD125 or so an important segment of the early church thought that a person named Mark wrote the second gospel.

Mark's connection with the second gospel is asserted or assumed by many early Christian writers. Perhaps the earliest (and certainly the most important) of the testimonies is that of Papias, who was bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia of Asia Minor until about AD130. His statement about the second gospel is recorded in Eusebius's *History of the Church (Historia Ecclesiastica)*, written in 325.

And the presbyter used to say this, 'Mark became Peter's interpreter [hermeneutēs] and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.'

(H.E. 3.39.15).⁴

Three important claims about the second gospel emerge from this statement:

² Or 'The Gospel According to Mark' – the manuscript tradition makes it hard to be sure whether the longer or shorter form is the original. NAZ prints the shorter, but Hengel argues for the longer ('The Titles of the Gospels and the Gospel of Mark', in *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], pp. 66–67).

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–84.

⁴ The quotation is taken from the translation by Kirsopp Lake in *Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926).

Mark wrote the gospel that, in Eusebius's day, was identified with this name.

Mark was not an eyewitness but obtained his information from Peter.⁵

Mark's gospel lacks 'order', reflecting the occasional nature of Peter's preaching.⁶

The importance of these claims is magnified when we realise that the presbyter whom Papias is quoting is the presbyter John, probably the apostle John himself. If Papias is to be trusted, the identification of Mark as the author of the second gospel goes back to the first generation of Christians.

Later Christian writers confirm that Mark was the author of the second gospel and that he depended on Peter for his information: Ireneus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.2 (AD180); Tertullian, *Adv. Macrc.* 4-5 (c. 200); Clement of Alexandria, *Hypotyposes* (c. 200), according to Eusebius (H.E. 6.14.5-7), Origen, *Comm. on Matt.* (early third century), again according to Eusebius (H.E. 6.25.5); and, probably, the Muratorian Canon (a list of New Testament books drawn up c. 190 and so named because the sole manuscript to preserve the list, an incomplete Latin manuscript of the seventh or eighth century, was discovered and published by Cardinal L.A. Muratori in 1740).⁷ Some scholars dismiss these testimonies as secondhand evidence going back to Papias, believing that Papias invents his claim about Mark's connection with Peter in order to defend the gospel against

⁵ In identifying Mark as Peter's hermēneutēs Papias may mean that he was Peter's 'translator' (from Aramaic into Greek) (see H.E.W. Turner, 'The Tradition of Mark's Dependence upon Peter', *ExpTim* 71 [1959-60]: 260-63) or, more probably, his 'interpreter', one who repeated and transmitted Peter's preaching (Zahn 2, 442-44).

⁶ This may mean that Mark, in the judgement of the presbyter, lacked chronological order (Martin Hengel, 'Literary, Theological, and Historical Problems in the Gospel of Mark', in *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 48) or, more probably, that it lacked rhetorical/artistic order (Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1 - 8:26*, WBC [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1989], p. xxvii).

⁷ Justin Martyr mentions the 'reminiscences of Peter' in conjunction with a quotation from Mark's gospel (Dial. 106).

its detractors.⁸ But Papias does not appear to be defending Mark's authorship or his connection with Peter but only the reliability of the gospel, against the charge that it lacked 'order'. Moreover, no dissenting voice from the early church regarding the authorship of the second gospel is found. This is surprising, since the tendency in the early church was to associate apostles with the writing of the New Testament books. While we must not uncritically accept everything that early Christian writers say about the origins of the New Testament, we should not reject what they say without good reason. The early and uncontested claim that Mark wrote the second gospel based on Peter's teaching can be overturned only by rather clear indications to the contrary from the gospel itself.

To assess this internal evidence, we must first identify the 'Mark' intended by Papias and the other early Christian writers. That they refer to the (John) Mark mentioned in Acts (12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37) and in four New Testament epistles (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13) is almost certain.⁹ No other early Christian Mark would have been so well-known as to be mentioned without further description.¹⁰ Son of a woman prominent in the early Jerusalem church (Christians had gathered at her home during Peter's imprisonment [Acts 12:12]) and cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), 'John, also called Mark', accompanied Paul and Barnabas as far as Pamphylia, in Asia Minor, on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:5, 13). For whatever reason (and speculation has been rampant), Mark left Paul and Barnabas before the first journey ended, and Paul therefore refused to take him along on his second extended preaching trip. Barnabas disagreed with Paul's decision and separated himself from Paul, taking Mark along with him (Acts 15:36-40). Yet Paul and Mark were eventually reconciled: Paul mentions Mark's presence with him during his Roman imprisonment (Philem. 24; Col. 4:10). Peter, writing from Rome, also

⁸ E.g. Kümmel, p. 95; Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 2 vols., HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1976-80), 1:4-7.

⁹ A few scholars think that an unknown Mark wrote the gospel (see, e.g., Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:9-11).

¹⁰ Jerome is the first explicitly to identify the Mark of the second gospel with the John Mark mentioned in the New Testament.

mentions that Mark was with him, calling him his son (1 Peter 5:13), perhaps implying that Mark had been converted through his ministry.¹¹ Mark has also been identified as the 'young man' who 'fled naked' from Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:51-52): it has been argued that this enigmatic reference, peculiar to Mark's gospel, is an autobiographical reminiscence.¹² This may be the case, but the identification may call into question Papias's claim that Mark was not an eyewitness.¹³

Does the little we know of John Mark from the New Testament present any difficulty to identifying him as the author of the second gospel? Some scholars think so, pointing to Mark's alleged ignorance of Jewish customs and errors about Palestinian geography.¹⁴ But neither difficulty stands up to scrutiny; careful and sympathetic interpretation of the alleged problem passages reveals no errors in such matters. In contrast, two features of Mark and his career as they are presented in the New Testament fit the author of the second gospel. The Greek style of Mark's gospel is simple and straightforward and full of the kind of Semitisms that one would expect of a Jerusalem-bred Christian.¹⁵ And Mark's connection with Paul may help explain what many scholars have found to be a Pauline theological influence in the second gospel. Both features are far too general to offer any positive evidence toward an identification. But the important point is that nothing in the second gospel stands in the way of accepting the earliest tradition that identifies John Mark as its author. Our decision, then, will rest almost entirely on external evidence, and especially on the tradition handed down through Papias and Eusebius from the unnamed presbyter. 'Those who are sceptical of the reliability of Papias

¹¹ See Zahn 2:427.

¹² E.g. A.B. Bruce, 'The Synoptic Gospels', in *EGT* 1:441-42. Early tradition also identified the home of Mark and his mother as the location of the last supper.

¹³ Kümmel calls the identification 'a strange and wholly improbable conjecture' (95), but he gives no better explanation for the inclusion of these verses in Mark's gospel.

¹⁴ E.g. *ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁵ Note Martin Hengel's judgement: 'I do not know any other work in Greek which has so many Aramaic or Hebrew words and formulae in so narrow a space as does the second gospel' ('Literary, Theological, and Historical Problems', p. 46).

conclude that the author of the gospel is unknown.¹⁶ Yet, as we have seen, there is nothing in the New Testament that is inconsistent with Papias's claim that Mark wrote the second gospel. And since we have no indication that anyone in the early church contested Papias's claim, we see no reason not to accept it.

But can we also accept the tradition that Mark is dependent on the preaching of Peter? Here, again, scepticism is rampant. Modern approaches to the Gospels consider the gospel material to be the product of a long and complex process of traditions-history, a view that has difficulty accommodating the direct connection between Mark and Peter suggested by Papias.¹⁷ While recognising this as something of a problem, two factors may mitigate its force. First, we must question whether the assuredness with which critics identify the origins and growth of traditions is always justified. In many cases the basis for such judgements does not appear to be strong, and we may well think that the derivation of a given pericope from Peter himself may satisfy the evidence equally well. Only a 'doctrinaire form critic would insist that all the gospel tradition must have been transmitted through the faceless 'community'.¹⁸ Second, we must probably allow for Mark to have used sources other than Peter. As long as the apostle was a central source for the gospel, Papias's claim stands.

On the other side of the ledger are factors that could be taken to point to Peter's connection with the gospel. The vividness and detail of the second gospel is said to point to an eyewitness. Only Mark, for instance, mentions that the grass on which the five thousand sat was green (6:39). But even if valid (and some scholars insist that there was a tendency to add such detail to the tradition), this feature could do no more than show that there was some eyewitness testimony behind Mark's gospel.

¹⁶ E.g. Kummel, pp. 95-97; Joachim Gnllka, *Das Evanaelium nach Markus*, EKKNT, 2 vols. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchencr, 1978; Zurich: Benziger, 1979), 1:32-33.

¹⁷ Thus, for instance, Guelich concludes that Papias is right in identifying Mark as the author but wrong in thinking that the gospel is based on the preaching of Peter (Mark 1 – 8:26, pp. xxvi-xxix).

¹⁸ Martin 204-5.

This focus may be narrowed by another feature of the gospel: the especially critical light in which the Twelve are displayed. While found in all four gospels, the picture of the disciples as cowardly, spiritually blind, and hard of heart is particularly vivid in Mark. This, it is held, points to an apostolic viewpoint, for only an apostle would have been able to criticise the Twelve so harshly. Two other factors suggest that this apostolic witness may be Peter's. First, Peter figures prominently in Mark, and some of the references are most naturally explained as coming from Peter himself (e.g. the references to Peter 'remembering' [11:21; 14: 72]).¹⁹ Second, C.H. Dodd has pointed out that Mark's gospel follows a pattern very similar to that found in Peter's rehearsal of the basic kerygma, the evangelistically oriented recitation of key events in Jesus' life, found in Acts 10:36-41.²⁰ We might add, finally, that Peter's reference to Mark as 'my son' in his first letter fits nicely with the relationship between Peter and Mark mentioned by Papias; it discourages one from thinking Papias simply invented such a relationship.

Each of these factors is commensurate with the tradition that Mark is based on Peter's preaching, and one or two of them may even point slightly in that direction, but none of them, nor all of them together, is sufficient to establish the connection. Again, however, there seems to be no compelling reason to reject the common opinion of the early church on this matter.

Provenance

Early tradition is not unanimous about the place where Mark wrote his gospel, but it favours Rome. The anti-Marcionite prologue to Mark (late second century?) claims that Mark wrote the gospel 'in the regions of Italy'. Both Ireneus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1.2) and Clement of Alexandria (according to Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.14.6-7) suggest the same thing. Several considerations are said to confirm a Roman provenance: (1) the large number of Latinisms in the gospel;²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:204

²⁰ C.H. Dodd, 'The Framework of the Gospel Narrative', *ExpTim* 43 (1932): 396-400.

²¹ See esp. Mark's explanation of the widow's two copper coins as equalling a *kodrantēs*, a Roman coin (12:42), and of the 'courtyard', *aulē* as being a *praitōrion*, another distinctively Roman/Latin name (15:16). Readers in the eastern part of the

(2) the incidental mention of Simon of Cyrene's sons, Alexander and Rufus, at least one of whom may have been known to Mark in Rome (when writing to the Roman church, Paul greets a Rufus [16:13]); (3) the apparently Gentile audience of the gospel; (4) the many allusions to suffering, which would be appropriate if the gospel was written under the shadow of persecutions of the church in Rome; (5) the fact that 1 Peter 5:13 locates Mark in Rome with Peter in the early sixties; and (6) the connection with an important early centre of Christianity, which would have explained the gospel's quick acceptance.

None of these points, however, carries much weight: numbers 1 and 3 could fit a provenance anywhere that boasted Gentile and Latin influence; number 6 is of questionable validity and, even if accepted, could point to several possible locations (Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus); numbers 4 and 5 are valid only if Mark was written in the middle sixties (we will argue for an earlier date, in the middle or late fifties); and number 3 assumes that there was only one Rufus in the early church. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the gospel that is incompatible with a Roman provenance, and Mark may well have been in Rome with Peter for some years prior to the writing of 1 Peter.

The only other provenance that finds support in early tradition is Egypt (Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.* 1.3 [c. AD400]). If Morton Smith is right, Clement of Alexandria may also have connected Mark with the church in Alexandria. According to Smith, a letter he discovered in the monastery of Mar-Saba in Egypt is an authentic letter of Clement, in which he says that Mark, after writing his gospel in Rome with Peter, came to Alexandria, where he composed a 'deeper', Gnostic-oriented gospel.²² But the authenticity of the letter is disputed, and in any case, it simply corroborates a Roman provenance for the canonical Mark. Chrysostom's identification of

Roman Empire would almost certainly have known these Greek terms. For a complete list of Mark's Latinisms, see Kümmel, pp. 97-98.

²² Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discoverer and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

Egypt as the place of Mark's composition may even be a mistaken inference from Eusebius.²³

Two other specific provenances have gained support from modern scholars. J. Vernon Bartlet argues for Antioch, noting, among other things, its proximity to Palestine (which explains why Mark assumes his readers will know Palestinian place-names), its large Roman colony, Peter's connection with Antioch, and the fact that the presbyter whom Papias quotes comes from the East.²⁴ Other scholars, while less specific, are inclined to think that Mark was written somewhere in the East.²⁵ In his groundbreaking redactional study of Mark, Willi Marxsen argues for a Galilean provenance: Noting the positive significance accorded to Galilee in Mark, Marxsen theorises that Galilee, for Mark, was the place of revelation and that the references to Jesus 'going before' the disciples into Galilee (14:28; 16:7) were a summons to Christians to gather in Galilee and await the return of Christ.²⁶ Marxsen's theory, however, is fraught with problems, and there is no convincing reason to locate Mark in Galilee. While certainty is impossible, a Roman provenance is the best alternative, granted the strength of the early tradition and the lack of any evidence from within the New Testament to the contrary.

Date

Mark has been dated in four different decades: the forties, the fifties, the sixties, and the seventies.

²³ H.E. 2.16.1: 'Mark is said to have been the first man to set out for Egypt and preach there the gospel which he had himself written down'. See, e.g., Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 32; Martin 1:215.

²⁴ J. Vernon Bartlet, *St. Mark* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, n.d.), pp. 5-6.

²⁵ E.g. Kümmel, p. 98. Bo Reicke suggests Caesarea, its Palestinian location fitting his theory of gospel origins, and its Roman flavour (it was the Roman administrative centre) explaining the large number of Latinisms (*The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], pp. 165-66).

²⁶ Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969).

A Date in the Forties

A date in the forties has been proposed on the basis of historical and papyrological considerations. C.C. Torrey argues that Mark's 'abomination that causes desolation' (13:14) is a reference to the attempt in AD40 of the Emperor Caligula to have his image set up in the Jerusalem temple, and he contends that the gospel was written shortly after this.²⁷ But the identification is unlikely. Jose O'Callaghan bases his early dating of Mark on three papyrus fragments found at Qumran (7Q5; 7Q6, 1, 7Q7), dated c. 50, which he claims contain, respectively, Mark 6:52-53, 4:28, and 12:17.²⁸ But most scholars have contested the identification;²⁹ even if it were valid, it would prove only the existence at this date of tradition that came to be incorporated into Mark. Another theory holds that Peter may have journeyed to Rome in the 40s after being freed from prison (see Acts 12:17) and that Mark may have written the gospel at that time.³⁰ But so early a date for Mark's gospel makes it hard to explain the silence of Paul and other New Testament writers about it, and it does not perhaps allow sufficient time for the development of the tradition behind Mark.

A Date in the Fifties

Another problem in the way of dating Mark as early as the forties arises if we give credence to the traditions that the gospel was written in Rome on the basis of the preaching of Peter. Although

²⁷ C.C. Torrey, *The Four Gospels*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1947), pp. 261-62. Moreover, Torrey's theory assumes an early Aramaic gospel of Mark. A similar proposal has recently been defended by Günther Zuntz ('Wann wurde das Evangelium Marci geschrieben?' in *Markus-Philologie: Historische, literargeschichtliche, und stilistische Untersuchungen zum zweiten Evangelium*, ed. Herbert Cancik, WUNT 33 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984), pp. 47-71).

²⁸ Jose O'Callaghan, 'Papiros neotestamentarios en la quere 7 de Qumran', *Bib* 53 (1972): 91-100. See William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 18-21, for a summary and discussion.

²⁹ See, e.g., Pierre Benoit, 'Note sur les fragments grecs de la Grotte 7 de Qumran', *RevBib* 79 (1972): 321-24; Lane, *Mark*, pp. 19-21.

³⁰ J.W. Wenham, 'Did Peter Go to Rome in AD42?' *TynB* 23 (1972): 97-102.

possible, it is not likely that Peter came to Rome in the early forties.³¹ But there is evidence that Peter was in Rome in the middle fifties, making it possible to date Mark in the later fifties without contradicting the well-established tradition of the origin of the gospel.³² The strongest case for this dating comes not from Mark directly but from the relationship of Mark to Luke–Acts. The argument assumes that Acts ends where it does, with Paul languishing in a Roman prison, because Luke published the work at that time that is, in about AD62. This would require that the gospel of Luke, the first volume of Luke’s literary effort, be dated sometime before 62. If we then accept the prevailing scholarly opinion that Luke used the canonical Mark as one of his key sources, Mark must have been written by 60, at the latest.³³ This argument is based on two key assumptions: that Acts is to be dated in the early 60s, and that Luke has used canonical Mark. Yet these assumptions are well founded (on Luke’s use of canonical Mark, see ch. 1, and on the date of Acts, see ch. 6), and there is much to be said for this dating of Mark.

A Date in the Sixties

The majority of contemporary scholars date Mark in the sixties, for three reasons. First, the earliest traditions favour a date for Mark

³¹ Wenham is representative of those who think that Peter may have come to Rome after his miraculous release from prison, recorded in Acts 12 (‘Did Peter Go to Rome?’ pp. 97–99). Yet Peter is back in Palestine by the time of the Jerusalem Council in AD48 or 49 (Acts 15), and it is difficult to think that Paul and Barnabas would have taken on the first missionary journey one who had worked closely with Peter in Rome for some years. For a discussion of Peter’s movements, see Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), pp. 38–39.

³² Peter was probably in Corinth before AD55, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (see 1:12; 2:22), and in Rome in about 63 (the probable date of 1 Peter). Eusebius implies that Peter was in Rome during the reign of Claudius, who died in AD54 (*H.E.* 2.14.6). The absence of any reference to Peter in Rome suggests that Peter was not in Rome in 57.

³³ See esp. Adolf Harnack, *The Date of Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels* (New York: Putnam’s, 1911). Reicke’s argument is similar, although he thinks Mark was written at about the same time as Luke (*Roots of the Synoptic Gospels*, pp. 177–80). C.S. Mann thinks that Mark composed a first draft of his gospel in AD55 (*Mark*, AB [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986], pp. 72–83).

after the death of Peter.³⁴ Second, and perhaps more important for most, the internal evidence of Mark is said to favour a date during, or shortly after, the onset of persecution in Rome. Mark has much to say about the importance of disciples' following the 'road to the cross' walked by our Lord. This emphasis best fits a situation when Christians were facing the grim prospect of martyrdom, a setting that would have obtained in Rome at the time of, or after, Nero's famous persecution of Christians in AD65.³⁵ Third, Mark 13 is said to reflect the situation in Palestine during the Jewish revolt and just before the Roman entrance into the city, and thus it must be dated between AD67 and 69.³⁶

A Date in the Seventies

The main argument for dating Mark as late as the seventies rests on the assumption that Mark 13 reflects the actual experience of the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans.³⁷ But the argument is seriously flawed. As several scholars have shown, Mark 13 shows very little evidence of being influenced by the course of events in AD70. Jesus' predictions reflect stock Old Testament and Jewish imagery having to do with the besieging of cities rather than the specific circumstances of the siege of Jerusalem.³⁸ Even more damaging to this argument is the assumption on the part of these critics that

³⁴ The anti-Marcionite prologue (late second century?), Ireneus (AD185; see *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.2), and perhaps Papias's citation of the presbyter (note the tense: 'Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter').

³⁵ For this case, see esp. Cranfield, *Mark*, p. 8; Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, NCB (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976), p. 26; Martin 1:213. Martin Hengel cites other arguments in support of a late date: (1) the clarity of Mark's writing; (2) Mark's lateness in comparison with Q; (3) the assumption in Mark of the existence of a worldwide mission (see 13:10; 14:9); and (4) the prophecy of the martyrdom of James and John ('The Gospel of Mark: Time of Origin and Situation', in *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 12-28).

³⁶ Hengel, 'Time of Origin', pp. 2-28; Augustine Stock, *The Method and Message of Mark* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1989), pp. 6-8; Guelich, *Mark 1 - 8:26*, pp. xxi-xxxii.

³⁷ See Kümmel, p. 68; Pesch, *Markusevangelium* 1:14; Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* 1:34.

³⁸ See esp. Bo Reicke, 'Synoptic Prophecies of the Destruction of Jerusalem', in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, ed. David E. Aune, SuppNovT 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 121-33; John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 13-30.

Jesus could not accurately have predicted the course of events in 70. As long as we grant Jesus the ability to do so, Mark 13 will offer no help in dating the gospel.

Conclusion

Mark, then, is to be dated either in the late fifties or the middle sixties. While the latter is the majority view, we favour the late fifties. Indeed, we are required to date Mark before AD60 if our assumptions about the ending of Acts and the priority of Mark are valid. Mark's emphasis on persecution need not reflect a situation in which his readers are actually undergoing such persecution. Persecution, as the New Testament makes clear, is always a possibility for the believer, and Mark's inclusion of so much of Jesus' teaching on the subject is perfectly understandable on such a basis. Dating Mark in the fifties does go against the earliest traditions about Mark having been written after the death of Peter. But other traditions affirm that Mark wrote while Peter was still alive, so the early evidence is by no means unanimous on the subject.³⁹

Audience and Purpose

Mark is a self-effacing narrator. He tells his story with a minimum of editorial comments and says nothing about his purpose or his intended audience. We must, depend, then, on the early testimonies

³⁹ Clement of Alexandria says: 'When Peter had preached the word publicly in Rome and announced the gospel by the Spirit, those present, of whom there were many, besought Mark, since for a long time he had followed him and remembered what had been said to record his words. Mark did this, and communicated the gospel to those who made request of him. When Peter knew of it, he neither actively prevented nor encouraged the undertaking' (recorded by Eusebius in *H.E.* 6.14.6-7; the translation is from Taylor, *Mark*, pp. 5-6.) Tertullian may also witness to this tradition (see *Against Marcion* 4.5.3). It has even been argued that the key early traditions can be reconciled by understanding the word *exodos* in Ireneus (e.g. 'after the "exodos" of these [Peter and Paul]') to refer not to their death but to their departure from Rome (so T.W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, ed. Matthew Black (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), pp. 34-40). Others reconcile the conflicting traditions by assuming that Mark began his gospel during Peter's lifetime but published it after his death (Zahn 2:433-34; Guthrie is favourable to the suggestion [86]).

about Mark and on the character of the gospel itself for information about his readers and his purpose.

Audience

The extrabiblical sources point to a Gentile Christian audience, probably in Rome. The Roman destination of Mark's gospel is simply an inference from its Roman provenance. If Mark wrote in Rome, he probably wrote to Romans. This is either stated or implied in the early traditions about the gospel, which have Mark recording the preaching of Peter for those who had heard the great apostle in Rome. As we have noted above, the many Latinisms of the gospel are incompatible with, if not conclusive for, a Roman audience. That Mark writes to Gentiles seems clear from his translation of Aramaic expressions, his explanation of Jewish customs (such as the washing of hands before eating [7:3-4]), and, in the few texts he includes on the subject, his interest in the cessation of the ritual elements in the Mosaic law (see 7:1-23, esp. v. 19; 12:32-34).

Purpose

Mark's purpose is much harder to determine. Interest in this question has been high because of its importance in redaction criticism, the most popular contemporary method of interpreting the Gospels. Redaction criticism of Mark is hampered by our inability to isolate the sources Mark has used, but this has not stood in the way of the quest for Mark's purpose. Redaction critics typically stress theological purposes in the writing of the Gospels, and this has certainly been the case with respect to Mark. The large number of specific proposals forbids our giving anything close to a complete survey. We mention here three representative interpretations, the first focusing on eschatology, the second on Christology, and the third on apologetics.

Willi Marxsen, who initiated the modern redactional study of Mark, thought that Mark wanted to prepare Christians for Jesus' imminent parousia in Galilee.⁴⁰ He argued that Mark focuses on Galilee, as the place where Jesus meets with his disciples, at the expense of

⁴⁰ Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*.

Jerusalem, where Jesus is rejected and killed. Jesus' command to his disciples to meet him in Galilee (14:28; cf. 16: 7) was taken by Marxsen as a prediction to Mark's community of Jesus' glorious return to them. But the meeting with Jesus to which these verses refer is clearly a postresurrection meeting, not the parousia.⁴¹ Moreover, the geographic contrast that Marxsen (and some before him) discerns is much better explained as a reflection of the actual course of Jesus' ministry than as a theologically motivated invention of Mark's.

Theodore Weeden found in Mark a polemic against a 'divine man' (*theios anēr*) Christology, a way of viewing Jesus that saw him as a wonder-working hero but denied or neglected his suffering and death.⁴² To counter this tendency, Mark wrote a gospel that emphasised the humanity and suffering of Jesus. Weeden is correct to see in Mark a focus on Jesus' suffering, but he goes too far in identifying Mark's opponents as people who held to a divine-man Christology. For one thing, evidence for a polemical stance in Mark is not at all clear he probably does not have any opponents in view at all.⁴³ For another, the very existence of a Hellenistic divine-man concept as a category into which early Christians would have put Jesus is open to question.⁴⁴

A specific kind of apologetic was discerned in Mark by S.G.F. Brandon. He thought that Mark had attempted to mask the political implications of Jesus' life and, especially, his death. According to Brandon, Jesus was a sympathiser with the Jewish revolutionaries, the Zealots. For this reason he was crucified by the Romans, a method of execution generally reserved for political criminals. By branding Jesus as a rebel against Rome, his crucifixion made it very difficult for Christians to win a hearing from the Roman public particularly in the aftermath of the Jewish revolt in

⁴¹ See, e.g., Robert H. Stein, 'A Short Note on Mark XIV.28 and XVI.7', *NTS* 20 (1974): 445-52.

⁴² Theodore Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁴³ See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁴⁴ See, e.g., David Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (Missoula, Mont.: SP, 1972).

Palestine, when, according to Brandon, Mark wrote his gospel. To overcome this difficulty, Mark transferred as much of the blame for Jesus' death from the Romans to the Jews as he could, a process revealed by the many manifestly unhistorical features in the Sanhedrin and Roman trials.⁴⁵ But there is no need to follow Brandon in finding these trials to contain unhistorical fabrications.⁴⁶ In general, Brandon's theory can be sustained only by arguing, without any evidence, that Mark (and all other writers who have come after him) has eliminated the political element from Jesus' teaching and ministry.

These three specific suggestions about Mark's purpose represent only a sampling of recent proposals, but they share with many others the fault of being overly specific and based on only a selection of the data. Any attempt to determine Mark's purpose must take into account the gospel as a whole and refrain from arguing beyond the evidence.

Certain features of Mark's gospel are especially relevant to an investigation into its purpose: its focus on the activity of Jesus, especially his working of miracles; its interest in the passion of Jesus (Mark, claimed Martin Kähler in a famous aphorism, is 'a passion narrative with an extended introduction'); its repeated correlation of Jesus' predicted sufferings and the 'cost of discipleship' in 8:26–10:52. As Ralph Martin has shown, two general concerns emerge from these characteristics: Christology and discipleship.⁴⁷ Mark presents a balanced Christology in which Jesus' miracle-working power (the focus in 1:16–8:26) is set beside his suffering and death (the focus in 8:27–16:8). The one who is identified as the Son of God in the opening verse of the gospel⁴⁸ is confessed to be the Son of

⁴⁵ S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967).

⁴⁶ For studies of Jesus' trials that generally vindicate the historicity of the gospel accounts, see David R. Catchpole, *The Trial of Jesus: A Study in the Gospels and Jewish Historiography from 1770 to the Present Day* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); Josef Blinzler, *Der Prozess Jesu*, 2nd ed. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1955).

⁴⁷ Ralph Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), esp. pp. 156–62.

⁴⁸ For the textual problem, see the section 'Text' below.

by the Roman centurion as Jesus dies, humiliated and in agony, on the cross (15:39). Mark wants his readers to understand that Jesus is the Son of God, but especially the *suffering* Son of God. Moreover, believers are to be followers of Jesus. Mark also shows that Christians must walk the same road as Jesus – the way of humility, of suffering, and even, should it be necessary, of death. Mark wants to impress on his readers the famous words of the Lord: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ (8:34).

Mark thus wants to help his readers understand who Jesus is and what real discipleship involves. But we must recognise that Mark has many other things to say that cannot easily be placed into these categories. Recent study has stressed the theological purposes behind the writing of the Gospels, and we may agree that the evangelists were writing with some specific points to make to the Christian communities in their day. But we should not ignore two other, more general purposes, that were probably at work in the production of Mark: historical interest, and evangelism. In addition to encouraging certain beliefs and actions in his Christian readers, Mark was providing them with a record of Jesus’ deeds and words. This was becoming a great need in Mark’s day, as the original eyewitnesses such as Peter, were beginning to pass from the scene. While it is unlikely that Mark was written for non-Christians directly, the focus in the gospel on Jesus’ actions, the similarity between the gospel’s structure and the early Christian evangelistic preaching, and Mark’s announced intention to write a book about ‘the gospel’ (1:1) all suggest that Mark wanted to arm his Christian readers with a knowledge of the ‘good news of salvation’.⁴⁹

Sources

Our ability to identify the sources Mark has used in composing his gospel depends on our solution to the synoptic problem. If the Griesbach, or two-gospel, solution is correct, then both Matthew and Luke are sources for Mark, and we could seek to identify the ways in which he has ‘epitomized’ these two major sources.

⁴⁹ See Guthrie, pp. 57-58; Cranfield, *Mark*, pp. 14-15; Moule, p. 122.

If, however, the two-source solution is correct, then both Matthew and Luke have depended on Mark, and we would possess no written source that Mark has used. As we argue in chapter 1 of *An Introduction to the New Testament*, the two-source theory is much more likely to be correct. Any knowledge of Mark's sources, then, will be based on extrapolations from his gospel itself. And this, as the many conflicting reconstructions demonstrate, is a highly dubious procedure.⁵⁰

The most persistent theory is that there existed a written pre-Markan passion narrative,⁵¹ but even this idea now meets with less favour than it used to.⁵² We must admit that we have no certain knowledge of the written sources, if any, Mark has used in putting his gospel together. His material may have come to him in small pieces of tradition, as the classic form critics thought, in both small pieces of tradition and longer oral summaries, or in a combination of these along with some written sources. In any case, if, as we have argued, the traditions about the Petrine origin of Mark are correct, then Peter himself is the immediate source of much of Mark's material.

Text

The two most important textual problems in Mark's gospel concern its beginning and its end. The words "Son of God" (greek [*huiou theou*]) in 1:1 are omitted in a few important early manuscripts (the original hand of the uncial *x*, the uncial *O*, and a few minuscules). But the words could have been accidentally omitted;⁵³ they are found in the majority of early and significant manuscripts

⁵⁰ Kümmel lists a number of suggestions (pp. 84–85).

⁵¹ See, e.g., Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), pp. 178–217.

⁵² See esp. Eta Linnemann, *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte*, FRLANT 102 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970); a convenient summary of the discussion in English is found in John R. Donahue, 'Introduction: From Passion Traditions to Passion Narrative', in *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14–16*, ed. Werner H. Kelber (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), pp. 8–16.

⁵³ The eye of a scribe may have passed from *ou* at the end of *Christou*, lit. 'of Christ'), to the same letters at the end of *theou*, (lit. 'of God'), omitting what is between, thereby effectively dropping out *huiou theou*, ('of the Son of God').

(the uncials A, B, D, L, W), as well as in the mass of later manuscripts; and the inclusion of the phrase fits well with Mark's Christology. With most modern commentators, then, we think the words belong in Mark's text.

The ending of Mark's gospel poses quite a different, and more severe, problem. The majority of manuscripts include the so-called long ending, in which are narrated several resurrection appearances of Jesus, Jesus' commissioning of the disciples, and his ascension. This long ending is printed as verses 9–20 in the KJV, in modern English versions, it usually appears in the margin or with a notation. Since it is found in the bulk of the manuscripts and can be traced to as early as the first half of the second century, this long ending can lay some claim to be considered as the original ending of Mark's gospel.⁵⁴

But the arguments against this ending being original are very strong. First, it is missing from what are generally considered the two most important manuscripts (the uncials *Greek* and *greek*), as well as several others. Second, Jerome and Eusebius both state that the best manuscripts available to them did not contain this longer ending. Third, two other endings to the gospel exist: a shorter ending (attested in the uncials L, 099, 0112, and some other witnesses), and the longer ending combined with an interpolation (attested in the uncial W and mentioned by Jerome). The presence of these alternative endings suggests that there was uncertainty about the ending of Mark for some time. Fourth, the longer ending contains several non-Markan words and expressions. Fifth, the longer ending does not flow naturally after 16:8: Jesus is presumed to be the subject in verse 9 (the Greek does not have an expressed subject), although 'the women' was the subject in verse 8; Mary is introduced in verse 9 as if she has not been mentioned in verse 1; and 'when Jesus rose early on the first day of the week' (v. 9) sounds strange after 'very early on the first day of the week' (v. 2).

⁵⁴ William R. Farmer has recently argued that Mark composed vv. 9–20 before writing his gospel and then added it at the end of this gospel as he finished (The Last Twelve Verses of Mark SNTSMS 25 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974]).

With the great majority of contemporary commentators and textual critics, then, we do not think that verses 9–20 were written by Mark as the ending for his gospel. The resemblances between what is narrated in these verses and the narrative of Jesus’ resurrection appearances in the other gospels suggest that this longer ending was composed on the basis of these other narratives to supplement what was felt to be an inadequate ending to the gospels.⁵⁵

If verses 9–20 were not the original ending to Mark’s gospel, what was? Three main possibilities exist. First, Mark may have intended to write more but been prevented from doing so (by his death or arrest?).⁵⁶ Second, Mark may have written a longer ending to his gospel, including one or more resurrection appearances, and this ending may have been lost in the course of transmission. It has been suggested, for instance, that the last leaf of Mark’s gospel – presuming the gospel was in the form not of a scroll but of a codex, or many-paged book – may have been accidentally torn off.⁵⁷ Third, Mark may have intended to end his gospel with verse 8. This third possibility is becoming more popular and is perhaps the most likely. Mark’s gospel is typified by a degree of secrecy and understatement. For him to conclude his gospel with a plain announcement of the fact of the resurrection (v. 7) and the resulting astonishment and fear (perhaps to be understood in the biblical sense as reverential awe) of the women would not be out of keeping with his purposes.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ The secondary character of the longer ending has been argued in the monograph by Joseph Hug, *La finale dell’evangelo di Marco*, EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1978).

⁵⁶ Zahn 2:479–80.

⁵⁷ C.F.D. Moule speculates that the loss of the ‘bottom sheet’ could have resulted in both the ending and the beginning of the gospel being lost, and that 1:1, as 16:9–20, is a later attempt to fill in the resulting gaps (pp. 131–32n.).

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ*, reprint ed., with *The Witness of Luke to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 86–118; Kümmel, pp. 100–101; Lane, *Mark*, pp. 590–92; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:40–47.

Recent Study

For many centuries, little attention was paid to Mark's gospel.⁵⁹ The early church quickly saw Matthew come to pride of place among the Gospels, with Mark considered to be a rather inferior and inconsequential extract from Matthew. It was only in the nineteenth century that Mark came into a position of prominence. The liberal school of interpretation, pioneered by scholars such as H.J. Holtzmann, found in Mark's simplicity of style and relative paucity of theological embellishment evidence of an earlier and more factual account of the life of Jesus than was presented in the other gospels. This isolation of Mark was destroyed by the work of W. Wrede. Specifically, Wrede argued that Mark had imposed on the tradition the notion of the messianic secret. Jesus' many commands for silence about his status in the gospel, argued Wrede, were invented by Mark in order to explain how it was that Jesus was not recognised to be the Messiah during his lifetime.⁶⁰ Today few hold to this notion of the messianic secret.⁶¹ The motif itself is more likely to reflect the actual situation in the life of Jesus than it does a later invention.⁶² But at the time, Wrede's work was taken to indicate that Mark wrote with just as much theological interest and bias as did the other evangelists.

The dominance of the form-critical approach during most of the first half of the twentieth century resulted in little interest in Mark as a gospel as such attention was focused on the tradition before Mark. With the advent of redaction criticism in the 1950s, this changed, and the last three decades have witnessed an avalanche of studies on Mark's theology, purposes, and community. The contributions of Willi Marxsen, Theodore Weeden, S.G.F. Brandon, and Ralph Martin have been described above. To these could be added numerous other studies, devoted either to

⁵⁹ For a history of interpretation of Mark's gospel, see Sean Kealy, *Mark's Gospel: A History of Its Interpretation from the Beginning Until 1979* (New York: Paulist, 1982); Martin, *Mark*, pp. 29-50.

⁶⁰ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (London: J. Clarke, 1971); the German original was published in 1901.

⁶¹ David E. Aune, 'The Problem of the Messianic Secret', *NovT* 11 (1969): 1-31.

⁶² See, e.g., Hengel, 'Literary, Historical, and Theological Problems', pp. 41-45.

the gospel as a whole or to specific themes within the gospel. Two themes that receive considerable attention in recent studies are Mark's Christology⁶³ and his portrait of the disciples.⁶⁴

The methodology of interpreting the Gospels, and Mark in particular, has also been the subject of debate. Some scholars are attempting to refine the technique of redaction criticism as it may be applied to Mark,⁶⁵ while at least one recent study questions the fruitfulness of the whole approach for the study of Mark.⁶⁶ In this respect we might mention two other methods that are being used in recent study of Mark. The first is sociological analysis, exhibited in Howard Clark Kee's *Community of the New Age*.⁶⁷ Kee analyses Mark's community, suggesting that it was moulded by an apocalyptic perspective and that Mark was seeking to redefine and encourage the community in light of God's purposes in history. Another direction is determined by the recent interest in the application of modern literary techniques to the Gospels. These studies focus on the way in which Mark, as a narrative, is put together and how it may be understood by the contemporary reader.⁶⁸ Mark's significance is then often seen to lie not in what he actually says but in the deeper structures created by his 'narrative world'. Older questions and methods continue to crop up in the recent literature as well. Notable in this respect is the series of articles by Martin Hengel, which show that Mark must be taken seriously as a historian of early Christianity and that his obvious

⁶³ E.g. Kingsbury, *Christology*.

⁶⁴ E.g. Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, JSNTSupp 4 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).

⁶⁵ E.g. E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel: A Study of Syntax and Vocabulary as Guides to Redaction in Mark*, SNTSMS 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

⁶⁶ C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples According to Mark: Marcan Redaction in Current Debate*, (JSNTSupp JSOT, 1989).

⁶⁷ Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1989).

theological interests do not force us to abandon his material as historically worthless.⁶⁹

The Contribution of Mark

One might be tempted to mimic the early church and wonder why one should bother with Mark at all. Those who do not consider the gospel an inferior extract of Matthew and/or Luke may well find Mark's significance to lie almost entirely in his supplying to these more verbose evangelists the basic raw material of their own gospels. On this view, Mark's significance could be considered mainly historical: he was the first to compose a gospel, the first to set forth an account of the ministry of Jesus in this peculiar and largely unparalleled genre.

But that accomplishment in itself should not be underrated. Mark is the creator of the gospel in its literary form an interweaving of biographical and kerygmatic themes that perfectly conveys the sense of meaning of that unique figure in human history, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Furthermore, by tying the significance of Jesus for the church so tightly to a specific series of historical occurrences in Palestine in the third decade of the first century, Mark has ensured that the church, if it is to be true to its canonical documents, never abandons the real humanity of the Christ whom it worships. By reminding Christians that their salvation depends on the death and resurrection of Christ, Mark has inextricably tied Christian faith to the reality of historical events.

Mark's very organisation of this history makes a point in this regard. The structure of the gospel has been understood in various ways. Philip Carrington suggested that a synagogue lectionary sequence lies at the basis of its structure,⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Hengel's essays have been collected in *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

⁷⁰ Philip Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Calendar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

Parallels between Peter's Preaching and Mark

Acts 10	Mark
'good news' (v. 36)	'the beginning of the gospel' (1:1)
'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit' (38)	the coming of the Spirit on Jesus (1:10)
'beginning in Galilee' (37)	The Galilean ministry (1:16 – 8:26)
'He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil' (38)	Jesus' ministry focuses on healings and exorcisms
'we are witnesses of everything he did ... Jerusalem' (39)	in the ministry in Jerusalem (chs. 11-14)
'They killed him by hanging him on a tree' (39)	Focus on the death of Christ (ch. 15)
'God raised him from the dead on the third day' (40)	'He has risen! He is not here.' (16:6)

but this is most unlikely.⁷¹ Equally improbable is the complicated series of Old Testament correspondences discerned by Austin Farrer.⁷² Most think that geography plays a significant role in the gospel's structure, and there is truth to this. But the significance of the geography lies not in some particular theological scheme of Mark's but in the actual sequence of the ministry of Jesus. As C.H. Dodd has noted, the sequence of Mark's gospel follows the same sequence revealed in the early church's preaching.⁷³ In the table note the parallels between the preaching of Peter in Acts 10:36-40 and the structure of Mark.

⁷¹ On the issue of Jewish lectionaries and the Gospels, see Leon Morris, *The New Testament and the Jewish Lectionaries* (London: Tyndale, 1964).

⁷² Austin Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark* (Westminster: Dacre, 1951).

⁷³ Dodd, 'Framework of the Gospel Narrative'. Dodd's scheme was criticised by D.E. Nineham (*Studies in the Gospels* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1955], pp. 223-39) but has been accepted by others (e.g. Lane, *Mark*, pp. 10-12).

While the sequence in the table is to a considerable extent dictated by the actual course of events, Mark's straightforward, action-oriented account preserves the sequence more clearly than do the other gospels. The kerymatic structure of Mark helps the readers of the gospel understand the basic salvation events and prepares them to recite those events in their own evangelism.

This same bare-bones narrative sequence also throws into prominence the structural divide of Caesarea Philippi. Though often differing on the structure of Mark, commentators find in this incident the hinge on which the gospel turns. The material in 1:1–8:26, with its stress on Jesus' miracles, leads up to Peter's divinely given insight into the true nature of the man Jesus of Nazareth. But immediately after the confession, and dominating the remainder of the gospel, is the focus on the suffering and death of Jesus. As we have noted, this combination of emphases reveals a major Christological purpose of Mark's: Jesus is the *suffering* Son of God and can truly be understood only in terms of this suffering.

As we also noted above when discussing the purpose of the gospel, another central theme in Mark is discipleship. The Twelve figure very prominently in Mark and serve in general as a pattern for the disciples whom Mark addresses in his gospel. To be sure, the Twelve are not always presented as models to be emulated: their conspicuous failure, though present to some degree in the other gospels, is especially prominent in Mark. Mark portrays the disciples as hard of heart (e.g. 6:52), spiritually weak (e.g. 14:32–42), and incredibly dim-witted (e.g. 8:14–21). As Guelich puts it, Mark presents the disciples as both 'privileged and perplexed'.⁷⁴ Perhaps in both these ways they are models for the disciples of Mark's day and of ours: privileged to belong to the kingdom, yet perplexed about the apparent reverses suffered by that kingdom when Christians suffer. In another way Mark perhaps wants implicitly to contrast the situation of the Twelve, seeking to follow Jesus before the cross and the resurrection, with that of Christian disciples at his time of writing: the latter, however, follow Jesus

⁷⁴Guelich, Mark 1–8:26, p. xlii.

with the help of the powers of the new age of salvation that has dawned.

The Identity of Jesus

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

reaction. The demons recognise his authority and want to flee from him. The authorities realise eventually that some of the parables are told against them (12:1-12). Ultimately, the lack of understanding by some is an indication that the parables have brought judgement. Those who have ears to hear do so, those who do not (and they are the ones who should have done) judge themselves.

Studying Mark

There is of course much more to the background and content of Mark than this short booklet could include. In many ways the gospel is multi-layered. Although John's gospel is often viewed as a pool of water in which children can paddle but elephants can wade in, Mark also has a number of depths for different readership. On one level we have a biographical-type of literature that desires to present an accurate record of the words and work of Jesus. When we probe deeper we find that Mark has structured his material, in a very deliberate way, to make sure we clearly see the person of Jesus. But perhaps above all Mark wants us to understand the person of Jesus in close connection with his work, he is supremely the *suffering* Son of God. The good news that Mark announces at the start of his gospel is the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, the culmination of God's plans for Israel and the extension of God's grace to the whole world. Yet for all these levels the student of Mark can often miss the wood for the trees. Like the blind man who at first only sees men as trees walking, we can study the gospel, grasp some of the issues and main points, but never answer Jesus' question for ourselves - who do you say that I am? How many scholars, academics and students of theology and RS achieve great proficiency in all these subjects yet evade the blunt challenge of Jesus' question? It is a question that you the reader must be prepared to answer, and one that cannot be fended off by clinging to vague notions of so called objective and impartial study. Mark will not let us get off the hook so easily. It seems that Mark wrote to early Christians who, because of their answer to this question, were prepared to go the way of the Messiah. They were to suffer, and even to die, taking up their own cross as Jesus had said, because they understood for themselves who this Jesus was and why he came. This radical call to follow Jesus remains, the cost is

not optional. Even in the 21st century whether those who leave everything to become disciples of Jesus risk their lives in doing so will depend on which part of the globe they live in. In the academic world to confess that Jesus is the Son of God will be done at the cost of being thought of as intolerant, obscurantist and intrusive. After all, the academy says, studying Mark is about arriving at an impartial understanding of the text and its problems. What would the author of the gospel say to this? The Jewish authorities were those who should have heard and understood, and yet they were cast out of the vineyard for their reaction to the master's son. In the modern world the academics and the theologians may well be expected to hear and understand, but how many do? Can we say that we have truly read and understood Mark's gospel if we have not answered Jesus' question? To confess that Jesus is the Son of God, if we listen to his teaching, is not only to make a truth claim about him but also to identify with him. Will you then take up your cross and follow him, denying yourself, and being unashamed of him and his words? To those who count the trappings and trophies of this life of greater value than becoming a disciple he plaintively asks 'what good is it for a person to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?'

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