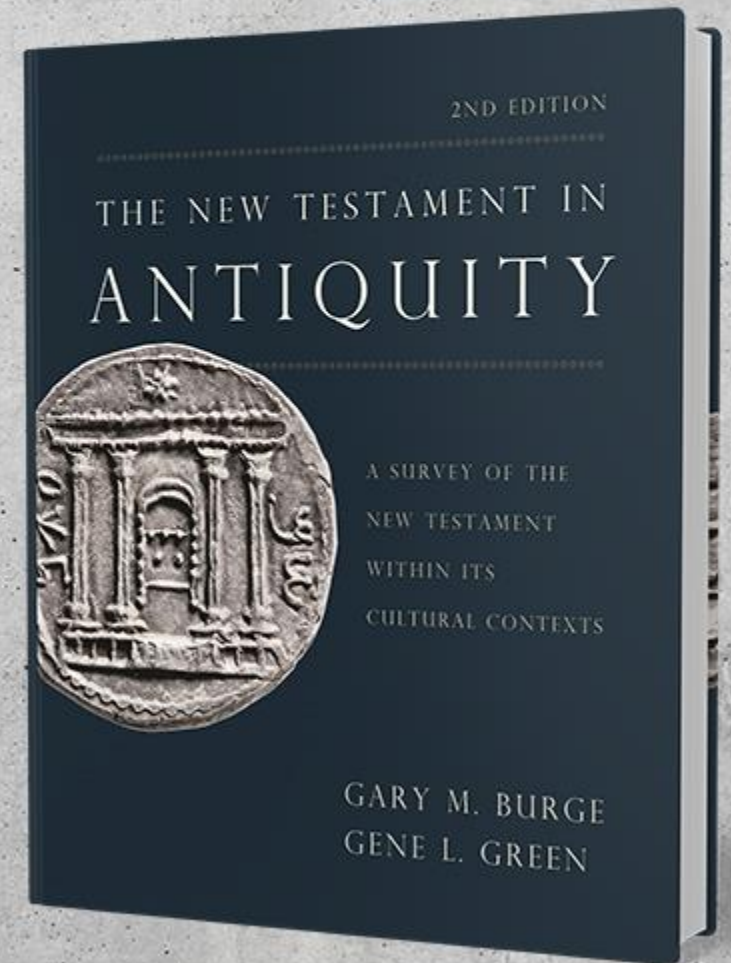


Chapter 9

The Gospel According to Mark



THE SETTING OF MARK

- Mark's story is quick-paced and dramatic.
 - Compelling and with elements of Hellenistic theater, which suggests it was meant to be read aloud
 - Its main concern is wonder found in the good news of "Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (1:1).

- Written for Gentiles who did not know Hebrew or Aramaic
 - Hebrew names and Aramaic words are translated (3:17; 7:34; 15:22, 34), and Jewish purification rituals are outlined (7:1–4).
 - However, the audience does understand many rudiments of the Christian message, such as Pilate, Pharisees, and “rabbi,” which Mark does not feel the need to explain.
 - Clement of Alexandria said Mark wrote his gospel in Rome.



MARK'S LITERARY FORM

- Three confessions of Jesus's identity structure Mark's gospel.
 - The author: "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (1:1).
 - Peter: "'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah'" (8:29).
 - The centurion at the cross: "Surely this man was the Son of God" (15:39).
- Mark wants to persuade us to see Jesus as the Messiah embraced by all the world.
 - Through the corroborating testimony of the leading Jewish apostle and a gentile.

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE (1:1–8:26)

- Prologue (1:1–13)
- The First Phase of the Galilean Ministry (1:14–3:6)
- The Second Phase of the Galilean Ministry (3:7–7:23)
- The Third Phase of the Galilean Ministry (7:24–8:26)

The Prologue (1:1–13)

- Opens with John the Baptist who fulfills the call of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3
 - He is “on stage” to announce the messianic kingdom to come.
 - When Jesus is baptized in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit alights on him, and the Father confirms his identity as the beloved son, we know we have met the hero of Mark’s drama.
- Jesus is then sent by the Spirit into the wilderness (1:12).
 - Mark mentions he was there for forty days with Satan tempting him, wild animals present, and angels ministering to him (1:13).
 - There is no narrative of the temptations (Mt 4:1–11; Lk 4:1–13), which keeps Mark’s story mysterious and rapid.

The First Phase of the Galilean Ministry (1:14–3:6)

- John moves off stage, Jesus moves up stage.
 - John is arrested but Mark does not explain who did it or why.
 - Jesus's message: "The time has come....The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (1:15).
 - Jesus goes north after John's violent removal and imprisonment.
- This new kingdom is a realm of power, whose king bears unique authority to challenge the powers of the world.
 - Jesus calls many to leave careers: they immediately follow him.
 - He teaches with authority, and crowds attend to him.
 - He casts out demons, heals many, and forgives sins.

The Second Phase of the Galilean Ministry (3:7–7:23)

- Jesus’s following takes on a measurable form in the Twelve.
 - Twelve men are listed (3:13–19), which symbolically echoes the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - These “apostles” (6:30) receive inside teaching not given to the public (4:34), and three of them witness breathtaking scenes (raising up a little girl [5:37] and Jesus’s transfiguration [9:2]).
 - They are enabled and given a mission of healing, defeating Satan, and preaching to others just as Jesus does.



- Mark gives a selection of Jesus's parables about the kingdom.
 - The kingdom is like "scattered seed" (4:26), "a grain of mustard seed" (4:31), and Jesus is the sower (4:1-20).
 - Parables were typical of Jesus's teaching style (4:2, 33–34), which often veil to many the true secrets of the kingdom (4:11–12).
- A number of Jesus's apostles are Galilean fishermen.
 - Sometimes he teaches from a boat (4:1).
 - Twice storms arise and Jesus silences the storm (4:35–41; 6:45–52), which shows his power over primeval forces of chaos.
- There is an aggressive posture in Galilee toward Jesus.
 - Mark 6 recounts John's arrest and death under Herod to complete the story and show Herod's animosity to Jesus.
 - Jerusalem's leadership is sending emissaries to interrogate him (7:1).
 - Jesus replies "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions" (7:9).

The Third Phase of the Galilean Ministry (7:24–8:26)

- The Jordan River's inlet to the Sea of Galilee was a barrier.
 - Culturally it separated the Greek Decapolis in the east from the Jewish regions in the west
 - Politically it was the boundary between Philip and Herod



- Jesus moves east to avoid Herod's threats and enters Gentile culture.
 - He heals many and miraculously feeds four thousand people.
 - When Jesus's eating practices are criticized (7:1–5, 14–23) he declares “all foods clean” meaning in the new kingdom the division between “clean and unclean” no longer applies.
 - Jesus moves back and forth between these two regions.



THE SUFFERING OF JESUS IN JERUSALEM (8:27–16:8)

- Jesus travels to Jerusalem (8:27–10:52)
- Jesus enters Jerusalem (11:1–13:37)
- Jesus dies in Jerusalem (14:1–16:8)

Jesus Travels to Jerusalem (8:27–10:52)

- In Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks his followers about his identity.
 - In Philip's region, which was the farthest place away from Jerusalem, Peter correctly says, "You are the Messiah" (8:29).
- After Peter's confession Jesus heads south to Jerusalem.
 - Along the way Jesus redefines their expectations of the Messiah.
 - Peter also has much to learn as when he rebuked Jesus for saying "the Son of Man must suffer and die" (8:31–33) and when he suggested that they linger on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured (9:5).
 - Jesus frequently asks that his identity and works be kept a secret.

- As Jesus redefines the concept of “Messiah,” he also redefines discipleship.
 - The disciples were arguing among themselves over who was the greatest, so if Jesus died they would have a successor (9:33–37).
- Sacrifice is essential to membership in the kingdom.
 - Peter rebuked Jesus for saying the Messiah must suffer and die, and Jesus replied, “Get behind me Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (8:33).
 - “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (8:34).
- Models of discipleship are found in children (9:36; 10:14) and those who suffer such as the blind.
 - They are innocent and plainly ask for what they need, which is mercy and gift, rather than privilege and power.

Jesus Enters Jerusalem (11:1–13:37)

- Mark's mention of Jericho means Jerusalem is close.
 - They are following the normal route of Jewish pilgrims to Jerusalem during the major feasts such as Passover.
- Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem is dramatic.
 - Pilgrims express joy for him as he enters the city, and he expresses outrage at the commercialism of the temple.
 - As he goes between Bethany and Jerusalem he curses a fig tree—a symbol of Israel and its temple—because it bears no fruit (11:11).
 - He debates leading figures in Jewish society and offers the parable of the vineyard and the tenants (12:1–11) to explain how he will be killed by this proud and jealous people.

Jesus Dies in Jerusalem (14:1–16:8)

- Death looms over the story as authorities plan to kill Jesus (12:12) despite his popularity with pilgrims.
 - He is taken from his prayer at the Mount of Olives to the high priest, Caiaphas, and then to the Roman governor, Pilate.
- Mark's crucifixion scene is deeply ironic.
 - Jesus is called "king" six times (15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32) and is mocked three times on the cross.
 - He is buried by a rich man and women disciples, representing the polar opposites of Israel: the pious leadership of the nation and the poor from Galilee.

- Mark's gospel ends with mystery and wonder.

- When the women arrive on Sunday morning, a heavenly messenger says that Jesus is alive, fulfilling his threefold promise of resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:34).

- “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid” (16:8).

- Here Mark's gospel poignantly ends in mystery and wonder and prods us to complete the drama with our own belief.



AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

- Unlike most Hellenistic biographies, none of the gospels mention their author by name.
 - Galen states that it was not necessary to put his name on his works when they were for public consumption “as everyone gave them a different title.”
- The gospels were likely personal documents written for the communities they served.
 - The bishop Papias (2nd Cent) remarked that Mark was the interpreter of Peter who wrote down all that he remembered of the Lord (in Eusebius’s *Eccl. Hist.*, 3:39.15)..

- But who exactly was this Mark who was so close to Peter?
 - Mark was a very common name in the Roman world.
 - In the New Testament only one Mark is mentioned (Phm 24; 2 Tim 4:11; Col 4:10; Acts 15:39; 1 Pt 5:13) or “John whose surname is Mark” (12:12, 25; 15:37).
- From these references a composite personality emerges.
 - Mark was a Greek-speaking convert who knew some Aramaic.
 - He became a Christian and worked closely with Peter.
 - He joined Paul on his first missionary journey.
- Early church tradition says Mark wrote around the time of Peter’s death under Nero, which puts it in the early 60s.
 - If Mark served as a source for Matthew and Luke (70s and 80s) it would have circulated earlier, some say beginning in the 50s or 40s.