The Book of Mark

A Survey of
The First Gospel of
the New Testament
Why the Book of Mark?

• Possibly the most significant writing in the history of Western literature
  • It is the most condensed Gospel we have
  • Earliest Gospel manuscript
  • Answers the basic questions of Christianity
    • “Who is this?” 4:41
  • Addresses basic issues of Discipleship
    • "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!" 9:24
  • One of the most rhetorically powerful writings in the NT
    • Reads like a story (early Church narrative)
Ground Rules for Reading Mark:

• Rule #1 – CROT Criticism
  • A Close Reading Of the Text only!
  • Temptation is to Harmonize the Gospels and see what the similarities/differences are
  • This destroys the unique witness of Mark:
  • Creates a reading which never existed
    • If Mark was intended to be read in light of Matthew (or vice-versa), the writer would have made this clear
  • Does not take seriously the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiration.
  • We only do what the text tells us to do!
Ground Rules for Reading Mark:

• Rule #2 - Read Mark ONLY When We Read Mark!
  • Mark was not written to be analyzed apart from its unique purpose
  • Not written to be compared to and against other Gospels
  • Not written to provide a historically, mathematically testable account that would answer the objections of “modern” thinking.
  • Western minds have a hard time thinking like Eastern authors. The main goal is to let the text shape YOU, not the other way around.
Ground Rules for Reading Mark:

• Rule #3 – Each Gospel serves its own purpose and unique witness.
  • The church intentionally preserved four gospels, not one.
  • Individuals and congregations that preserved only one “harmonized” Gospel or kept just one Gospel had an incomplete view of Christ and eventually lapsed into heresy.
  • The Gospels are meant to contribute different sides of the same prism!
  • We will look at one side when reading Mark.
Five Key Features of Mark:

1. Narrator – voice of the storyteller; point of view, overarching beliefs of narrative, storytelling technique
2. Setting – The context within the story; depiction of cosmos, social world, temporal and spatial contexts (time, distance)
3. Plot – Events; order in the narrative, sequential relations, turning points and breakthroughs, development and resolution of conflicts
Five Key Features of Mark: Continued

4. Characters – Actors; motives, relationships, changes and development
5. Rhetoric – Persuasion; what the narrative does to readers
Problems WE Have With Mark:

• Imperfect knowledge of Koine Greek, which Mark used when he wrote
  • Makes it harder to ‘nail down’ some of the words and meanings (context)

• Cultural Issues
  • Since we didn’t live in Mark’s time, we don’t know all of the ‘ins and outs’ of living in that culture

• When you write a letter, you have an intended recipient, with your own ideas and thoughts you want to get across.
  • This is the gap we must bridge when reading Mark (and that’s HARD!!)
Which Mark Are We Talking About?

- "Mark" in the New Testament
  - Philemon 24: mentioned in greeting.
  - Colossians 4:10: Listed as one sending greetings; described as “cousin of Barnabas”
- 2 Timothy 4:11: Paul asks for Mark to be brought to him.
- 1 Peter 5:13: Described as “son” of Peter; with Peter in “Babylon” = Rome
Which Mark Are We Talking About?

- John Mark “Mark, surnamed John”:
  - Acts 12:12: Mother’s house is where Peter goes after imprisonment in Jerusalem
  - Acts 12:25: Accompanies Barnabas and Saul from Jerusalem after their relief visit there.
  - Acts 13:13: Accompanies Paul to Cyprus, but after traveling to Perga and Pamphylia, he returns to Jerusalem. (Only referred to as John)
  - Acts 15:37-39: Paul rejects John as a coworker on his second missionary journey because he “deserted” them earlier; Barnabas took him along back to Cyprus.
Which Mark Are We Talking About?

- We know it is not the apostle ‘Mark’
- It is possible that ‘Mark’ and ‘John Mark’ are the same person
- As Christians we recognize the TEXT as inspired and as authoritative, not the author.
- So, in the end, does the authority of Mark’s Gospel depend on who Mark was? Not really.
- This is why the early Church wasn’t fooled by all the ‘gnostic gospels’ floating around. They had a “high-profile” name attached but had tons of errors about Christ and His mission:
  - Ex: Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary Magdalene, etc.
- It takes more than a ‘name’ to make a Gospel!
The Implied Author of Mark:

There are examples of an implied author in other stories in literature (Moby Dick, etc.). He behaves like a narrator of a play.

Key things about the implied author:
1. Anonymous - No appeal made to the author's authority (different from, e.g., Paul)
2. Not involved in the events of the story - speaks in the third person

Mark 1:4 “And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”
The Implied Author of Mark:

3. Not limited to time and space constraints of the story or characters in it
Mark 14:66 “While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by.”

4. Able to describe characters' thoughts, feelings, and sensory experiences
Mark 5:29 “Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.”
The Implied Author of Mark:

5. Provides “asides” to assist the reader:
   • Explains customs, translates words, etc.
Mark 7:19 “For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")"

6. Lets the reader in on privileged information
Mark 1:10-11 “As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."
The Implied Author of Mark:

- The implied author leads the reader to adopt certain attitudes toward the characters, events, and teachings.

- Not everything is explained, however

- The reader is left to come to his/her own conclusions regarding appropriate attitudes and actions.

- Mark is shaping us towards the right conclusions
Who Is The Implied Reader in Mark?

Reader probably:
1. Knew Greek, but was better in Latin
   • Had little to no knowledge of Aramaic or Jewish customs

How do we know this?
• Because Mark explains Aramaic terms in his Greek text.
• He uses Latin words in the Greek when he describes something Roman, like quadrans, or ‘copper coins’ in English (12:42).
• Uses the word census and other Latin words 13 times, and uses the word praetorium (15:16) when he talks of Roman courts.
Who Is The Implied Reader In Mark?

2. The Reader accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative
   • Already in 1:2, an Old Testament text is presented as something that speaks about the life of Jesus Christ.
   • Jesus justifies his own teaching on the basis of the Old Testament, e.g., 4:12
Who Is The Implied Reader In Mark?

3. The Reader was familiar with the life of Jesus; probably already a Christian
   • Uses title “Christ” in a historic sense
     • Jesus is and was the ‘Christ’
   • On the other hand, contemporary Judaism was still seeking a future messiah
   • Assumes knowledge of events and teachings familiar to Christians; does not fully explain, e.g., Pentecost (1:8), Temptation of Jesus (1:12-13)
   • Mark assumes his audience already knows the Jesus story!
Who Is The Implied Reader In Mark?

3. The Reader was vaguely familiar with Judaism, but not from a Jewish background:
   - Unaware that Jews have hand washing rituals:
     - Mark 7:3 “The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.”
   - Gentiles highlighted:
     - Temple a “house of prayer for all people” 11:17
     - Gentile woman in “victorious” dialogue with Jesus (7:24-30)
Who Is The Implied Reader In Mark?

- First accepted confession of faith comes from centurion (15:39)
- Jewish/Gentile relations and obligations of Gentiles to Old Testament laws an issue; cf. Romans
- Persecution was an issue for the Reader: References in chapters 8, 9, 13 – May point to a Roman background during time of Nero, AD 64

SO, who was Mark’s implied Reader?
Who Is The Implied Reader In Mark?

• Educated Gentiles
• Gentiles who had contact with Jews and were vaguely familiar with their rituals and customs
• Gentiles who were already Christian and familiar with the story of Jesus Christ.
• Lived in a time when Christians were persecuted.

• Does this sound A LOT like us!?!?
• How do we fit with the implied Reader?
• What do we add to the mix that we need to be aware of?
• This is why we work hard to understand Mark’s intentions (and Greek & Hebrew).