



# The Gospel of Mark

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## Context & Characteristics

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# An Example Of Context

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“This nation asks for action, and action now.”

- Says who?
- What nation?
- What kind of action?
- Why now?
- Franklin Roosevelt
- First inaugural address, 1933
- 3 ½ years into the Great Depression



# Who?

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✦ Theory 1: A man named Mark who did not know Jesus personally but was a close associate of Peter. (Eusebius; 1 Peter 5:13; Acts 12:25)

✦ Problems:

- ◆ Peter isn't mentioned much.
- ◆ Mentions of Peter are fairly negative.
- ◆ Theological themes and emphases closer to Paul than to Peter.

# Who?

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✦ Theory 2: A man named Mark who did not know Jesus personally but was a close associate of Paul. (Philemon 24; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11)

✦ Problems:

- ✦ Paul showed little interest in recounting earthly ministry of Jesus.
- ✦ Paul could not be source of narrative material.

# Who?

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- ✦ A first-century Christian.
- ✦ No reason to doubt the name “Mark”.
- ✦ Very likely a close associate of one or more of the apostles.
- ✦ Apparently had access to eyewitnesses but was probably not an eyewitness himself.  
(Mark 15:21 et al.)



# Where?

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- ✦ Community was apparently mostly Gentile (7:3-4) but familiar with Christian appropriations from Judaism (1:2).
- ✦ Theory 1: Rome
  - ◆ Connections to Peter and Paul
  - ◆ Would explain need to clarify Jewish Palestinian practices
  - ◆ Would explain concern with persecution (13:11-13)
- ✦ Theory 2: Galilee
  - ◆ Gospel has a strong focus on Galilee (Ch. 1-9; 16:7)
  - ◆ Few references to other areas of Palestine
- ✦ Galilean community seems to be most likely of the two.

# When?

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- ✦ Around the time of the Jewish War with Rome (66-70 A.D.)
- ✦ Theme of suffering/persecution
- ✦ Little reference to tensions with synagogue communities



# Why?

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- ✦ Mark's purpose: to lay claim to the tradition in a particular way (cf. Mark 7:14-23, Matt. 15:10-20)
- ✦ Providing historical grounding for an emerging theological system
- ✦ Not co-opting Jesus to advance a particular theological agenda
- ✦ Attempting to show that a particular theological agenda is grounded in the ministry and words of Jesus



# Why?

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## ✦ Specific concerns:

- ✦ Openness of Christianity to Gentiles while maintaining Jewish roots
  - (7:24-30; cf. 8:1-9, 6:30-44; 1:2-3)
- ✦ Strengthening of those whose faith is in danger
  - (4:3-9, 13-20; 8:34-38; 13:9-13; 14:32-42)
- ✦ Right Priorities
  - (10:17-31; 12:41-44)
- ✦ False Prophets
  - (13:22)



# The “What”

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## Characteristics of Mark’s Gospel

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# The “What”

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- ✦ Mark crafts his narrative in unique ways in order to convey his theological and Christological understandings
  - ✦ These unique features include both *what* Mark reports and *how* he reports it

# 1. An Unusual Sense Of Urgency

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- ✦ Things happen very quickly
- ✦ Jesus' ministry seems to last only a few weeks
- ✦ “*And immediately...*”
  - ◆ Used 42 times in Mark; only once in Luke and 17 times in all of the rest of the NT
- ✦ Sense of urgency intended to apply to what is still to come as well (13:30-37)



## 2. Emphasis On Deeds Over Words

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- ✦ Compared with the other Gospels, the acts of Jesus take up proportionately more space
- ✦ Teaching is still significant, and is often illustrated by actions
- ✦ Mark actually tells fewer miracle stories than the others, but the higher proportion of action accounts leads to a much stronger impression of Jesus as a miracle worker

# 3. Dominant Passion Narrative

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- ✦ Fast-paced, urgent account slows down noticeably in chapters 14-16
- ✦ Day-by-day, sometimes hour-by-hour account
- ✦ Numerous references to coming Passion
  - ◆ (2:20; 12:6-8; 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34)
- ✦ Plotting of enemies begins much sooner
  - ◆ (3:6; Matt. 12:14; Luke 19:47)
- ✦ “A passion narrative with an extended introduction” –Martin Kahler, 1892



## 4. Less-Refined Linguistic Style

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- ✦ *Koine* Greek, not classical or Attic Greek
- ✦ All four Gospels written in *Koine*, the common language
- ✦ Mark is just a little more common
- ✦ Mark's gift for storytelling, however, makes his accounts some of the most vivid and detailed

# 5. Effective Use Of Rhetoric

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✦ Mark uses very sophisticated literary devices to hold the story together and to move it along

- ◆ Narrative Anticipations

- ◆ Two-Step Progressions

- ◆ Intercalations (“Markan Sandwiches”)

- Insertions of one story within another; two similar stories separated by a seemingly unrelated story
- Intent is for the reader to connect the “meat” story with the “bread” stories
- See Mark 6:7-31; 11:12-20



# A Fig & Temple Sandwich: Mark 11:12-20

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<sup>12</sup>On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

<sup>13</sup>Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup>He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. <sup>15</sup>Then they came to Jerusalem. And he

entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; <sup>16</sup>and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. <sup>17</sup>He was teaching and saying,

"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." <sup>18</sup>And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. <sup>19</sup>And

when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. <sup>20</sup>In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.

# 6. Geographical Focus On Galilee

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- ✦ Ch. 1-9 set in Galilee, with few references to other locations
- ✦ Ch. 10-16 shift abruptly to Judea/Jerusalem
- ✦ Finale: Return to Galilee (16:7)



# 7. A Very Human Jesus

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- ✦ Jesus becomes tired and hungry (6:31; 11:12)
- ✦ Wide range of emotions
  - ◆ Pity (1:41)
  - ◆ Anger (3:5)
  - ◆ Wonder (6:6)
  - ◆ Compassion (6:34)
  - ◆ Indignation (10:14)
  - ◆ Love (10:21)
- ✦ Knowledge and power are extraordinary, but sometimes limited (6:5; 8:22-26; 13:32)

# 8. The Messianic Secret

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- ✦ Jesus' teaching is "the secret of the reign of God" (4:11)
- ✦ Parables are to obscure meaning, not to illumine (4:10-12)
- ✦ Commands to "say nothing to anyone"
  - ◆ (1:43-44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9)
- ✦ Silencing of demons
  - ◆ (1:23-25, 34; 3:11-12)



# 9. Failures Of The Disciples

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- ✦ Dense Disciples Don't Digest Didactics (8:14-21)
- ✦ Opposite to Jesus in their thinking (8:33; 9:33-34; 10:37-38)
- ✦ Unable to live up to expectations
- ✦ Can't keep watch with Jesus
- ✦ Bold statements, weak deeds
  - ◆ Betrayal by Judas
  - ◆ Denial by Peter
  - ◆ Abandonment by others

# Next Week:

## Key Theological Emphases

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### ✦ The Reign Of God

- It has come near!

### ✦ Son Of Humanity/Son Of God

- Will the real Jesus please stand up?

### ✦ Conflicting Points Of View

- “It’s like double vision...”

### ✦ Centrality Of The Cross

- All roads lead to Calvary