

# MARK

ROBERT H. STEIN



Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

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## Series Preface

The chief concern of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT) is to provide, within the framework of informed evangelical thought, commentaries that blend scholarly depth with readability, exegetical detail with sensitivity to the whole, and attention to critical problems with theological awareness. We hope thereby to attract the interest of a fairly wide audience, from the scholar who is looking for a thoughtful and independent examination of the text to the motivated lay Christian who craves a solid but accessible exposition.

Nevertheless, a major purpose is to address the needs of pastors and others involved in the preaching and exposition of the Scriptures as the uniquely inspired Word of God. This consideration affects directly the parameters of the series. For example, serious biblical expositors cannot afford to depend on a superficial treatment that avoids the difficult questions, but neither are they interested in encyclopedic commentaries that seek to cover every conceivable issue that may arise. Our aim therefore is to focus on problems that have a direct bearing on the meaning of the text (although selected technical details are treated in the additional notes).

Similarly, a special effort is made to avoid treating exegetical questions for their own sake, that is, in relative isolation from the thrust of the argument as a whole. This effort may involve (at the discretion of the individual contributors) abandoning the verse-by-verse approach in favor of an exposition that focuses on the paragraph as the main unit of thought. In all cases, however, the commentaries will stress the development of the argument and explicitly relate each passage to what precedes and follows it so as to identify its function in context as clearly as possible.

We believe, moreover, that a responsible exegetical commentary must take fully into account the latest scholarly research, regardless of its source. The attempt to do this in the context of a conservative theological tradition presents certain challenges, and in the past the results have not always been commendable. In some cases, evangelicals appear to make use of critical scholarship not for the purpose of genuine interaction but only to dismiss it. In other cases, the interaction glides over into assimilation, theological distinctives are ignored or suppressed, and the end product cannot be differentiated from works that arise from a fundamentally different starting point.

The contributors to this series attempt to avoid these pitfalls. On the one hand, they do not consider traditional opinions to be sacrosanct, and they are certainly committed to do justice to the biblical text whether or not it supports such opinions. On the other hand, they will not quickly abandon a long-standing view, if there is persuasive evidence in its favor, for the sake of fashionable theories. What is more important, the contributors share a belief in the trustworthiness and essential unity of Scripture. They also consider that the historic formulations of Christian doctrine, such as the ecumenical creeds and many of the documents originating in the sixteenth-century Reformation, arose from a legitimate reading of Scripture, thus providing a proper framework for its further interpretation. No doubt, the use of such a starting point sometimes results in the imposition of a foreign construct on the text, but we deny that it must necessarily do so or that the writers who claim to approach the text without prejudices are invulnerable to the same danger.

Accordingly, we do not consider theological assumptions—from which, in any case, no commentator is free—to be obstacles to biblical interpretation. On the contrary, an exegete who hopes to understand the apostle Paul in a theological vacuum might just as easily try to interpret Aristotle without regard for the philosophical framework of his whole work or without having recourse to the subsequent philosophical categories that make possible a meaningful contextualization of his thought. It must be emphasized, however, that the contributors to the present series come from a variety of theological traditions and that they do not all have identical views with regard to the proper implementation of these general principles. In the end, all that really matters is whether the series succeeds in representing the original text accurately, clearly, and meaningfully to the contemporary reader.

Shading has been used to assist the reader in locating salient sections of the treatment of each passage: introductory comments and concluding summaries. Textual variants in the Greek text are signaled in the author's translation by means of half-brackets around the relevant word or phrase (e.g., "Gerasenes"), thereby alerting the reader to turn to the additional notes at the end of each exegetical unit for a discussion of the textual problem. The documentation uses the author-date method, in which the basic reference consists of author's surname + year + page number(s): Fitzmyer 1992: 58. The only exceptions to this system are well-known reference works (e.g., BDAG, LSJ, *TDNT*). Full publication data and a complete set of indexes can be found at the end of the volume.

Robert Yarbrough  
Robert H. Stein



## Author's Preface

The format followed in this commentary divides each section being discussed into four parts to assist the reader: (1) First, in gray shading, is a discussion of the context in which the section is found, both the immediate context and the extended context. This context, given by Mark, provides the means for understanding the present passage and how it fits the message of the entire Gospel. The larger sections of Mark (1:1–13; 1:14–3:6; 3:7–6:6a; 6:6b–8:21; 8:22–10:52; 11:1–13:37; and 14:1–16:8) are also discussed at the beginning of each of these sections. (2) Second, a literal translation is given, at the expense of fluidity, in order to better assist in the discussion of words and phrases in the comment section. Italics are used to indicate emphasis in the original. (3) Within the comment section, the discussion is further divided into logical subsections. Several verses are frequently included together as a subsection, but at times a subsection contains only a single verse. Here in the commentary proper are discussed the words, phrases, sentences, and information that make up the passage. Occasionally, in the comment section, an important theme of Mark is discussed at length, and later in the commentary, when this theme comes up again, the reader will be referred to the original discussion by “see” followed by the passage (for example, “see 1:45”). (4) The fourth part of the discussion of each section, titled “Summary” and also in gray shading, summarizes the Markan message. Here I delineate Mark’s main emphases in the section. Here, more than anywhere else, I seek to complete the sentence “I, Mark, have told you this account/saying of Jesus because. . . .” The focus here is not on the information found in the passage (whether about Jesus, John the Baptist, the Pharisees, first-century Judaism, the geography of Judea and Galilee, etc.) but rather on what Mark is seeking to teach his readers through the information he has provided in the passage. Consequently, the primary goal of this commentary is not to construct a life of Jesus of Nazareth but to ascertain the meaning of Mark, that is, what the second evangelist sought to teach by his Gospel. In his inspired inscripturation of this meaning by the words and content he chose, Mark’s original audience and readers ever since have found a word from God.

This commentary was not written in a vacuum but owes a great debt to the many scholars who over the centuries have contributed to the advancement of our understanding of the Gospel according to Mark. It is hoped that the present work will serve in some way to add to this understanding. I wish to thank the many people who have assisted in the writing of this commentary. These include Gloria Metz, faculty secretary at Bethel Seminary, who for twenty years has been a God-given gift to me and has saved me from the many demons lurking within my computer; James M. Hamilton Jr., who as a graduate student carefully read various parts of the manuscript and laboriously checked their references; my students who through the years have challenged and sharpened my thinking as we worked our way through the study of Mark; Bethel University, Bethel Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where it has been my privilege to teach for over thirty-five years; Robert W. Yarbrough, my coeditor of the BECNT series, whose suggestions have made this a better work than it would have been otherwise; Baker Academic for the many years in which we have collaborated in the publishing of some nine works; and above all to my wife, Joan, who has patiently encouraged me and willingly put off various plans over the years so this work could be finished. My gratitude for her partnership in this and my other works can never be overstated. She has always been and will always be the love of my life and my partner in ministry.

# Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

## Authorship

Like the other canonical Gospels, the author Mark does not identify himself and makes no claim to be an eyewitness (cf. Luke 1:2; contrast John 21:24). The present titles associated with the four Gospels are not original but were added later (see below). Why the Gospels are anonymous is uncertain. Some have suggested that this may have been due to fear of persecution, but this can be neither proven nor disproven. What is reasonably certain is that this indicates there was no need for the authors to identify themselves. In the case of the second Gospel, which for the sake of convenience I will simply call “Mark,” the author was well known to his original readers and part of the same Christian community (Marcus 2000: 17). The lack of identification may also be due to the fact that Mark and the other Gospel writers did not think that what they wrote was “their Gospel.” Mark is not the Gospel of the “Good News of Mark” but the “Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). The later titles associated with the canonical Gospels recognize this, for they do not describe the four Gospels as “The Gospel of Matthew,” “. . . of Mark,” “. . . of Luke,” and “. . . of John,” but rather as “The Gospel according to Matthew,” “. . . according to Mark,” “. . . according to Luke,” and “. . . according to John” (Hengel 2000: 48–53).

Evidence for the Markan authorship of the Second Gospel can be divided into two types, external evidence (tradition) and internal evidence (what we can learn about the author from the text of Mark itself). The evidence of the tradition supporting Markan authorship can be described in general as early, universal, and extensive. The earliest and most important involves the testimony of Papias found in Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.1–17). Eusebius, the foremost early church historian, writing in the early fourth century, quotes from Papias’s now lost *Interpretation of the Oracles of the Lord*.

Mark became Peter’s interpreter [ἑρμηνευτής, *hermēneutēs*] 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 thus writing down single points as he remembered them.

1. The identity of the author of the Fourth Gospel as the “beloved disciple” in John 21:20–24 is not made by the author but by his followers, as “*we* know that *his* testimony is true” (21:24c, italics added) indicates.

For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them. (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.15)<sup>2</sup>

According to Eusebius, Papias received this information from John the Elder and Aristion (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.4). Since John the Elder died shortly after AD 100 (Hengel 2000: 65–66), the tradition Papias is quoting must date back to the last decades of the first century and near to the time when Mark was written (65–70).<sup>3</sup> This is supported by Eusebius’s statement that Papias became famous during the time of Polycarp (d. ca. 155) and Ignatius (d. ca. 107; *Eccl. Hist.* 3.36.1–2; cf. also 3.39.1), as well as Papias’s association with Clement of Rome (d. ca. 100; *Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.1). That Eusebius’s discussion of Papias comes before his discussion of the persecution under Trajan (ca. 110) in *Eccl. Hist.* 4 also supports a late-first-century date (Yarbrough 1983: 186–90; Orchard 1984: 393–403; Gundry 1993: 1027). Finally, if we acknowledge Papias’s acquaintance with the daughters of “Philip the apostle” (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.9; cf. Acts 21:8–9), this also supports a late-first-century date. Thus the testimony of Papias is early (within thirty years of the writing of the Gospel of Mark) and at most only one generation removed from eyewitness tradition (the apostles—John the Elder and Aristion—Papias)<sup>4</sup> and was probably written down by him in the first decade of the second century.<sup>5</sup>

Other traditions concerning the authorship of Mark include the following:

*The Titles of Mark (70–100)*. The titles of this Gospel found in most Greek MSS involve a longer form (The Gospel according to Mark, εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Μάρκον, *euangelion kata Markon*; A D L W Θ f<sup>13</sup>) and a shorter

2. The Greek and Latin texts of Eusebius and the following quotations can be found at the back of Aland 2001. English translations of these and other early church references to Mark as the author of the Second Gospel can be found in C. Black 1994: 80–182.

3. “There is wide scholarly agreement that Mark was written in the late 60s or just after 70” (R. Brown 1997: 164, italics his).

4. A statement of Papias found in Eusebius suggests that he may have had direct access to eyewitness testimony: “For unlike most I did not rejoice in them who say much, but in them who teach the truth, nor in them who recount the commandments of others, but in them who repeated those given to the faith by the Lord and derived from truth itself; but if ever anyone came who had followed the presbyters [i.e., ‘elders’], I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord’s disciples, had said, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord’s disciples, were saying. For I did not suppose that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice” (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.3–4). It is possible to interpret the quotation of Eusebius to mean that “Papias was auditor of the apostle John, the Lord’s disciple” (C. Black 1994: 87), but Eusebius himself seems to place Aristion and the presbyter John after the apostolic eyewitnesses and states that Papias did not have direct access to the apostles but received their words via Aristion and the presbyter John (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.2, 6). For the view that Aristion and the presbyter John were the last of the eyewitnesses, see Bauckham 2006: 15–21.

5. The only real evidence in the tradition that would date the testimony of Papias later comes from Philip of Side, who wrote a century after Eusebius (ca. 430 versus ca. 324) and was “notoriously unreliable” (Gundry 1993: 1028). Despite various attempts to read a later anti-gnostic tendenz in Papias’s writings, there is no clear anti-gnostic polemic in Papias (Yarbrough 1983: 182–83; Hengel 1985: 48).

form (According to Mark, κατὰ Μᾶρκον, *kata Markon*; § B). Both these unusual forms consciously avoid the genitive of authorship (“of Mark” [Μάρκου, *Markou*]) to emphasize that what follows is not the Gospel of Mark but the (one and only) Gospel according to Mark’s account (Hengel 1985: 65–66). The unanimity of the κατὰ Μᾶρκον superscription in one form or another argues against a mid-second-century origin, and the Papias quotation (see above) seems to presuppose its existence both for Mark and for Matthew (von Campenhausen 1972: 173n123; Hengel 1985: 69), so that the association of κατὰ Μᾶρκον with the Second Gospel already existed in the late first century. The antiquity of this inscription is also confirmed by its naming a nonapostle, Mark, as its author, for, as the apocryphal Gospels indicate, by the mid-second century it was popular to ascribe apostolic authorship to Gospel-like works. It is furthermore quite unlikely that the original Gospel of Mark simply fell anonymously and unannounced into the hands of its first readers. Therefore some sort of title was probably associated with Mark from the very beginning (Hengel 1985: 74–84; 2000: 50–56; contra Marcus 2000: 17–18).<sup>6</sup>

*The Anti-Marcionite Prologue* (ca. 150–180). “Mark related, who was called ‘Stumpfinger’ because for the size of the rest of his body he had fingers that were too short. He was the interpreter of Peter. After Peter’s death the same man wrote this gospel in the regions of Italy” (Grant 1946: 92). The negative comment about Mark’s “stumpfingers” has every appearance of being a historically reliable tradition.<sup>7</sup> It is most unlikely that secondary tradition would demean Mark by such a description. Rather, it is more likely that it would have sought to extol the Gospel writer by adding something like “who was called ‘Beautiful Hands,’ for with them he would write ‘the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.’”

*Justin Martyr* (ca. 150). Justin quotes Mark 3:17 (“the sons of Zebedee, to that of Boanerges, which means ‘sons of thunder’”) and refers to this being found in the *Memoirs of Peter* (*Dial.* 106.3).

*Irenaeus* (ca. 170). “But after their departure [ἔξοδον, *exodon*] Mark, the disciple and interpreter [ἑρμηνευτής, *hermēneutēs*] of Peter, himself also handed over to us, in writing, the things preached by Peter” (*Haer.* 3.1.1; C. Black 1994: 99–100).

*Clement of Alexandria* (ca. 180). “When Peter had publicly preached the word at Rome, and by the Spirit had proclaimed the Gospel, that those present, who were many, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed him for a long time and remembered what had been spoken, to make a record of what was said; and that he did this, and distributed the Gospel

6. Hengel (1985: 81) points out that as soon as a church community possessed two different Gospels in their church library, there would have been a need of titles to distinguish them.

7. Mark is also referred to as “Stumpfinger” in Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 7.30.1 (C. Black 1994: 116; the reference is found in ANF 5:112 [7.18.1]).

among those that asked him. And that when the matter came to Peter's knowledge he neither strongly forbade it nor urged it forward" (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 6.14.6–7 LCL).<sup>8</sup> Although Clement of Alexandria refers to Mark writing his Gospel while Peter was still alive, the great majority of early witnesses claim that he wrote it after Peter's death.

*Origen* (ca. 200). "Secondly, that according to Mark, who wrote it in accordance with Peter's instructions, whom also Peter acknowledged as his son in the catholic epistle, speaking in these terms: 'She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Mark my son'" (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 6.25.5 LCL).

*Tertullian* (ca. 200). "That gospel which Mark edited may be affirmed to be of Peter, whose interpreter Mark was" (*Against Marcion* 4.5; Barclay 1976: 121).

*Eusebius* (ca. 324). "They say that this Mark was the first to be sent to preach in Egypt the Gospel which he had also put into writing, and was the first to establish churches in Alexandria itself. The number of men and women who were there converted at the first attempt was so great, and their asceticism was so extraordinary philosophic, that Philo thought it right to describe their conduct and assemblies and meals and all the rest of their manner of life. Tradition says that he came to Rome in the time of Claudius to speak to Peter, who was at that time preaching to those there" (*Eccl. Hist.* 2.16–17.1 LCL).

*Jerome* (ca. 400). "Mark, the interpreter of the apostle Peter, and the first bishop of the church of Alexandria, who himself had not seen the Lord, the very Saviour, is the second who published a gospel; but he narrated those things he had heard his master preaching more in accordance with the trustworthiness of the things performed than in order" (*Commentary on Matthew*, prologue 6; Barclay 1976: 121).

From the above it is evident that the attribution of the authorship of the Second Gospel to John Mark is early and widespread. As for the internal evidence found in the Gospel itself, although it is not able to demonstrate that its author was John Mark, it lends indirect support to the tradition that he was its author and that it was written for the Christian community in Rome. That the author knew Greek (cf. Acts 12:25–13:13; 15:36–39) does not, of course, narrow the field of possible authors a great deal, but that he also knew Hebrew/Aramaic (Mark 3:17, 22; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34) fits well the John Mark of the tradition, whose home was in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). That he knew Jewish customs and religious groups, though his audience did not (Mark 7:1–4; 14:12; 15:42), also supports the tradition, as does his explanation of all the Semitic expressions,<sup>9</sup> and his knowledge of various Jewish parties and

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8. In *Eccl. Hist.* 2.15.1–2 Peter is said to have "authorized Mark's work."

9. Contra Koester (1990: 289) and Schnelle (1998: 200), who argue that the author of Mark was not a Jewish Christian. Cf., however, Hengel 1985: 46, "I do not know any other work in

groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, scribes, priests, chief priests, high priests, etc.). The presence of various “Latinisms” (see below, “Audience”) also supports the tradition that Mark was the author of the Second Gospel and that he wrote it for the Christian community in Rome (Gundry 1993: 1043–44). In summarizing the internal evidence concerning the authorship of the second Gospel, we can conclude that it fits well the tradition of the early church that it was written by John Mark to the church in Rome.<sup>10</sup>

Critical scholars have raised a number of objections to the above arguments. One involves the reliability of the Papias tradition in claiming that Mark was the “interpreter” of Peter and wrote down in his Gospel what he had heard Peter say. There is no clear evidence that Mark recorded autobiographical stories spoken by the apostle. Yet this argument, which assumes that the well-rounded form of the traditions in Mark could not come from an eyewitness, loses sight of the fact that repeated storytelling even by an eyewitness would become more polished and smooth over time. If the stories spoken by Peter in the 60s had been reported by him for over thirty years (cf. Luke 1:2; Acts 1:21–22; 2:42; 4:2, 13, 19–20; 5:29–32; 6:4; 8:25; 10:22, 33, 39–43; etc.) and he had repeated them once a month, this would mean that he had repeated the same stories over 360 times by the time Mark heard them in the 60s. If he had repeated them only once every six months, he would have repeated them over sixty times. Surely by then they would have become more “rounded” and stereotyped! In addition, if the author of the Second Gospel is the John Mark of Acts 12:12, he would have heard these traditions thirty years earlier and been involved in passing them on in his own ministry (cf. Acts 12:25–13:13; 15:36–39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24; 1 Pet. 5:13). We should also note that Papias refers to Mark as Peter’s ἐρμηνευτής, or “interpreter,” not as his amanuensis or “secretary” (cf. C. Black 1994: 89–91). Thus it is incorrect to assume that if the Second Gospel stems from “personal reminiscence, we would expect more detail” (Marcus 2000: 23). On the other hand, the amount of material found in Mark concerning Peter (1:16–18, 29–31, 36; 3:16; 5:37–43; 8:29, 31–33; 9:2–8; 10:28–31; 11:21; 13:3–37; 14:27–31, 32–42, 54, 66–72; 16:7) fits well with a tie between the author of the Second Gospel and Petrine testimony.

Another argument raised against Markan authorship involves supposed errors in geography found in the Gospel (Niederwimmer 1967: 178–83; P. Parker 1983: 68–70). The most frequently cited is 7:31, “And having departed from

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Greek which has as many Aramaic or Hebrew words and formulae in so narrow a space as does the second Gospel.”

10. The most vigorous attempt to associate Peter with the Gospel of Mark involving internal evidence from the Gospel itself is that of C. Turner (1925; 1926; 1928). He argues that “in all these passages [1:21, 29; 5:1, 38; 6:53, 54; 8:22; 9:14, 30, 33; 10:32, 46; 11:1, 12, 15, 20, 27; 14:18, 22, 26, 32] Mark’s third person plural may be reasonably understood as representing a first person plural of Peter’s discourses” (C. Turner 1928: 54). Cf. Manson (1962: 42), who, following C. Turner, sees Peter as the source for 1:16–39; 2:1–14; 3:13–19; 4:35–5:43; 6:7–13, 30–56; 8:14–9:48; 10:32–35; 11:1–33; 13:3–4, 32–37; 14:17–50, 53–54, 66–72. Cf. also Bauckham 2006: 155–82.

the regions of Tyre, he again came to the Sea of Galilee by way of Sidon and through the middle of the Decapolis.” If one draws a line from Tyre to Sidon to the Sea of Galilee to the Decapolis, this involves a strange journey indeed. A comparable trip (in direction, not distance) would be to travel from Portland to Denver via Seattle and the Great Plains (Marcus 2000: 472). Such a trip envisions leaving Tyre and proceeding 22 miles north to Sidon, then southeast from Sidon to the Decapolis, and then northwest to the Sea of Galilee. This supposedly reveals that the author of Mark was ignorant of Palestinian geography and could not have been the John Mark of Acts 12:12, whose home was Jerusalem and who journeyed with Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 12:25–13:4). A similar alleged error in geography is found in Mark 11:1. Here the journey from Jericho (10:46–52) to Jerusalem, Bethphage, and Bethany, if understood as occurring in that order, would be strange indeed, for if one proceeds from Jericho, the order of progression is Bethany (the eastern side of the Mount of Olives), Bethphage (the summit of the Mount of Olives), and Jerusalem (west of the Mount of Olives). The order in both these instances, however, reflects not an ignorance of Palestinian or Judean geography, as some suggest, but rather Mark’s desire to list the ultimate goal of the journey from Tyre (i.e., the Sea of Galilee) and Jericho (i.e., Jerusalem) first and the intervening places next (Sidon and the Decapolis; Bethpage<sup>11</sup> and Bethany; see 7:31 and 11:1).<sup>12</sup> Consequently, these alleged geographical errors found in the Second Gospel are not evidence of Mark’s ignorance of Palestinian geography but rather reflect various critics’ misunderstanding of the Markan style used to describe such journeys.

Still another alleged error on the part of the author of Mark that supposedly prevents him from being the John Mark of Acts 12:12 is his ignorance of Jewish laws and customs (P. Parker 1983: 73–75).<sup>13</sup> In 7:3–4 Mark comments parenthetically, “(For the Pharisees and all the Jews, unless they wash their hands with the fist, do not eat because of holding to the tradition of the elders, and [when they come] from the marketplace unless they wash themselves, they do not eat, and there are many other traditions they have received and observe [lit. ‘received to hold’] [such as] the washings of cups and pitchers and bronze vessels).” This is not literally true, for such washing rites were not universally practiced by all Jews. Consequently, 7:3–4 is not technically correct

11. Bethphage is probably mentioned before Bethany because it is closer to Jerusalem and may reflect the order of the journey from Jerusalem through Bethphage to Bethany in 11:11. Cf., however, J. Edwards (2002: 334), who argues that the ancient road from Jericho to Jerusalem passed through Bethphage before Bethany.

12. Another supposed geographical error in Mark is found in 10:1. Here again, however, we have the place of departure mentioned first (“there,” i.e., Capernaum [9:33]), the ultimate goal second (“the regions of Judea”), and the intervening route last (“across the Jordan”). See 10:1.

13. Contrast Hengel (1985: 9), who states that Mark knows “the ‘historical contours’ of Palestinian Judaism before the destruction of the second temple more accurately than the later Evangelists” and uses as an example his distinguishing among the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.



(Niederwimmer 1967: 183–85). The term “all,” however, is frequently used as an exaggerated adjective for emphasis (Stein 1994a: 134). For the gentile readers of Mark, one of the most distinctive features of the Jewish people was the kosher regulations that pervaded their lives, and no clear distinction would have been made by them between OT regulations and Pharisaic oral traditions (cf. Let. Aris. 305). As a broad generalization, what Mark states in 7:3–4 is correct, and one should not expect from him a statistical analysis of the percentage of Jews who followed the Pharisaic rules of washing. See 7:3–4.<sup>14</sup>

The debate about the authorship of the Second Gospel does not involve the “meaning” of the Gospel (Guelich 1989: xxix). The meaning of the Gospel of Mark involves what its author meant by the words that make up the Gospel. This is true regardless of whether the author’s name was John Mark. The reason why there is vigorous debate about Markan authorship lies elsewhere, and it does not involve a simple, objective pursuit of knowledge. Various presuppositions are often involved that are seldom discussed and at times may not even be consciously recognized but predispose scholars to a particular viewpoint. What is involved in the issue of authorship concerns primarily the “significance” that a person attributes to Mark (Stein 1994a: 43–46). If one brings to the study of Mark naturalistic presuppositions and denies the historicity of much or all of the miracles recorded in Mark, then how can one attribute the authorship of Mark to the John Mark of Acts 12:12 and 1 Pet. 5:13, whose main source for this information was the apostle Peter, an eyewitness of the events? One must conclude either that the author was not John Mark but an anonymous author who believed the fictional accounts created by the anonymous community and incorporated them into his Gospel or that John Mark was an unabashed deceiver who created fictional accounts to deceive or to edify the church. The latter “accommodationist” view had a brief period of popularity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but is generally discredited because it is clear that the Gospel writers believed what they were writing (cf. Luke 1:3–4; John 21:24).

On the other hand, those who believe in the historicity of the miracle accounts in the Second Gospel and/or believe that it was in some way divinely inspired see support for this in the view that the Gospel was written by Mark and that he obtained his information from an eyewitness, the apostle Peter. Thus, just as the former view seeks to discredit the arguments in favor of Markan authorship and supports the various objections raised against it, this view seeks to support the arguments in favor of Markan authorship and attempts to refute the objections raised against it. As a result, although the meaning of the Second Gospel is unaffected by the issue of who wrote it, the issue of authorship is a critical one with respect to the significance or value

14. Technically, Mark’s statement “on the first day of [the Feast of] Unleavened Bread, when they were sacrificing the Passover lamb” (14:12) is also incorrect, for the sacrificing of the Passover lamb took place on the fourteenth of Nisan, and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the fifteenth of Nisan. But it was common to describe the sacrificing of the Passover lamb as taking place on the fifteenth of Nisan (see 14:12).

one attributes to the Gospel. It would seem, however, that the presuppositions of critical scholarship play a more dominant and decisive role with respect to the question of authorship than those of evangelical scholarship. For critical scholarship, the antisupernaturalist presupposition usually associated with this position requires a non-John Mark authorship and a denial that behind the accounts found in Mark stands the eyewitness testimony of the apostle Peter. For evangelical scholarship, Markan authorship in association with the eyewitness testimony of Peter would be nice but is not necessary, for the truthfulness of the miracle accounts in Mark does not require Markan authorship.

For me, the case for Markan<sup>15</sup> authorship is strong and involves the following:

1. The universal and early tradition ascribing Markan authorship to the Second Gospel. It is highly unlikely that a purely fictional ascription would have named a nonapostle as the author, and especially one with a less-than-exemplary history (Acts 13:13; 15:36–41). One need only compare the attribution of apostolic authorship to the apocryphal Gospels (the Gospels of Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Peter, etc.) to see that a fictional attribution of the Second Gospel to a nonapostle is contrary to what one would expect. Furthermore, if we assume that the tie to the apostle Peter was intended to give apostolic sanction to a nonapostolic work, then the tradition from the beginning associated the Second Gospel with Mark.
2. The negative comment in the Anti-Marcionite Prologue and Hippolytus that attributes authorship of the Second Gospel to John Mark, who is called “Stumpfenger,” has every appearance of being reliable tradition. Why would a completely fictional tradition attribute such a negative comment to the author of one of the sacred Gospels?
3. It is quite unlikely that the Second Gospel simply fell anonymously, without any knowledge of its origin, into the hands of its first readers. The comment in Mark 15:21 that Simon of Cyrene was “the father of Alexander and Rufus” indicates that the Gospel was written to a church that the author knew and that no doubt knew him. Thus the authorship of the Second Gospel was never unknown to its first hearers.
4. While internal evidence cannot prove Markan authorship, various aspects of the Gospel support Markan authorship (knowledge of Aramaic; the presence of numerous Latinisms; knowledge of Jewish customs; a more accurate knowledge of “the ‘historical contours’ of Palestinian Judaism before the destruction of the second temple . . . than the later evangelists”

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15. Since the only “Mark” referred to in the NT is the John Mark of Acts 12:12; 13:5, 13; 15:36–40; Philem. 24; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; and 1 Pet. 5:13, the tradition concerning the Markan authorship of the Second Gospel assumes that “Mark” is the John Mark of the NT (contra Marcus 2000: 24). If the tradition were referring to a different “Mark,” it would have had to make a clear distinction between the two.

[Hengel 1985: 9]; the distinguishing of various Jewish groups such as the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees; etc.).

5. The negative arguments raised against Markan authorship (lack of knowledge of Palestinian geography and Jewish customs) misunderstand Mark's style in describing the geography of Jesus's journeys and his general way of describing Jewish customs for his gentile readers.

## Audience

From within Mark we learn a great deal about the audience for whom it was written. We know it was a Greek-speaking audience that did not know Aramaic, as Mark's explanations of Aramaic expressions indicate (3:17–22; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34). We also know that it was a Christian audience familiar with the gospel traditions. Evidence for this is as follows:

1. The various titles used to describe Jesus (Christ, Son of God, Son of David, Lord, and especially the enigmatic title "Son of Man") are not explained; it is assumed that the readers understand them.
2. The expression "the word" (1:45; 2:2; 4:33; 8:32; cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4, 29, 31; etc.) is not defined but understood as a synonym for "the gospel."
3. The expression "his disciples" is never explained but assumed to be understood.
4. The meaning of John the Baptist's "*I* baptized you with water, but *he* will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (1:8) is nowhere explained but assumes that what it refers to (the coming of the Spirit into the life of the believer at conversion) is understood by the readers.
5. It is a church in whose membership were apparently two sons of a Gospel eyewitness, Simon of Cyrene (15:21).
6. The readers knew the main characters and places of the Gospel story, so that when they are mentioned, no explanation is needed. The former include John the Baptist, simply introduced as "John" (1:4), whose unique clothing is described and not explained but whose significance the readers are expected to understand (cf. 1:6 and 9:11–13 with 2 Kings 1:8) and whose martyrdom by King Herod was apparently known to the readers (Mark 6:14–29). Pilate is simply introduced to the readers as "Pilate" without any explanatory title (contrast Matt. 27:2, "Pilate, the governor"; and Luke 3:1, "Pontius Pilate, being governor of Judea"). The area ruled by King Herod (Mark 5:14, 29; 8:15) is not delineated, and "James the younger and Joses" (15:40; 16:1) were apparently known to the readers, as was Jesus's hometown, whose name "Nazareth" is not mentioned.<sup>16</sup>
7. Mark assumes that various cities (Capernaum: 1:21; 2:1; 9:3; Tyre: 3:8; 7:24, 31; Sidon: 3:8; 7:31; Jerusalem: 3:8, 22; 7:1; 10:32–33; Bethsaida: 6:45; 8:22; Caesarea Philippi: 8:27; Jericho: 10:46; Bethany: 11:1, 11–12;

16. It is possible that Mark assumed that his readers would arrive at this conclusion due to such references as 1:9, 24 (cf. also 14:67).

14:3; and Bethphage: 11:1) do not have to be explained to his readers. Similarly, various places are not explained (the Jordan River: 1:5, 9; 3:8; 10:1; Judea: 1:5; 3:7; 10:1; 13:14; Galilee: 1:9, 14, 28, 39; 3:7; 6:21; 9:30; 14:28; 15:41; 16:7; the Sea of Galilee: 1:16; 7:31 [cf. also 2:13; 3:7; 4:1, 39, 41; 5:1, 13, 21; 6:47–49]; 11:1, 11, 15, 27; 15:41; the Decapolis: 5:20; 7:31; Gennesaret: 6:53; the Mount of Olives: 11:1; 13:3; 14:26; etc.). Though one can grant that a non-Christian could know a number of these places, some were insignificant to the Roman world of the first century. For Christians, however, they were known because they were part of “the greatest story ever told.”

It is also apparent Mark’s readers were familiar with various OT characters and possessed considerable knowledge of the Jewish religion. This is seen in references to Isaiah, mentioned without explanation in 1:2; 7:6–7; Moses, 1:44; 7:10; 9:4–5; 10:3–4; 12:19, 26; David, 2:25; 10:47–48; 11:10; 12:35–37; Elijah, 6:15; 8:28; 9:11–13 (cf. 1:6); 15:35–36; Elijah and Moses, 9:4–5; and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 12:26. There is frequent mention of the OT “Scriptures” (12:10, 24; 14:49; cf. also 1:2; 7:6; 9:12–13; 10:4–5; 11:17; 12:19; 14:21, 27). They knew that the ruling body of Israel was called the Sanhedrin (14:55; 15:21). They were expected to understand the symbolism, and probably the significance, of Jesus’s choosing “twelve” disciples (see 3:14–15). They were furthermore familiar with certain Jewish festivals (14:1, 12a; 15:42), the importance of the Sabbath in the life of Israel (1:21; 2:23–28; 3:2, 4; 6:2; 16:1–2), various Jewish groups that are introduced without explanation (the Pharisees and scribes, 2:16, 18, 24), and various Jewish traditions and their importance to the people of Israel (7:6–7, 9–13). Certain oral traditions on ritual purity nevertheless needed to be explained (7:3–5). All this suggests that the original audience of Mark consisted primarily of gentile Christians, familiar with both the gospel traditions and the Judaism of the first century. It is possible that many of them were originally “God-fearers” (Acts 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26), but this cannot be proven.

With respect to the geographical location of Mark’s intended readers, the tradition states that Mark wrote his Gospel for the church at Rome.<sup>17</sup> This was the general consensus until the second half of the twentieth century. Since then several other locations have been suggested as the Gospel’s intended audience. Some of them, such as Galilee (Marxsen 1968: 143; 1969: 54–95) and the Decapolis (the alleged flight of the Judean church to Pella), have received little

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17. See the Anti-Marcionite Prologue, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius quotations in the discussion of authorship above and the association of Mark with Peter and Rome in 1 Pet. 5:13. The much debated and previously unknown Epistle of Clement discovered by Morton Smith in 1958 in the monastery library of Mar Saba states that whereas Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome, after Peter’s death he went to Alexandria and wrote a revised and more spiritual Gospel. This more spiritual Gospel had been called Mark’s Secret Gospel (C. Black 1994: 139–45). Cf. John Chrysostom (*Homily on Matthew 1.7*), who states that Mark wrote his Gospel in Alexandria.

endorsement. The only other suggested audience that has received substantial support is the Christian community in Syria (Kümmel 1975: 98; Theissen 1991: 236–58; Marcus 2000: 33–37). Several reasons are given for this. One is the close agreement between the descriptions found in Mark 13 and the general course of events of the Jewish War in AD 66–70. This is supposedly better explained and understood in a Syrian context than a Roman one. Second, if the “abomination of desolation” of 13:14 is understood as an event associated with the Jewish War and the need to flee Jerusalem before its encirclement by the Roman army, one can argue that this would be more applicable in a Syrian context than a Roman one (Marcus 2000: 34). There is no evidence, however, of Christians being persecuted by the Romans during the Jewish War. Some also argue that the depiction of agriculture (4:2–8, 26ff.), housing (2:4; 4:21), employment, landownership, taxation (12:1–9, 13–17), and land (Kee 1977: 102) accurately reflects and favors a Syrian-Palestinian provenance and audience for the Gospel. But much of this material in Mark is also found in Matthew and Luke, and it is far more likely that its presence is due not to Mark having reworked the gospel materials for a Syrian-Palestinian audience but rather to the fact that this material reflects its origin in the Palestinian environment of the historical Jesus.

The association of the Gospel of Mark with Rome found in the early church tradition is quite weighty and receives support from several quarters. If the warnings of Mark 13:9–13 and elsewhere are directed to the readers of the Gospel and meant to prepare them for persecution from both the synagogue (13:9a–b) and the state (13:9c), the latter fits the time of Nero far better than the supposed persecution of the Palestinian church during the Jewish War (see, however, the discussion of 13:9–13 below). We know of no clear example of Roman persecution of the Christian church in the first century other than that experienced by the Roman church during the time of Nero in the mid-60s (Hengel 2000: 79). In addition, the description of the Greek woman in 7:26 as “Syrophoenician by birth” makes far better sense if addressed to a Roman audience than a Syrian one. For the latter, “Phoenician” would have been sufficient, whereas “Syrophoenician” would seem “nonsensical” (Hengel 1985: 29). The application of Jesus’s teaching on divorce to women divorcing their husbands in 10:12 would be especially meaningful for a gentile and Roman audience.

An additional argument in support of the traditional view that Rome was the Gospel’s intended audience is the presence of numerous “Latinisms” in Mark. These include the following:

- to make their way (ὁδὸν ποιεῖν, *hodon poiein*; Lat. *iter facere*)—2:23
- mat (κράβαττος, *krabattos*; Lat. *grabatus*)—2:4, 9, 11, 12; 6:55
- basket (μόδιος, *modios*; Lat. *modius*)—4:21
- legion (λεγιών, *legiōn*; Lat. *legio*)—5:9, 15
- soldier of the guard (σπεκουλάτωρ, *spekoulatōr*; Lat. *speculator*)—6:27

denarius (δηνάριον, *dēnariion*; Lat. *denarius*)—6:37; 12:15; 14:5  
fist (πυγμή, *pygmē*; Lat. *pugnus*)—7:3  
pitcher (ξέστης, *xestēs*; Lat. *sextarius*)—7:4  
tax (κῆνσος, *kēnsos*; Lat. *census*)—12:14  
penny (κοδράντης, *kodrantēs*; Lat. *quadrans*)—12:42  
centurion (κεντυρίων, *kentyriōn*; Lat. *centurio*)—15:39, 44, 45  
to satisfy (τὸ ἱκανὸν ποιῆσαι, *to hikanon poiēsai*; Lat. *satis facere*)—15:15  
scourge (φραγελλῶ, *phragelloō*; Lat. *flagello*)—15:15  
praetorium (πραιτώριον, *praitōrion*; Lat. *praetorium*)—15:16<sup>18</sup>

Although the presence of these Latinisms does not prove a Roman provenance for the Gospel of Mark (some of these same Latinisms are also found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, although “soldier of the guard,” “fist,” “pitcher,” and “centurion” are found only in Mark, and “penny” is a Roman coin that fits a Roman audience extremely well),<sup>19</sup> the number of them in Mark is significant and suggests a Roman audience. V. Taylor’s comment (1952: 45) seems judicious, “The presence of almost all these words in the papyri shows that they belonged to the Koine, but their frequency in Mark suggests that the Evangelist wrote in a Roman environment.”<sup>20</sup>

## Date

Although there is a wide consensus that Mark was written around AD 70, there have been several attempts to date Mark earlier. One involves the generally accepted assumption that Luke made use of Mark in writing his Gospel (Stein 2001: 29–169) and the ending of Acts. If Luke ended Acts with the most recent information available concerning the situation of Paul (in Rome awaiting trial), then Luke–Acts could not have been written after AD 62. Consequently, Mark must date earlier, and this would suggest a date in the late 50s (Carson and Moo 2005: 179–82). Yet did Luke write all that he knew about Paul and his fate in Rome? His reporting of Peter’s activities in Acts provides insight for answering this question. We read of Peter in Acts 1–15 but not at all in 16–28. This reveals that Acts is not a biography of the life of Peter and/or Paul. Luke refers to Peter in Acts only to the extent that Peter assists in the fulfillment of the theme of Acts—“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8). Thus Peter is on

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18. Cf. also “fourth watch” (τετάρτη φυλακή, *tetartē phylakē*)—6:48, which reflects a Roman reckoning of time. According to the Jewish reckoning of time, there were three watches of the night, but according to the Roman reckoning, there were four (cf. 13:35). See BDAG 1067–68.

19. Cf. how the explanation of an American sum of money in dollars by “pounds,” “lira,” “yen,” “pesos,” “rubles,” “francs,” and so on suggests a specific audience.

20. For additional discussion of the Latinisms found in Mark, see BDF §§4–6; Dschulnigg 1986: 276–78; and Gundry 1993: 1043–44.

center stage in the spread of the gospel in Jerusalem (2:1–8:1b), Judea and Samaria (9:1c–12:19), and to both Jews (2:1–9:43) and gentiles (10:1–15:11). After this, Luke has no further interest in Peter. This is not because Luke has brought his readers up-to-date on the life of Peter or because he possessed no further information about him (cf. the “we” sections in Acts that take place in Jerusalem and Judea, where all sorts of information about Peter would have been available for Luke—21:3–18; 27:1). It is rather because Peter’s role in the spread of the gospel to Jerusalem-Judea-Samaria in fulfillment of Acts 1:8 has been completed. Similarly, Acts is not a biography about the life of Paul, and when Paul has fulfilled his mission in bringing the gospel to the end of the earth (9:1–28:31) by preaching it in Rome to Caesar himself, Luke ends Acts. Acts 1:8 is fulfilled! Thus Acts 28:31 may be an unsatisfying ending to a biography of Paul, but it is a quite satisfying ending for Acts. The gospel has spread from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the end of the earth (1:8), and the emperor of the whole Roman Empire is hearing it. If this is true, then the ending of Acts does not necessarily serve as a *terminus ad quem*, or the latest possible date, at which Mark could have been written. It could have been written after AD 62.

Another attempt to ascribe an early date to Mark that received a spectacular amount of publicity came in 1972 when José O’Callaghan argued that two Greek papyrus scraps found at Qumran (7Q5 and 7Q6) were fragments of Mark 6:52–53 and 4:28. If correct, this would require a date for Mark before AD 68–69, when Qumran was destroyed by the Romans. Paleographically 7Q5 and 7Q6 date around AD 50 (plus or minus twenty-five years). The larger fragment (7Q5) consists of twenty letters found in five lines. O’Callaghan’s delineation of the letters required for his identification of this as part of Mark 6:52–53 involves several emendations (only ten letters are really clear) and is highly dubious (Gundry 1999). Furthermore, his reconstruction of the lines is unlikely as well (W. Lane 1974: 18–21). Now that the excitement created by the original claim has died down, scholars agree that these two scraps are not fragments from the Gospel of Mark. In reality 7Q5 is more likely a part of the Greek text of 1 Enoch.

The strongest external evidence for dating Mark comes from tradition, and this associates the origin of the Gospel with the death of Peter. The Anti-Marcionite Prologue and Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.1.1) make the connection quite explicit (cf. also Papias [Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.39.15] and Justin Martyr [*Dial.* 106.3], who seem to presume this). Since Peter is assumed to have died during the latter part of Nero’s reign in AD 64/65 (cf. 1 Clem. 5.2–4), this suggests that Mark was written in the late 60s. This scenario appears far more likely than that suggested by Clement of Alexandria (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 6.14.6–7) and Origen (*ibid.*, 6.25.5), who state that Mark was written before Peter’s death. The dating of Mark before Peter’s death would have been more advantageous for apologetic purposes, so that the dating of Mark after Peter’s death appears to be a more reliable tradition. The tie between Mark, Peter, and Rome found in 1 Pet. 5:13 (“She who is at Babylon, who is

likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son”) also supports a dating in the late 60s.

Numerous scholars have sought by means of internal evidence to date the Gospel. Some see the emphasis on the suffering of Jesus (8:31–10:45; 14:1ff.) and the warning to the church to prepare for persecution (8:31–38; 13:3–13) as indicating that Mark was seeking to encourage his readers during their time of persecution and that this reflects the Neronian persecution of Christians in Rome in the mid-60s. Yet Acts reveals that from the beginning the church experienced persecution, and most of Paul’s warnings concerning Christian persecution were written before AD 64/65 (2 Thess. 1:4–7; Rom. 8:35; 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12; Phil. 1:29–30; etc.). Thus a mirror reading of the passages in Mark to reflect the persecution under Nero is questionable. The origin of most of these warnings to prepare for persecution and suffering almost certainly goes back to the ministry and teachings of Jesus himself.

The second main area of internal evidence scholars tend to use for dating Mark involves supposed allusions to the Jewish War in Mark 13. These include the reference to the “abomination of desolation” in 13:14. The editorial aside in 13:14b calling upon the readers to note this reference is seen as being especially relevant for the dating of Mark. The event is associated with the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem and serves as a warning for people in Judea and Jerusalem to flee from the city before its encirclement by the Romans (13:14c). The value of this passage for dating Mark must be questioned, however. The exhortation to flee Jerusalem is not addressed to Mark’s readers, who probably reside in either Rome or Syria but certainly not Judea(!), as his explanation of Aramaic terms (5:41; 7:34; 14:36; 15:34; etc.) and Jewish traditions (7:3–5) clearly indicates. Thus the warning of the historical Jesus, which would have benefited Jewish believers in Judea and Jerusalem in the late 60s and led them to flee from (not into!) Jerusalem, had great relevance for believers living in Judea, but it is not addressed to Mark’s audience as an exhortation that serves to date the Gospel. See 13:14.<sup>21</sup>

Another allusion in Mark 13 that some see as evidence for dating Mark is found in 13:7, which refers to “wars and reports of wars.” It is argued that this refers to a specific time, AD 68–69, when after Nero’s death the Roman Empire experienced a unique period of war and turmoil. This involved not only the Jewish War but also the bloody civil wars involving the emperors Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, who all died within one year, and rebellions in Germany, Gaul, Britain, Africa, the lower Danube, and Pontus (Hengel 1985: 22; cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.2.1). Yet “wars and reports of wars” is a common apocalyptic idea found in judgment prophecies and descriptions of the end times and the “birth pangs” of the messianic age (Isa. 19:2; Jer. 51:46; Ezek. 5:12; Rev. 6:8;

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21. Crossley (2004) has argued that the portrayal of Jesus as a Torah-observing Jew in Mark betrays a period before the mid-40s when both Jewish and gentile Christians no longer felt bound to observe certain parts of the Torah. It is far more likely, however, that the Torah-observing Jesus in Mark reflects the practice of the historical Jesus and that Mark (and Matthew, who clearly writes after the mid-40s) did not feel compelled to re-create Jesus to fit their own situations.



2 Esd. 13:31; 1 En. 99.4–6; Sib. Or. 3.635–36; 2 Bar. 27.3–9; 70.3–8; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.10.1 §187; etc.). In actuality nothing in the description of the destruction of Jerusalem in Mark 13 is not already found in the imagery of various prophecies of judgment found in the OT and the apocryphal literature of the intertestamental period. Thus the reference to “wars and reports of wars” cannot be used to determine the date of Mark any more than the exact same phrase in Matt. 24:6 and the parallel expression in Luke 21:9, written after Mark wrote his Gospel, can date the origin of their Gospels to AD 68–69. The use of Mark 13 to date Mark is highly questionable. There is no doubt that Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple (see 14:55–59), and the imagery found in Mark 13 could very well have been spoken by Jesus himself and written down anytime between the mid-30s and the early 70s.

Some scholars have attempted to date Mark after AD 70 and the fall of Jerusalem by claiming that the description of the destruction of Jerusalem in Mark 13 is so precise that it requires a post-AD 70 date for the composition of the Gospel. However, whereas this may be valid with respect to the Lukan material (cf. Luke 19:41–44; 21:20–21, 24), the very opposite appears to be true with respect to Mark. If Mark were written after the destruction of Jerusalem and reflects the events surrounding this horrific event, it is difficult to understand why no reference is made to the catastrophic fire that destroyed the temple (Josephus, *J.W.* 6.2.9–6.9.4 §§164–434). Matthew and Luke also do not mention the great fire, and this may suggest that the Gospel writers were quite faithful to what Jesus said on the subject and were far less creative and free in describing Jesus’s teaching on this subject than is often thought. “The lack of precision in the prophetic description of the fate of Jerusalem in Mark 13 . . . points to its having been written prior to the events which it depicts” (Kee 1977: 100–101).

## The Emergence of Mark in Gospel Studies

During the first seventeen centuries of church history the Gospel of Mark was for the most part the forgotten Gospel. Matthew proved far more useful for catechetical purposes than Mark (or Luke) because of its careful arrangement of Jesus’s teachings into five sections (chs. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 23–25) that all end similarly (“And when Jesus finished these sayings” [7:28]; “And when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples” [11:1]; “And when Jesus had finished these parables” [13:53]; “Now when Jesus had finished these sayings” [19:1]; and “When Jesus had finished *all* these sayings” [26:1 italics added]) and are placed alternately between six sections of narrative (chs. 1–4, 8–9, 11–12, 14–17, 19–22, and 26–28). Consequently, Mark received little attention during this period.<sup>22</sup> That almost all the material in Mark, except

22. Hengel (1985: 67) points out that among the twenty papyri of the Gospels found in Egypt dating before Constantine, eleven contain John, nine contain Matthew, four contain Luke, but only one contains Mark. The earliest known commentary on Mark, once thought to have been written by Jerome but now recognized as having been written by an unknown author, did not

1:1; 3:20–21; 4:21–25; 6:30–31; 8:22–26; 9:38–40; 12:32–34; and 14:51–52 (23 of the 666 verses in Mark), is contained in some form in Matthew,<sup>23</sup> along with much additional material (the “Q” material [common material found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark] and “M” material [material found only in Matthew]), gave additional importance and prominence to Matthew. In addition, Augustine’s statement also contributed to the relative insignificance of Mark during this period:

Mark follows him [Matthew] closely, and looks like his attendant and epitomizer. For in his narrative he gives nothing in concert with John apart from the others; by himself separately, he has little to record; in conjunction with Luke, as distinguished from the rest, he has still less; but in concord with Matthew, he has a very large number of passages. Much, too, he narrates in words almost numerically and identically the same as those used by Matthew, where the agreement is either with that evangelist alone, or with him in connection with the rest. (*De consensu evangelistarum* 1.2.4)

This changed radically in the eighteenth century, when the search for the earliest sources available for “the quest of the historical Jesus” came to recognize that Mark was not the abbreviator of Matthew but rather his predecessor and source. The view that Mark was the first canonical Gospel written and served as a source for both Matthew and Luke came to be the prevailing view of nineteenth-century NT scholarship and continues to be the dominant view today.<sup>24</sup> The impetus to discover the Jesus of history led to an intense study of the oldest written source available for such an investigation—the Gospel of Mark. From its place of obscurity in Gospel studies for over seventeen hundred years, Mark now gained the place of prominence, and its arrangement of the Jesus traditions was seen as providing a chronological framework for understanding the life of Jesus.

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appear until the early seventh century, and its author was aware that he was doing something fresh and new in producing this commentary (Cahill 1998: 4–6).

23. From this, Hengel (1985: 52) argues, “The best explanation of the fact that the Second Gospel lived on in the church, although Matthew had taken over about ninety per cent of the material in it, is that the work of Mark was from the beginning bound up with the authority of the name of Peter.” See, however, Yarbrough 1998: 158–84, esp. 177–79.

24. Some of the main reasons for the priority of Mark (i.e., that Mark was the first Gospel written) are that it is easier to understand (1) Matthew and Luke adding material to their Gospels (the Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes, the birth narratives, etc.) than Mark omitting this material from Matthew and/or Luke, and at the same time often making the accounts he shares with Matthew and Luke longer; (2) Matthew and Luke improving on Mark’s grammar and style than Mark choosing to “worsen” the better grammar and style that he found in Matthew and/or Luke; (3) Matthew and Luke seeking to eliminate some of the harder readings in Mark that cause theological difficulties and problems than Mark choosing to add them to Matthew and/or Luke; (4) Matthew and Luke wanting to omit various Aramaic expressions found in Mark (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36; 15:22, 34) than Mark choosing to add them to Matthew and/or Luke and then explain them to his readers; and (5) Matthew and Luke adding to Mark their theological emphases (the “fulfillment quotations” and the emphasis on Jesus as the Son of David in Matthew; the role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of prayer in Luke) than Mark choosing to eliminate them. See Stein 2001: 49–96.

By the end of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century, NT scholars saw in Mark the earliest written account of the life of Jesus dating in the late 60s,<sup>25</sup> but a new question came to the forefront: “What was the shape of the gospel traditions found in Mark (and also Matthew and Luke) before being written down?” After World War I, the discipline of form criticism, led by a triumvirate of German scholars (K. L. Schmidt, 1919; M. Dibelius, 1919; and R. Bultmann, 1921) and already applied to the study of the OT, now began to dominate Gospel studies. The focus now shifted from the study of the Gospels as wholes to the study of the individual units and building blocks that make up the Gospels (Stein 2001: 173–233). These blocks were investigated to learn about the Christian community during the “oral period” between the resurrection of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. For some, this new discipline also served as a tool for studying the life and teachings of Jesus.<sup>26</sup> The form critics lost interest in a holistic approach to the Gospels and now considered the Gospel writers as simply collectors of tradition and editors who patched together tradition collections using scissors and paste.

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that interest in the Gospel writers surfaced again in the rise of a new discipline—redaction criticism. Most responsible for this was again a triumvirate of German scholars (Bornkamm, 1948; Conzelmann, 1954; and W. Marxsen, 1956). This new discipline demonstrated that the Gospel writers were not bland, disinterested editors who simply collected various gospel traditions and pasted them together. They were rather evangelists who collected, arranged, edited, and shaped these traditions with specific theological purposes in mind. As a result, a great interest arose in the study of the specific theological contributions given to the gospel traditions by the individual evangelists. This was most

25. The evaluation of the historicity of the Gospel of Mark during this period depended essentially on one’s presupposition as to whether history was “open” or “closed”: Is history a closed continuum of time and space in which God cannot, or chooses not to, intervene and thus is closed to the supernatural? Or is God sovereign over history and not bound by the “laws of nature”?

26. In general the quest for the historical Jesus had by then been dealt several deadly blows that caused almost as much disinterest in the study of the life of Jesus in the first half of the twentieth century as there was interest in the nineteenth. There were several reasons for this: (1) A. Schweitzer’s *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1910; original German, 1906) demonstrated that the liberal Jesus of the “old quest” was a creation by liberal scholars of a Jesus made in their own image and that the real Jesus was an enigma and offense for them; (2) W. Wrede’s *Messianic Secret* (1971; original German, 1901) indicated that Mark was not a simple objective, historical biography of the life of Jesus that could be used simplistically as a historical source; (3) M. Kähler’s *So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (1964; original German, 1892) showed that the Jesus who evoked faith and commitment over the nineteen centuries of church history was not the liberal Jesus of the “quest” but rather the Christ of faith described and proclaimed in the Gospel accounts. Additional influences that helped bring about the end of the “old quest” included W. Dilthey (1957: 5.317–38), who revealed that there was no such thing as objective, presuppositionless historiography and form criticism, which demonstrated that the gospel traditions circulated during the oral period as independent units shaped by the faith of the church did not allow the reconstruction of a chronological biography of the life of Jesus.

easily carried out with Matthew and Luke by comparing how they used their Markan source and by comparing their use of the Q material. By comparing them to Mark in a synopsis, various emphases of Matthew and Luke became quite clear, and their individual editorial contributions were then investigated throughout each Gospel. Thus a more holistic approach to Gospel studies developed that viewed the Gospels not as collections of isolated fragments of gospel traditions but rather as “the Gospel *according to Matthew*” and “the Gospel *according to Luke*.”

The application of redaction criticism to the study of Mark, however, is far more complicated, for whereas we possess the main source of Matthew and Luke (the Gospel of Mark) and can reconstruct to a reasonable extent the content of their Q source, we do not possess the source(s) of Mark, and the reconstruction of their shape and form is much more hypothetical (Stein 1970; 1971; 2001: 262–72). Nevertheless, a cautious use of redaction criticism in Mark is both possible and profitable, and throughout this commentary examples of this can be found in the introductory and summary sections. Traditional redaction criticism is nevertheless not as holistic a discipline as it first seems, for it is primarily concerned not with the evangelist’s theology as a whole but rather with his unique theological contribution (Stein 1969: 54). Thus the main emphases shared by Matthew, Mark, and Luke are essentially ignored.

A recent attempt to address this is found in literary and narrative criticism, where the total Gospel narrative is the focus of attention. Here great attention is given to the plot of the entire narrative, and we are introduced to such concepts as characterization, point of view, plot, setting, viewpoint, narrator, real author, implied author, real reader, implied reader, and so on. Whereas the holistic approach taken by narrative criticism to the entire narrative is commendable, its practice is often associated with assumptions that when applied to the Gospels are highly questionable. One involves the fact that the principles of narrative criticism have been obtained primarily from the study of fictional literature. Consequently, the approach often assumes that “Mark is a self-consciously crafted narrative, a fiction, resulting from literary imagination, not photographic recall” (Tolbert 1989: 30). It emphasizes far more the freedom of the author in composing the narrative than the restrictions placed upon him by history and tradition. In fiction such questions as the following are legitimate: Why does the author choose to have the main character crucified? Why does the main character rise from the dead? Why does the story choose to have a particular character (King Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas, etc.) act in a particular way? Why is a particular group portrayed in this manner? Yet in the study of Mark such questions are often out of place. It makes no sense to ask: Why does Mark have Jesus crucified at the end? Why does he have the high priests and chief priest involved in the death of Jesus? Why does he have a disciple, Judas Iscariot, betray Jesus? Why does he have Jesus rise from the dead? Such questions are illegitimate in that Mark is a “historical narrative,” and Mark did not have the freedom to construct his plot and characterizations

in the same way that a writer of fiction does. The historical events surrounding the life of Jesus controlled what Mark could or could not do. Even if one denies the historicity of much or all of the Gospel accounts, the fact remains that Mark was constrained by the gospel traditions he inherited and with which his readers were familiar. Thus some of the questions that one can ask about the narrative of a fictional account created by an author *de novo* are inappropriate when asked concerning historical narrative (Horsley 2001: 7).

A second weakness of much narrative criticism is its close association with reader-response criticism. The lasting quality of a good commentary on Mark (or on any biblical book) lies not in the meaning that a commentator chooses to read into it but in how well it enables the reader to understand the meaning of the evangelist contained in the written text he has provided. The great majority of readers seek help in a commentary on Mark for understanding the word from God that he has spoken through his servant Mark. Consequently, the present commentary is not a “reader-response” commentary revealing how I choose to read Mark. Such an approach (in the past often called “eisegesis”) is rejected in favor of seeking to describe for the reader what Mark sought to convey by the words of the text he has written. The purpose of this commentary is also not primarily to investigate the life of Jesus of Nazareth, although historical issues relevant to this topic are frequently discussed in the introduction to the exegetical unit and in the comments on specific verses. The dominating purpose in each section of the Gospel is to answer the following: *I, Mark, have told you* [the unit under discussion] *because*. . . . Thus the primary purpose of this commentary is to explain not what happened in the life of Jesus or exactly what he said, but rather what Mark is seeking to teach by this event/saying that he shares with his readers (cf. Donahue and Harrington 2002: 2–3).

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, there has been a lengthy and extensive debate over the exact genre of the Gospel of Mark. Some have suggested that Mark’s “Gospel” created an essentially new genre, a genre *sui generis* (Guelich 1991: 173–208). This has generally been rejected (Bryan 1993: 22–23). Others have suggested that it follows the genre of a Greek drama, in particular a Greek tragedy (Bilezikian 1977; cf. France 2002: 10–15, who describes Mark as a “Drama in Three Acts”). Yet Mark does not end as a tragedy but with the triumphant angelic message, “He has been raised, he is not here” (16:6), and it probably ended with a resurrection appearance to the disciples in Galilee (14:28; 16:7; see 16:1–8, “The Ending of Mark”). As for it being read as a drama, there are several reasons why this is unlikely. For one, the nearest analogy to reading sacred texts for the readers of Mark as Jews and God-fearers came from their experience of hearing the OT Scriptures in the synagogue services; readings of the OT in Hebrew and then Aramaic in Palestine and of the Greek Septuagint in the Diaspora were not “performances.”<sup>27</sup> They were

27. “Mark’s ‘pre-texts’ are the Jewish Scriptures” (Donahue and Harrington 2002: 16; cf. also Vines [2002: 144–64], who compares Mark with Daniel, Tobit, Judith, Susanna, etc.).

not read as dramas. Major parts of the OT were simply not appropriate for this (namely, most of the Prophets [Joshua—Kings and Isaiah—Malachi] and most of the Writings [Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles]). The reverential reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue no doubt carried over to the house church, where the letters of Paul and the Jesus traditions were also read or told with great reverence. Although Mark makes for “dramatic” reading, this is not because it is written in the genre of a Greek tragedy but because it tells the story of the most important person who ever lived—Jesus Christ, the Son of God! And it ends not in tragedy and death but in victory and resurrection. The second reason why it is improbable that Mark consciously wrote his Gospel in the form of a Greek drama or tragedy is because of the general revulsion of Jews and Christians toward the idolatry and immorality so often associated with the Greek theater.<sup>28</sup> It is extremely unlikely that the genre of drama, whose content was often repugnant to Christians, would have served as the model according to which Mark chose to pattern his Gospel.

The two main genre possibilities that best describe Mark are that of a biography (sometimes described as “Greco-Roman biography”; Talbert 1977; Burridge 1992; Bryan 1993: 9–64; Witherington 2001: 1–9) or as a historical narrative (A. Collins 1992: 1–38). “Ancient biography is prose narration about a person’s life, presenting supposedly historical facts which are selected to reveal the character or essence of the individual, often with the purpose of affecting the behavior of the reader” (Talbert 1977: 17). Whereas historical narrative tends to focus on the actions of an individual, biography is more concerned with a person’s character or essence. The earliest readers of Mark would not have concluded that this Gospel was something quite unique, a new genre. They would have seen similarities with OT accounts concerning the patriarchs, Moses,<sup>29</sup> Joshua, David, and so on, and they would already have been familiar with much of the content of Mark from the oral traditions that they had been taught about Jesus. What was unique about Mark was not the “form” of the Gospel but its contents concerning the unique person, teachings, and deeds of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. While not fitting the modern-day genre of biography in that it omits the first thirty-plus years of Jesus’s life, it fits the general form of Greco-Roman biography of his day. It is quite clear from 1:1 that Mark involves the “good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of

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28. A distinction should be made between the use of “the Greek theater” to describe an ancient architectural edifice and to describe the plays and performances that took place there. As a building the Greek theater served as a meeting place for many civil functions and public meetings (cf. Acts 19:29ff.). (The inscription on the seats of the theater at Miletus describing a certain location as the “Place of the Jews and God-fearers” may have involved their presence at various public meetings [see Ferguson 1993: 516 for an example].) It was not the building but the drama and games performed there that brought revulsion to Jews and Christians and pious pagans.

29. Cf. Kline (1975: 1–27), who refers to Exodus as the “Gospel of Moses” and argues that its influence on Mark would have been considerably greater than that of Greco-Roman biographies.

God,” and that the evangelist wants his readers to wrestle with the question “Who then is this man that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (4:41). On the other hand, various accounts (the account of John the Baptist’s death [6:14–29]; the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus [14:43–15:47]) are in the form of a historical narrative. There is clearly an overlapping of these genres in Mark. Attempts to describe Mark as one or the other stumble over the fact that elements of both are present and intermingled without embarrassment, for the biography of Jesus is intimately interwoven in a historical narrative. As a result, it may be best to describe the genre of Mark as “a historical biography.”<sup>30</sup>

## Theological Emphases

Within Mark we encounter several theological emphases. Some of them are more important than others. What is clear from the beginning, however, is that the central and dominating theme of Mark is christological in nature. This is made clear from the start. Mark is about “the gospel concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). Every account in Mark focuses the reader’s attention in some way on Jesus. Even those dealing with the ministry (1:2–8) and death (6:14–29) of John the Baptist serve to help the reader understand who Jesus of Nazareth is. The account of John’s ministry reveals that Jesus is greater than John the Baptist (1:7–8) and is the “Lord” (1:3) whose path this greatest of the prophets (cf. Matt. 11:7–15) came to prepare. The account of John’s death serves not only as a literary time gap for the mission of the disciples (6:7–13) and their return (6:30) but also as a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus (cf. 9:13, “and they did to him whatever they wanted, just as it has been written [καθὼς γέγραπται, *kathōs gegrapται*] concerning him [John the Baptist],” and 14:21, “For the Son of Man goes just as it has been written [καθὼς γέγραπται, *kathōs gegrapται*] concerning him”).

### Christology

Mark’s portrayal of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is multifaceted. The following are ways in which he seeks to help his readers to understand who Jesus is:

1. *The Miracles of Jesus.* Within Mark we encounter eight healing miracles (1:29–31, 40–45; 2:1–12; 3:1–6; 5:25–34; 7:31–37; 8:22–26; 10:46–52) and a resurrection from the dead (5:21–24, 35–43). In addition we encounter several Markan summaries that refer to Jesus’s healing ministry (1:34; 3:10; 6:5, 13, 54–56). Jesus’s healings include fever, leprosy, paralysis, a withered hand, hemorrhage, deafness and muteness, and blindness. There are also four examples of exorcism (1:21–28; 5:1–13; 7:24–30; 9:14–29), and several references to Jesus’s ministry of exorcism in various summaries and accounts (1:34, 39; 3:11, 22–30; 6:7, 13; cf. 9:38). In addition,

30. The term “historical” here is not used as a value judgment concerning the truthfulness of the Markan narrative, but simply as a shorthand term for “historical narrative biography.”

- we encounter five nature miracles: 4:35–41 (the stilling of a storm); 6:35–44 (the feeding of the five thousand); 6:45–52 (the walking on the sea); 8:1–9 (the feeding of the four thousand); and 11:12–14, 20–25 (the cursing of the fig tree).
2. *The Words and Actions of Jesus.* Within Jesus’s teachings we encounter numerous examples of his claim to a unique authority. He claims the divine prerogative of forgiving sins (2:5–12; cf. Luke 7:36–50), that one’s eternal destiny depends on following him (Mark 8:34–38; 9:37–42; 10:28–31; 12:6–12; 13:9–13), that he has authority over the Sabbath (2:23–28; 3:1–6), that he has authority to cleanse the temple (11:27–33; cf. 11:15–19; cf. also the connection of the question of Jesus’s authority and the cleansing of the temple in John 2:13–22). He claims that with his coming the kingdom of God has arrived (Mark 1:14–15; 2:18–20, 21–22; 14:22–24; cf. 3:23–27) and provides a symbolic act illustrating this by appointing twelve disciples (3:13–19) to indicate that in his ministry God is bringing about the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel. His teaching possesses a unique authority unlike that of the scribes (cf. 1:21–28); he needs no authority to support his teachings—a simple “Truly” (Ἀμήν, *Amēn*) suffices (3:28; 8:12; 9:1, 41; 10:15, 29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9, 18, 25, 30).
  3. *The Titles of Jesus in Mark.* Within Mark numerous titles are used to describe Jesus of Nazareth (1:24; 10:47; 14:67). Those that occur most frequently are “Teacher” (4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; 14:14)<sup>31</sup> and “Son of Man” (2:10, 20, 35; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21 [2×], 41, 62). The first title is used in Mark to describe Jesus not simply as one teacher among many but rather as the supreme and definitive teacher sent from God (1:22, 27; 6:2), the one who provides the authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures (7:6–13; 10:2–12; 12:18–27, 28–34, 35–37; 13:31). “Son of Man” serves clearly as a title in Mark and refers to Jesus in his present ministry (2:10, 28), his forthcoming passion and resurrection (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21 [2×], 41), and his parousia, when he will come to judge the world (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). The latter role of the Son of Man clearly has Dan. 7:13 in mind. Other titles that are used in Mark to describe Jesus are “Christ” (1:1; 8:29; 9:41; 14:61; 15:32), the synonymous expressions “Son of David” (10:47, 48) and “King of the Jews” (15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26), “Prophet” (6:4, 15; 8:28), and “Lord” (1:3; 2:28; 5:19 [cf. v. 20]; 7:28; 11:3). Yet the most important christological term for Mark to describe Jesus is “Son” (13:32) and its related expressions: “Son of God” (1:1; 3:11; 15:39), “my beloved Son” (1:11), “Son of the Most High God” (5:7), “Son of the Blessed” (14:61), and “Holy One of God” (1:24). Although other titles for Jesus may be

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31. Cf. also the Markan use of the verb “teach” to describe Jesus in 1:21–22; 2:13; 4:1–2; 6:2, 34; 8:31–32; 9:31; 12:38; cf. also 7:14–23; and the use of the titles “Rabbi” and “Rabbouni” in 9:5; 10:51; 11:21; 14:45.



used more frequently than “Son,” the importance of this title is seen in how it is used in Mark. First, it is the first clear title used to describe Jesus in Mark. In the opening verse, which serves as an introduction for 1:1–13 and also for the whole book, Mark states that the gospel is about Jesus Christ (in 1:1 “Christ” serves primarily as a name rather than a title), who is the “Son of God.”<sup>32</sup> Second, it is the way God describes Jesus at his baptism (1:11, “You are my beloved Son”) and at his transfiguration (9:7, “This is my beloved Son”). Third, it is the way the demons describe Jesus in his exorcisms (1:24, “the Holy One of God”; and 5:7, “Son of the Most High God”) and in the Markan summary in 3:11 (“And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they would fall down before him and cry out, saying, ‘You are the Son of God’”). The importance of the demonic confession of Jesus as the Son of God is made clear by Mark, who states in 1:34, “and he [Jesus] would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him.” This indicates that the demons serve as authoritative “spokesmen” for the Markan Christology.

From the above it is clear that the Gospel of Mark is essentially a historical biography/narrative of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that focuses on his ministry, passion, and resurrection.<sup>33</sup> Mark reveals this implicitly through his description of Jesus’s words and deeds (cf. Luke 24:19). His words assume that he has the authority to do things no other human being can do, for he assumes even divine prerogatives (2:5–12). By his deeds he demonstrates that he is Lord and master of nature (4:35–43), the demonic world (5:1–20), disease (5:25–34), and even death (5:21–24, 35–43). Explicitly, the titles used to describe Jesus not only reveal that he is the one whom Israel has long awaited, the promised Christ/Son of David/King of the Jews, but also demonstrate his unique relationship with God. He is not just greater than Moses or Elijah (9:4–6), but he possesses a uniqueness in essence (1:11; 9:7; 12:6; 13:32; 14:61–62)—he is the Son of God! Although it would be anachronistic to read into the Gospel of Mark the later Nicene Christology and its discussions of the “substance” (*ousias*) or “nature” (*homoousion*) of Jesus, it nevertheless teaches a “more-than-human status,” “a near-divinity,” a Messiah “who bears the marks of divinity” (Marcus 2000: 222, 340).

### *The “Messianic Secret”*

Several times within the Gospel of Mark, Jesus commands that knowledge of who he is, what he has done, and where he can be found be kept secret. Since Wrede (1971; German original 1901) this has been described as “the messianic secret.” The clearest examples of this involve Jesus’s command to his disciples

32. For a discussion of the textual problem associated with this title in 1:1, see comments on 1:1.

33. Contra Peace 1999: 110–25, who argues that “*the theme which plays the controlling part in the unfolding of the Gospel of Mark is the conversion of the Twelve*” (112, his italics).

not to reveal his messianic identity (8:29–30) and not to tell anyone concerning his transfiguration and the divine affirmation that he is God’s beloved Son until after his resurrection (9:9).<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the demons who recognize full well that Jesus is the Son of God (1:34) are forbidden to reveal this to others (1:25; 3:11–12; cf. 5:6–7, where it is supposed that since this demonic confession takes place outside Israel, such a command is unnecessary or that, because of 1:25 and 3:11–12, Jesus’s unique status is to be assumed). In numerous healing miracles we find similar commands by Jesus to tell no one (1:43–44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26 [this seems to be implied]). During his ministry, Jesus at times also sought to conceal his presence from the public (7:24; 9:30). Often he taught his disciples privately (4:13, 34; 7:17; 9:28–29, 30–31; 10:10–11; 13:3) and concealed his teaching from others (4:10–12, 33–34).

The most famous interpretation of these materials in Mark was by Wrede. According to him, whereas some of the secrecy material found in Mark is traditional, the majority of it was created by Mark in order to explain to his readers why the life of Jesus was so “unmessianic” and that Jesus became the Messiah only after his resurrection (9:9; cf. Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:3–4; cf. Bultmann 1968: 346–47). It is evident, however, that one cannot eliminate all the messianic claims and actions found in the Gospels from the life of Jesus of Nazareth. One cannot simply deny the history of all such passages as Peter’s messianic confession (8:27–29), the events of Palm Sunday (11:1–10), the cleansing of the temple (11:15–19), Jesus’s trial and condemnation by the Sanhedrin (14:43–65), Jesus’s condemnation to death by Pilate (15:1–39), and the superscription on the cross (15:26).<sup>35</sup> It is unclear how even faith in Jesus’s resurrection could have created the belief that one who never made such claims now became the Messiah, for messianic belief at the time did not associate a resurrection with the Messiah’s death (cf. 2 Esd. 7:28–29). (There was never any thought in the tradition that the resurrection of Lazarus made or proved that he was the Messiah.) It is furthermore evident that by the time Mark wrote his Gospel in the late 60s, the gospel traditions were and had been for a long time fully messianic in nature (Strecker 1983: 54). Consequently, there was no need for Mark to explain why the Jesus Christ of faith was so unmessianic in the gospel traditions, because the pre-Markan traditions were thoroughly messianic.

The attempt by Wrede and others to find a single, overarching theme in Mark to explain all the secrecy materials is likewise unconvincing because of the disparate nature of these materials. Whereas much of the emphasis on the messianic secret comes from the hand of Mark (1:34; 7:36a), the emphasis was already present in the pre-Markan tradition (1:44; 5:43; 8:26; cf. Räisänen 1990: 145–49, 162–66; Theissen 1991: 140–52) and stemmed from the historical

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34. The command to silence directed to Bartimaeus, who calls Jesus “Son of David” (10:47–48), is not part of Jesus’s “messianic secret,” because it comes from the crowd.

35. The crucifixion of Jesus and the titulus on the cross saying “The King of the Jews” is completely unintelligible if the life of Jesus of Nazareth was entirely unmessianic.

Jesus. This refutes Wrede's explanation of why Mark emphasized the motif of the messianic secret in his Gospel. The responses to the injunction to secrecy are also quite different. The "messianic secret" (8:29–30; 9:9) is kept until the trial (14:61–64; 15:2, 9, 12, 18) and crucifixion (15:26, 32, 39), but the "miracle secret" is continually disobeyed (1:45; 7:36b). As for the demons, although commanded to be silent (1:25; 3:12), they continually confess that Jesus is the Son of God (1:24; 3:11; 5:7).

In the life of the historical Jesus, the command to secrecy makes perfectly good sense in numerous instances. The avoidance of an open proclamation of Jesus's messiahship averted an immediate confrontation with Rome, for Pilate would not tolerate a popular, charismatic teacher who drew thousands of enthusiastic followers and referred to himself as the Christ/Messiah, the Son of David, the long-awaited King of the Jews. For the masses and Rome, this would have been interpreted to mean that Jesus came to deliver the Jewish people by force from the rule and bondage of Rome. (Note that the command to keep the messianic secret in 8:30 is also found in Matt. 16:20 and Luke 9:21.) Furthermore, since Jesus's own understanding of his messiahship was so radically different from that of his audience, it was expedient to avoid the public use of such titles. The more enigmatic "Son of Man" served as a better designation, and through it he was able to teach that his ministry involved not political revolution but giving his life as a ransom for many (10:45; 14:24). The public proclamation of his miracles could also be a hindrance to his ministry, for, as 1:45 indicates, this often resulted in his having little time to teach his disciples (7:24; 9:30). Even Jesus's teaching concerning the arrival of the kingdom of God had the potential of inflaming the passion for rebellion that later erupted in the Jewish War of AD 66–70. The arrival of the kingdom of God and the call to receive it (1:15) could, in the revolutionary atmosphere of first-century Palestine, be easily misunderstood as a call to arms. Thus it was wise to teach the crowds concerning its arrival in parables (4:10–12, 33–34).

With respect to Mark, the secrecy material serves at least two important purposes. For one, it demonstrates that Jesus was not put to death because he was a political revolutionary. In his ministry, Jesus avoided the open use of politically volatile self-designations such as Christ/Messiah, Son of David, King of the Jews. Along with the emphasis on the religious leadership's desire to kill Jesus (3:6; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; 12:12; 14:1–2, 10–11; etc.), this indicates that Jesus's death was due not to his having been a revolutionary but rather to the hostility of the religious leadership and above all to the will of God (8:31; 10:45; 14:12, 27, 32–42, 49). Second, the command to secrecy with respect to Jesus's miracles and exorcisms serves as a literary device to highlight the greatness and glory of Jesus and his identity. Jesus is too great to be hidden. The demons, whom Mark wants his readers to understand as authoritative "spokesmen" for his (and God's) point of view, are to be silent as to who Jesus is. But they are so commanded (1:25; 3:12) *after* they have already confessed that Jesus is the Son of God (1:24; 3:11). Those who are healed may be told not to proclaim that Jesus healed them (1:44; 6:36a), but they cannot help but

do so (1:45; 7:36b). Like a city set on a hill (Matt. 5:14), the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cannot be hidden. See 1:45.

### *The Disciples*

With the rise of redaction criticism, there arose a view of Mark's portrayal of the disciples<sup>36</sup> that was both new and unique. According to this view, Mark deliberately sought in his Gospel to portray the twelve disciples in a negative light and to attack the Christology they represented (Weeden 1971; Kelber 1979; Tolbert 1989). Evidence for this was seen in the misunderstandings of the disciples (6:52; 7:18; 8:4, 17–21, 32–33; 9:5–7, 10, 32) and their failures (9:14–29, 33–34; 10:35–41; 14:32–41, 50, 66–72). (The character of Judas Iscariot [3:19; 14:10–11, 43–46] cannot be used to support a negative portrayal of the disciples because he is set in sharp contrast to the other disciples in 3:13–19.) That Jesus had twelve disciples was already known to Mark's readers, who were also aware that the disciples held a unique place in Jesus's ministry and possessed the leading position of authority in the early church. In 1 Cor. 15:3–8 Paul repeats a confessional formula that he had taught the church during his first visit (ca. AD 49–50). This formula, which he himself had received much earlier, refers to the "Twelve" and Peter having seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:4). Despite the betrayal of Judas, the need to maintain the symbolism of the "Twelve" was so important that Luke portrays the replacement of Judas with Matthias as the first act of the early church (Acts 1:15–26). In addition, the acknowledgment that it was one of the twelve disciples whom Jesus personally chose that betrayed him is certainly not something the early church would have created. That Mark's readers knew of the twelve disciples and had a positive perception of them is clear (Tannehill 1977: 393; even Weeden 1971 acknowledges this). In light of this, if Mark had wanted his readers to change from a positive to a negative attitude

36. In Mark, "his disciples" (2:15, 16, 23; 3:7, 9; 5:31; 6:1, 29, 35, 41, 45; 7:2, 17; 8:4, 6, 10, 27 [2×], 33, 34; 9:28, 31; 10:23, 46; 11:1, 14; 12:43; 13:1; 14:12, 13, 32; 16:7), "your disciples" (2:18; 7:5; 9:18), "his own disciples" (4:34), "my disciples" (14:14), "the disciples" (8:1; 9:14; 10:10, 13, 24; 14:16), "the Twelve" (3:14, 16; 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; 14:10, 17, 20, 43), and "the apostles" (3:14; 6:30) are used interchangeably and refer to the same group of Jesus's followers (Meyers 1968: 97–99; 173–91; contra Best 1978: 32–35). Cf. how in 6:7 "the Twelve" are sent out to preach, heal, and cast out demons in fulfillment of Jesus's calling in 3:14; and they are called "apostles" in 3:14 (there is a textual problem here) and in their return in 6:30. Shortly after their return, they are then referred to as "his disciples" in 6:35. In 9:35 "his disciples" of 9:31–34 are referred to as "the Twelve," and in 10:32 "his disciples" of 10:23–31 are again referred to as "the Twelve." Mark makes no attempt to differentiate these groups. In 14:14 the Passover/Last Supper is said to be for Jesus and "his [lit. 'my'] disciples," but in 14:17 and 20 it is "the Twelve" who participate in the meal with Jesus. After Jesus and "the Twelve" leave the upper room (14:17, 20, 26–32), he and "his disciples" arrive at Gethsemane (14:32). Cf. also how Matthew refers to the "twelve disciples" (10:1; 11:1; 20:17; cf. also 26:20; 19:23 and 28, which refer to the "disciples" judging the "twelve" tribes of Israel) and to the "twelve apostles" (10:2; cf. J. Brown 2002: 39–43). Jesus, of course, had other followers as well (cf. Mark 1:45; 2:13–14; 3:7, 34–35; 4:10, 33–34; 5:18–20, 34; 8:34–38; 9:38–41, 42; 10:29–31, 32, 46–52; 14:3–9; 15:40–41, 42–47; 16:1–8), but they are not called "disciples" in Mark.

toward the disciples, he would have had to argue forcefully and powerfully from the very beginning of his Gospel to change their present viewpoint. One would certainly expect Mark to minimize or omit such positive descriptions of the disciples as found in 1:16–20; 3:13–19; and 6:7–13, but he does not (Tannehill 1977: 394).

The earliest portrayal of the disciples in Mark, however, clearly paints them in a positive light. Jesus calls Peter and Andrew (1:16–18) and James and John (1:19–20) to follow him, and they leave their nets and family to follow him. In so describing their response, Mark sharply contrasts their actions with those of the rich young ruler, who, because of his possessions, does not follow Jesus (10:21–22). The first description of the disciples therefore reinforces the positive view of them that his readers held. The second mention of the four disciples involves the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (1:29–31). There is nothing negative about the disciples here. The third reference (1:36–38) involves Peter, as a good disciple,<sup>37</sup> telling Jesus of the crowds seeking him and being invited to follow Jesus as he preaches and exorcises demons throughout Galilee. All this reinforces the preunderstanding of Mark’s readers that the disciples were chosen by Jesus, followed him, and were witnesses of Jesus’s preaching and healing ministry. In 2:16 the disciples are again portrayed as present with Jesus and acting in 2:18–22 and 23–28 in accordance with Jesus’s teachings. In 3:7 and 9 they are present with Jesus and obey his command to have a boat ready for him (cf. 4:1). In 3:13–19 the disciples are called apostles<sup>38</sup> and are uniquely appointed by Jesus to be his companions, recipients of his teachings, and partners in his ministry of preaching and exorcising demons. They furthermore are sharply contrasted with Judas Iscariot in 3:19. In all of this so far, Mark gives a highly positive portrayal of the disciples, confirming and supporting his readers’ preunderstanding of the disciples. It is most unlikely that Mark would describe the disciples so positively at the beginning of his Gospel if he were on a vendetta against them and their views and sought to portray them as heretics and reprobates.

The first negative description of the disciples is generally seen as occurring in 4:10–13. Yet 4:10 seems to be a natural question by the disciples concerning the meaning of Jesus’s parable(s). There is no stinging rebuke of the disciples by Jesus but rather an explanation that indicates their privileged position (4:11–12 and 34b; cf. 7:17; 10:10). Even 4:13b (“Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all [of the other] parables?”) functions less as a castigation of the disciples than as an emphasis on the importance of understanding the parable of the four soils. The second supposedly negative description of the disciples is found in 4:38–40 and functions less as a rebuke of the disciples than as a foil for the greatness of Jesus and the disciples’ rightful

37. There is no need to interpret “pursued” (κατεδίωξεν, *katediōxen*; 1:36) negatively (see 1:36–37). In the present context it serves primarily to emphasize that all the people are seeking Jesus (1:37), an example of Jesus’s great popularity.

38. See additional note on 3:16 concerning the textual problem involved here.

awe of “this man,” who is Lord of nature. That these verses are also found in the parallels in Matt. 8:25–26 and Luke 8:26 indicates that these evangelists did not see this statement as indicating that the disciples were heretical and disqualified from any leadership role in the church. The next reference to the disciples comes in Mark 5:37–43, where, in contrast to the ridiculing crowd, Peter, James, and John are invited to witness the raising of Jairus’s daughter. In 6:1 the disciples continue to follow Jesus, and in 6:7–13 they are sent out as extensions of Jesus’s ministry to preach, heal, and cast out demons. Their successful mission is summarized in 6:30. In 6:37 the response of the disciples to Jesus’s command to feed the five thousand would probably have been seen as natural by Mark’s readers, for they knew that, unlike Jesus, the disciples could not miraculously feed five thousand people. Consequently, they would probably not have understood 6:37 as a failure of the disciples, for no rebuke of the disciples is present. The disciples’ response serves rather to heighten Jesus’s miracle-working power. He could do things that the disciples could not even dream of doing.

The clearest negative description of the disciples so far comes in Mark’s editorial comment in 6:52: “they did not understand about the loaves, but [on the contrary] their heart had been hardened.” Here the disciples are described not only as lacking understanding but also as having a hardened heart. Matthew and Luke omit this verse, but Matthew adds the following words in Matt. 14:21: “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” The disciples’ hardness of heart is mentioned again in Mark 8:17 and recalls the use of this expression to describe Jesus’s critics who seek to kill him (3:5–6). In 7:17 the disciples are again portrayed as seeking further instruction concerning Jesus’s teachings (cf. also 10:10), and Jesus is surprised at their lack of understanding (7:18). The latter statement is also found in the parallel in Matt. 15:17, which indicates that for Matthew this was not understood as an attack on the character of the disciples that disqualified them as leaders of the church. Although Mark 8:4 is often given as another example of the disciples’ lack of understanding, it functions in Mark not to portray a failure of the disciples but rather to demonstrate the greatness of Jesus in feeding the four thousand. Its presence in the parallel account in Matt. 15:33 and the lack of any rebuke of the disciples or a reference to their dullness indicate this point. On the other hand, in 8:17–21 we have a clear example of the disciples’ lack of understanding, and reference is made for the second time to the disciples’ hardened hearts (8:17). Although Matthew omits the reference to their hardened hearts, he retains the rest of the account portraying the failure of the disciples (16:5–12).

In the first passion prediction in Mark, we find a harsh rebuke of Peter by Jesus. After Peter’s confession in 8:29 that Jesus is the Christ and Jesus’s command to secrecy in 8:30, we find Jesus’s first passion prediction (8:31; Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22). In both Mark 8:32 and Matt. 16:23 we find a rejection of Jesus’s teaching by Peter followed by a stern rebuke of Peter (“Get behind me, Satan . . .”). The presence of the rebuke in Mark is not due to Mark’s attempt to portray Peter

negatively but because it was part of the tradition. This is evident in that the rebuke of Peter in Matthew is made even more severe by the addition of “You are a stumbling block to me,” and yet in Matt. 16:17–19 Jesus praises Peter’s christological confession and attributes to him the leadership role in the early church. Clearly, Matthew had no desire to denigrate Peter in his Gospel, as his omission of various negative statements in Mark indicates. (Cf. his parallels to Mark 6:52; 8:17; 9:32 [note, however, how Luke, who clearly does not seek to demean the disciples, retains and heightens the disciples’ lack of understanding in his parallel in 9:45], 34; and 10:35.) The disciples’ lack of understanding in the transfiguration account (Mark 9:5–7) is not uniquely Markan but is traditional, as the parallels in Matt. 17:4–5 and Luke 9:33–34 indicate. Indeed, the Markan comment in 9:6 seeks to explain Peter’s error in equating Jesus with Moses and Elijah in a more sympathetic way than Luke (9:33) and Matthew (17:4) do. The failure of the disciples in 9:34, while ameliorated in Matt. 18:1, is reported with a clarification in Luke 9:46 that the disciples were debating which one of them was the greatest. The reference to the disciples asking Jesus concerning his teaching on divorce (Mark 10:10; cf. Matthew’s addition of a similar question in 13:36) should not be interpreted negatively but is an example of their unique and privileged position of having access to Jesus’s private explanations (Mark 4:34). (Is it out of place to point out that teachers in general like to have their students interact with their teachings and ask questions?) Similarly, the amazement of the disciples in 10:24 over Jesus’s teaching concerning the difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom of God functions in Mark to emphasize the cost of discipleship and the reversal of the common belief that wealth and piety were assured signs of God’s favor and blessing.

The clear misunderstanding and failure of the disciples to understand what greatness in the kingdom of God involves (10:35–41) is also found in Matt. 20:20–24. Matthew attempts to ameliorate the error by having the selfish request come from their mother rather than from the sons of Zebedee. Nevertheless, Matthew in 20:22–24 portrays Jesus’s rebuke in Mark 10:28–41 as directed at James and John. The failure of the disciples at Gethsemane is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels, and all three rebukes of the disciples in Mark (14:37, 40, 41) are found in Matthew (26:40, 43, 45). Luke in his very abbreviated account of the incident records only the first rebuke (22:46) and in condensed form.<sup>39</sup> After Jesus is seized at Gethsemane, Mark mentions the disciples’ flight (14:50). This is also mentioned in Matthew (26:56) but not in Luke. The last major failure of the disciples recorded in Mark involves the denial of Peter. All three denials of Peter in Mark (14:68, 70, 71) are found in Matthew (26:70, 72, 74) and Luke (22:57, 58, 60). This indicates that their presence in Mark is due less to a desire to vilify the disciples, for certainly Matthew and Luke do not seek to do so, than to the fact that the incident was part of the tradition of Jesus’s passion.

39. In Greek, Luke’s account contains only 88 words in comparison to Mark’s 181 and Matthew’s 194.

As we reflect upon the Markan portrayal of the disciples, we observe the following:

1. The preunderstanding of Mark's readers with regard to the disciples was positive, even though they knew of such things as Judas's betrayal, Peter's denial, the disciples' failure at Gethsemane, their desertion at Jesus's arrest, and so on. The portrayal of the disciples in the Jesus traditions was not a brittle, overly romantic fiction of twelve perfect disciples that could easily be shattered. On the contrary, they were well aware not only of their unique role as Jesus's twelve disciples and the leaders of the early church, but also of their failures.
2. Mark begins his Gospel with a highly positive portrayal of the disciples. This includes the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John, which provides a paradigm of what it means to follow Jesus (1:16–20). Their unique calling by Jesus to carry on his mission (3:13–19) and their successful carrying out of that mission (6:7–13, 30) would reinforce Mark's readers' positive preunderstanding of them. Other material in the early chapters (1:29–31; 2:16, 18–22, 23–26; 3:7–9; 4:10–12, 33–34; 5:1–43; etc.) reveals their presence with Jesus and, lacking any clear negative features, would tend to be interpreted positively by his readers. The supposed exceptions to this found in 4:13 and 38–40 (the latter of which is found in both the Matthean and Lukan parallels) are insufficient to change the positive understanding of Mark's readers into thinking that the disciples were heretics and reprobates. If Mark intended to do this, he "surely failed" (Tannehill 1977: 394).
3. Many of the passages in Mark where a severely negative portrayal is found occur in the parallels in Matthew and Luke: Mark 7:18 (cf. Matt. 15:17); 8:4 (cf. Matt. 15:33); 9:5–7 (cf. Matt. 17:4–5; Luke 9:33–34); 9:18 (cf. Matt. 17:16; Luke 9:40); 9:32 (cf. Luke 9:45); 9:33–34 (cf. Luke 9:46); 14:32–42 (cf. Matt. 26:36–46; Luke 22:39–46); 14:50 (cf. Matt. 26:46); 14:66–72 (cf. Matt. 26:69–75; Luke 22:56–62). These passages in Mark do not require us to interpret them as attempts to vilify the disciples any more than their presence in Matthew and Luke and in the gospel traditions require that they be seen in this light.
4. Whereas at times Matthew downplays the negative portrayals of the disciples found in Mark (cf. the Matthean parallels to Mark 6:52; 8:17; 9:32, 34; 10:35), at times he intensifies them (cf. Mark 4:38–40/Matt. 8:25–27; Mark 8:32–33/Matt. 16:23; Mark 9:28–29/Matt. 17:19–20; Mark 14:4/Matt. 26:8), and yet scholars agree that Matthew is not seeking in his Gospel to vilify the disciples and portray them as heretics.
5. The clearest examples of Mark's intensifying the disciples' lack of understanding are found in 6:52 (omitted by both Matthew, who adds a reference to Peter's failure in his attempt to walk on the sea, and Luke) and 8:17 (Matthew includes this in 16:9), where in addition to their lack of understanding the disciples are described as having a "hardened heart."



The latter expression is especially harsh in that it is used only one other time in Mark: to describe the hardness of heart of Jesus's opponents who seek to kill him (3:5). That 8:17 is in the form of a question and not a statement, however, tends to lessen its harshness somewhat (see 8:17–20).

6. Just as the beginning of the Gospel portrays the disciples positively, so does the present ending in 16:1–8. The angelic message in 16:7 that the disciples and Peter should go to Galilee, where they will meet the risen Christ, reinforces the prophecy that Jesus had made in 14:28, and this must be understood positively as a regathering of his scattered sheep (14:27) by the risen Christ. I will argue (see Mark 16:1–8, “The Ending of Mark”) that the original ending of Mark has been lost, and that it concluded with a resurrection account in which Jesus met the disciples in Galilee. Perhaps Matt. 28:16–20 and John 21 (esp. vv. 15–19) reflect aspects of this missing account. That Mark 14:28 and 16:7 are heavily redactional in nature argues strongly that the evangelist did not want to leave his readers with a negative understanding of the disciples but sought to show how these twelve chosen men, although flawed and imperfect, were reaffirmed as Jesus's disciples and leaders of the church after the resurrection.

For the historian, the question of how the disciples could be so obtuse and dull often loses sight of the pre-Pentecost situation of the disciples. Before Easter and Pentecost, it is easy to see how the passion of Jesus would have been hard to accept. The idea that the Messiah/Christ/Lord's Anointed/Son of David would die by crucifixion was totally foreign to the messianic understanding and hopes of first-century Judaism. For the disciples, it would take the resurrection to change this and put the divine seal of approval on this and other difficult teachings of Jesus. It is therefore not at all inconceivable that the disciples could have responded and reacted in the way portrayed in Mark (France 2002: 29). That Mark at times purposely portrays the disciples in a negative light cannot be denied. Why he chose to do this is unclear. Various suggestions have been made, but none of them is convincing.<sup>40</sup> That the pre-Markan gospel traditions contained such material is evident from the fact that Matthew (and Luke) not only includes such material from his Markan source, but he also adds material from outside Mark that portrays a negative picture of the disciples (cf. Matt. 13:36; 14:28–31; 18:19–20; 28:7). Mark's portrayal of the disciples is in places negative. Yet it is clear that Mark portrays the disciples as chosen by Jesus, and despite their failures they are reunited with Jesus

40. Among the suggestions are the following: Mark sought to portray the paradoxical character of true discipleship, to encourage his readers that their failures can be forgiven and they can be restored, to indicate that discipleship involves both failure and reconciliation, to use the failure of the disciples as a foil for his readers in order to have them follow Jesus more closely, for readers to derive hope from Jesus's gracious attitude toward them despite their failures, to refute a *theios anēr* (divine man) Christology of glory or an overly realized eschatology by demonstrating that the disciples were heretics.

after the resurrection (14:28; 16:7; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3–8) to serve as his apostles. That Christians throughout the centuries have found encouragement in this is obvious, but unfortunately the reason for Mark’s emphasis of this is not.

### *Discipleship*

Mark teaches his readers about discipleship in two ways. One is by recounting Jesus’s general teaching on the subject, and the other is by narrating different accounts in which Jesus invites various individuals to follow him. The clearest example of the former is found in 8:34–38. Here the general invitation to follow Jesus is extended to “anyone” (note the reference to the crowd in 8:34a) and involves three requirements: denying oneself, taking up one’s cross, and following Jesus. The first involves not just denying oneself of things, such as giving up something for Lent, but denying oneself as the determiner of one’s goals and purposes in life. It is to deny mastery over one’s life and ambitions and place oneself under the lordship of Jesus. That this involves denying various things is evident from the examples of Jesus and of those who chose or chose not to follow him (see below), but these “things” are simply the consequences of denying oneself. Denying oneself refers to an initial act of commitment (an aorist imperative; Best 1981: 32–33). It is a negative command involving an inner decision, and it functions much like the command to repent (1:4, 15; 6:12).

Like the first command, the second, “to take up one’s cross,” refers to the act of becoming a Christian. Mark understands this as standing in parallel to the first command and giving a specific example of what “denying oneself” might entail. To “take up one’s cross” recalls Jesus denying himself (14:36–39) and committing himself to fulfill God’s will even to death (8:35; 13:12–13). For Jesus’s hearers, Mark’s readers, and present-day readers, the figurative nature of this expression was/is self-evident. The command does not require actual martyrdom or a particular form of martyrdom—crucifixion—for all who choose to follow Jesus. Luke makes this clear by adding “daily” to this command (9:23). The expression refers rather to a total commitment to follow Jesus that accepts even the possibility of martyrdom.

In contrast to the first and second requirements, the command “to follow Jesus” is a present imperative and refers to a continuing action. This expression is a popular one in Mark to describe being a Christian, or “follower” of Jesus (1:18; 2:14–15; 9:38; 10:21, 28, 52; 15:41; cf. also the use of a verb followed by “after me” in 1:17 and 20). It emphasizes outward, continual actions and refers to the living out of Jesus’s teachings and example, such as loving God with one’s entire being and loving one’s neighbor as one loves oneself (12:29–31), becoming a servant/slave of others (9:35; 10:43–44), keeping the commandments (10:19), following Jesus above even one’s love and commitment to family (9:29; cf. Matt. 10:37–38/Luke 14:26–27 and note that loving Jesus more than one’s family is followed immediately by a reference to taking up one’s cross), having faith (Mark 1:15; 2:5; 4:40; 5:36; 9:42; 11:22), praying (11:24; 14:38), confessing Jesus and not denying or being ashamed of him (8:38), and removing any stumbling block from one’s life (9:43–47).

Mark also reveals what discipleship consists of through various examples. The greatest example is Jesus. What discipleship demands, Jesus himself lived out. From the beginning he was aware of his forthcoming passion (see below “The Death of Jesus Christ”) and denied himself in order to fulfill God’s will (14:36, 39). He modeled a life of prayer (1:35; 6:46; 14:32–39) and served as the supreme example of what it means to be a servant of all (10:43–44) by giving his life as a ransom for many (10:45). The disciples also modeled what discipleship involves by denying themselves, as witnessed by their leaving their “nets” or livelihood (1:18) and family (1:20; 10:28–30). Despite their failures, through the grace of forgiveness (14:28; 16:7), they demonstrated what it means to follow Jesus. Positive examples of the importance of faith are found throughout Mark (2:5; 5:28–34; 7:24–30; 10:52; etc.), along with negative examples (see above “The Disciples”). The story of the rich man provides an important example of what it means to deny oneself. Here Jesus points out that entering the kingdom of God involves denying oneself and that, for the rich man, this requires that he sell whatever he has, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus (10:21). Unwilling to do this, he provides a negative example of what not denying oneself involves (10:22) and its consequences (10:22–25; cf. 8:36–37).

### *The Death of Jesus Christ*

Mark has been described as “a Passion Narrative with an extended introduction.” Although this is somewhat exaggerated (chs. 1–13 are more than an “introduction”), this correctly recognizes the central role that the death of Jesus plays in the “gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). Already in the second chapter of the Gospel, the Markan Jesus is aware of his future death and refers to it in cryptic terms: “But days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them” (2:19–20). Mark’s readers at this point know far better than the disciples that this is a reference to Jesus’s crucifixion.<sup>41</sup> In chapter 3, after a controversy story involving Jesus healing on the Sabbath (3:1–5), Mark adds the comment that the Pharisees and Herodians took counsel to destroy Jesus (3:6); and after the selection of Judas Iscariot as one of the Twelve, Mark adds the comment, “who also betrayed him” (3:19), thus reminding and preparing his readers for Judas’s role in the crucifixion of Jesus.

It is, however, after Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi that Mark systematically tells his readers how Jesus at this point begins to teach the disciples of his coming death (cf. 8:31 and Matt. 16:21). Although the death of John the Baptist foreshadows the death of Jesus (Mark 6:14–29), it is at 8:31 that Jesus begins to teach the disciples of the divine necessity (note the “it is necessary” [δεῖ, *dei*] that parallels “it is written” in 9:12; 14:12, 27, 49). Jesus teaches, and Mark emphasizes, that his death is not a tragedy due to fate but is God’s plan for Jesus. God is the ultimate cause of

41. This would be especially true if Mark was written to the Roman church, which was familiar with the Pauline message of “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23; cf. Rom. 6:6).

Jesus's death. He will smite him (14:27), and Jesus's coming is for this very purpose (10:45). Beginning with 8:31 we find Jesus repeatedly teaching the disciples about his coming death. An allusion to Jesus's crucifixion is found in 8:34, and mention of his death is made after the transfiguration in 9:9–10, but in 9:31 and 10:33–34 we find Jesus explicitly repeating a second and third time that he will soon be killed. The third reference is the most explicit of the three. In 10:45 Jesus teaches that he has been sent by God to give his life as a ransom for many. In 11:18 we find another reference to the religious leadership seeking to kill Jesus. Then, in the parable of the vineyard, Jesus talks about how the religious leadership (the tenants in charge of the vineyard) not only killed the prophets sent to them (the servants of the vineyard owner) but also would kill the owner's "beloved son" (12:6–8), and after the parable Mark adds the comment that the leaders sought to seize Jesus but could not because of the crowd (12:12).

In 14:1–2 we read of the desire of the chief priests and scribes to kill Jesus and how the presence of the people thwarted their desire. Sandwiched between this and how Judas provided the opportunity for the chief priests to do this (14:10–11) is the account of an unnamed woman in Bethany anointing Jesus (14:3–9). Jesus interprets this generous act of love as preparing him for his coming death (14:8). The account of the Last Supper not only refers to the betrayal of Jesus (14:18–21) and his death (14:22–25) but also explains that his death is sacrificial in nature, sealing a new covenant (14:24). Jesus will be smitten by God himself, for the Scripture states that this is the divine purpose of his life (14:27). At Gethsemane Jesus struggles with this divine purpose, which is described as a "cup" that he must drink (14:36a–b, 39; cf. 10:38–39). Yet he submits, for his death is the will of God (14:36c). At this point the death of Jesus is described by various narratives. The first involves his betrayal and seizure (14:43–50), and what is taking place is described as the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures (14:49). This is followed by Jesus's trial before the Sanhedrin (14:53–65) and his condemnation to death (14:64). After the account of Peter's denial (14:66–72), we read of Jesus's trial before Pilate (15:1–15), in which Jesus is sentenced to be crucified, and then of the crucifixion (15:16–41), burial (15:42–47), and resurrection (16:1–8).

It is obvious that Mark seeks to emphasize that Jesus's death is part of the divine plan for his life. It is not a tragedy, an example of how things can take an unfortunate turn or how the best laid plans can go awry. On the contrary, in the death of Jesus all things go exactly according to the divine plan. It is God's plan, foretold centuries earlier in the Scriptures, that Jesus should die in order to be a ransom for many (10:45) and by his sacrificial death seal a new covenant that God is making with his people (14:24). Thus Jesus willingly accepts the cup given to him. There is nothing new or unique in Mark's portrayal of the death of Jesus. It is traditional. That he emphasizes this in his Gospel is clear, but *why* he does so is unclear. Attempts to reconstruct the specific situation or concern that Mark sought to address is debated. There have been numerous suggestions: to combat a *theios anēr* (divine man) Christology that

emphasized the glory and majesty of the earthly Son of God; to explain why Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died such a shameful death; to encourage his readers who were facing persecution and death and help them accept their situation and face it with courage by showing how Jesus faced persecution and death; to emphasize that Jesus did not die as a revolutionary but that the human cause of his death was the jealousy and animosity of the Jewish leadership; to emphasize that God's will and purpose was the ultimate cause of Jesus's death; and so on. Some of these explanations are less likely than others, but all are speculative and none can be demonstrated from the text of Mark. Fortunately, however, we can know *what* Mark is emphasizing in his Gospel, even if the exact understanding of the *why* eludes us.

## An Outline of the Gospel of Mark

The following outline of the Gospel of Mark is intentionally worded to remind the reader that, according to Mark 1:1, this Gospel is about “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

- I. Prologue: The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1–13)
  - A. The witness of John the Baptist to Jesus (1:1–8)
  - B. The baptism of Jesus (1:9–11)
  - C. The temptation of Jesus (1:12–13)
- II. Who is this Jesus? Part 1 (1:14–3:6)
  - A. A summary of Jesus's message (1:14–15)
  - B. Jesus calls the first disciples (1:16–20)
  - C. Jesus's healing ministry in Capernaum and Galilee (1:21–45)
    1. Jesus's authority as a teacher (1:21–28)
    2. An evening in Capernaum (1:29–34)
    3. Jesus's ever-increasing fame (1:35–39)
    4. Jesus heals a leper (1:40–45)
  - D. Jesus's mighty acts in Capernaum and Galilee (2:1–3:6)
    1. Jesus forgives the sins of a paralytic (2:1–12)
    2. Jesus dines with toll collectors and sinners (2:13–17)
    3. Jesus and fasting do not mix (2:18–22)
    4. Jesus and the Sabbath, part 1 (2:23–28)
    5. Jesus and the Sabbath, part 2 (3:1–6)
- III. Who is this Jesus? Part 2 (3:7–6:6a)
  - A. A summary of Jesus's ministry (3:7–12)
  - B. Jesus calls the twelve apostles (3:13–19)
  - C. Jesus, his family, and Beelzebul (3:20–35)
  - D. Jesus teaches in parables (4:1–34)
    1. Jesus's parable of the sower, seed, and soils (4:1–9)
    2. Jesus's purpose for teaching in parables (4:10–12)
    3. Jesus's interpretation of the parable of the soils (4:13–20)

4. Jesus's parables of the lamp and the measure (4:21–25)
5. Jesus's parables of the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed (4:26–34)
- E. Jesus—Lord of nature, demons, disease, and death (4:35–5:43)
  1. Jesus—Lord of nature (4:35–41)
  2. Jesus—Lord of demons (5:1–20)
  3. Jesus—Lord of disease and death (5:21–43)
- F. Jesus encounters unbelief in Nazareth (6:1–6a)
- IV. Mission and misunderstanding: Part 3 (6:6b–8:21)
  - A. A summary of Jesus's ministry and the mission of his disciples (6:6b–13)
  - B. The death of John the Baptist (6:14–29)
  - C. Jesus feeds the five thousand (6:30–44)
  - D. Jesus walks on the sea (6:45–52)
  - E. A summary of Jesus's healings at Gennesaret (6:53–56)
  - F. Jesus and the tradition of the elders (7:1–23)
  - G. Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman (7:24–30)
  - H. Jesus heals a deaf mute (7:31–37)
    - I. Jesus feeds the four thousand (8:1–9)
    - J. Jesus is asked for a sign (8:10–13)
  - K. Jesus's miracles of the two feedings recalled (8:14–21)
- V. On the way to Jerusalem: Part 4 (8:22–10:52)
  - A. Jesus heals the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22–26)
  - B. Peter's confession and Jesus's first passion prediction (8:27–33)
  - C. Jesus's invitation to discipleship (8:34–9:1)
  - D. Jesus is transfigured (9:2–8)
  - E. The Son of Man and the return of Elijah (9:9–13)
  - F. Jesus performs a difficult exorcism (9:14–29)
  - G. Jesus's second passion prediction (9:30–32)
  - H. Jesus's teachings on discipleship (9:33–50)
    - I. Jesus's teaching concerning divorce (10:1–12)
    - J. Jesus blesses the children (10:13–16)
  - K. Jesus, the rich man, and eternal life (10:17–31)
  - L. Jesus's third passion prediction (10:32–34)
  - M. The misguided request of James and John (10:35–45)
  - N. Jesus heals a second blind man (10:46–52)
- VI. Jesus's entry into Jerusalem: Part 5 (11:1–13:37)
  - A. Jesus's messianic entry into Jerusalem (11:1–11)
  - B. Jesus's judgment of the fig tree and the temple (11:12–25)
  - C. Jesus questioned concerning his authority (11:27–33)
  - D. Jesus's parable of the vineyard (12:1–12)
  - E. The Pharisees and Herodians seek to trick Jesus (12:13–17)
  - F. The Sadducees seek to trick Jesus (12:18–27)
  - G. A scribe asks Jesus about the great commandment (12:28–34)
  - H. Jesus's question concerning the Messiah (12:35–37)

- I. Jesus's denunciation of the scribes (12:38–40)
- J. Jesus's teaching concerning the widow's great gift (12:41–44)
- K. Jesus's eschatological discourse (13:1–37)
  - 1. Jesus's prediction of the destruction of the temple (13:1–4)
  - 2. The coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem described (13:5–23)
  - 3. The coming of the Son of Man (13:24–27)
  - 4. The lesson of the fig tree (13:28–31)
  - 5. The coming of the Son of Man and the call to watchfulness (13:32–37)
- VII. The Passion Narrative: Part 6 (14:1–16:8)
  - A. The plot to kill Jesus, and his anointing by an unnamed woman (14:1–11)
  - B. The Last Supper and Jesus's prediction of the denial of the disciples (14:12–31)
  - C. Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:32–42)
  - D. Jesus is seized (14:43–52)
  - E. Jesus is tried by the Sanhedrin (14:53–65)
  - F. Jesus is denied by Peter (14:66–72)
  - G. Jesus is tried by Pontius Pilate (15:1–15)
  - H. Jesus is crucified (15:16–41)
    - I. Jesus is buried (15:42–47)
    - J. Jesus is raised from the dead (16:1–8)