

The Half Hour That Changes the World

The Gospel of Mark

Book 41

Basic Questions behind the book:

What are the basic components of the story of Jesus that we must not forget?

Summary of book:

Mark's Gospel is believed generally to have been the first of the three Synoptic Gospels to be written. It is the shortest. It is largely to be found in Matthew and Luke (only 31 verses are not found elsewhere!), often quoted word for word. Where there are differences, the changes are clearly an addition or expansion by the others, moving away from the simple and straight forward words of Mark. Peter was believed to be the main motivation or inspirer of Mark's work. This Gospel has a sense of pace about it. In the first two chapters for example, the Greek word for 'immediately' is employed six times (17 times in the whole book). There are a number of literary devices that have interested scholars, for example the whole book seems to have a hinge – it is in 8:27-30 where Peter declares Jesus to be the Christ. Before that moment the Gospel was a record of the actions and teaching of Jesus. After this point, his coming death is spoken of and the movement is toward Jerusalem and the cross from then on. Biblical scholars have spoken about the Messianic secret in Mark, where the question in the first half of the book seems to constantly be 'who is this man?' and Jesus seems to dissuade people from articulating the answer, wanting instead to remain hidden. Another interesting feature of Mark is that it appears, from the earliest available manuscripts, that the Gospel originally ended at 16:8 with the women running from the tomb to declare the angelic message of the resurrection. Chapter 16:9-20 appears to be a later addition for completeness sake. Finally note what is not to be found in this Gospel: there is no mention of virgin birth or any part of the nativity; many of the beloved parables are absent; and there are no resurrection appearances if you take the view that the Gospel originally concluded at 16:8.

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To present briefly and succinctly the person, teaching, work and passion of Jesus.

Author: John Mark, who apparently lived in the house where the Upper Room was. A companion of Paul & supported by Barnabas. Could he have been the storker of 14:51, 52?

Recipients: It is believed that Mark may have been writing in the late 60's, just before the Fall of Jerusalem, to Christians in Judea and in Rome.

Dating: AD 65 - 70. It is believed that Peter died between AD 60 and AD 65 and that Mark was concerned that the witness of the first generation of apostles who were dying out needed to be preserved.

Setting: Jerusalem, Judea and all of Israel at the time of Jesus.

Other Reflections:

If you've never read a Gospel, most people would suggest that Mark is the best place to start. It is a no-frills account of Jesus with little comment, though plenty of theological agenda going on behind the scenes. Jesus is clearly to be seen as the Son of God (1:1) but he doesn't shout it from the roof tops. His actions shout so loudly that words aren't required. His life points to his true identity. It is often asked, why didn't Jesus just tell people who he was and make it really obvious for all involved? The best answer I've ever heard on this one is the one where Jesus is compared to the Queen. She never has to announce who she is! People would think she was feeling insecure if she did!

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (10:45)