

The Gospel of Mark: A Strong Dose of Jesus

Who is Jesus? What is he like? How are we to respond to him?

- 1) The Messianic Secret: Who is Jesus? Note the narrator gives us the answer *immediately* (1:1-3, 11)
 - a) What do men say?
 - i) Teacher with authority. 1:22, 27
 - ii) Healer. 1:34; 3:9-10; 5:34
 - iii) Bad seed. 2:16
 - iv) Glutton. 2:18
 - v) Lawbreaker. 2:23-24
 - vi) Crazy man. 3:21
 - vii) Demoniac. 3:22
 - viii) Miracle worker. 4:41; 6:41-44, 48-52; 8:6-9
 - ix) The Lord. 5:19; 7:28; 12:35-37
 - x) A “nobody” from Nazareth in Galilee. 6:1-4
 - xi) John the Baptist. 6:14; 8:27-28
 - xii) Elijah. 6:15; 8:27-28
 - xiii) A prophet. 6:4, 15; 8:27-28
 - xiv) Despiser of tradition. 7:5
 - xv) The Messiah (Christ). 8:29 (turning point in the narrative—the messianic secret is out); 14:61-62
 - xvi) The Son of David. 10:47; 12:35-37
 - b) What do the demons say?
 - i) Holy One of God. 1:24
 - ii) The Son of God. 3:11; 15:39
 - c) What does Jesus say?
 - i) The Son of Man. 2:10; 8:31; 10:45 (theme verse for Mark’s Gospel)
 - ii) The King of the Jews. 15:2, 32
- 2) For whom does Jesus care?
 - a) Downcast. 2:1-5; 3:1-5; 6:34-44, 53-56; 10:46-52
 - b) Social outsiders. 2:14-17; 7:24-30
 - c) Sinners. 2:16
 - d) Unclean. 1:23-28, 40-42.
 - e) Children. 5:35-43; 9:20-27; 10:13-16
 - f) Women. 5:24-34; 14:3-9
 - g) Gentiles. 7:24-37; 11:15-17. Note also the (geographic) structure/outline of Mark’s gospel.

- 3) With whom does Jesus conflict?
- Jewish religious leaders. 2:6-12, 24-28; 3:6; 8:11-13; 11:27-33; 12:13; 14:43; 15:1
 - Satan and the demons. 1:13, 23-27
 - Own family. 3:20-21.
 - Own disciples. 8:33; 14:10-11, 66-72
 - Ruling authorities. 3:6; 12:13; 15:1-15
- 4) How should one follow Jesus?
- Immediately! Mark is the gospel of “immediate” action. The word immediately occurs in Mark 36 times—almost as many times as the rest of the NT books combined.
 - As a fisher of men. 1:16-20
 - As a servant, not as one who is great. 9:35; 10:42-45
 - As a child, one who is humble and trusting. 10:14-16.
 - On the path of faithfulness, even in suffering. 8:34-38.
 - With an eye to storing up treasure in heaven. 10:17-31
 - On the road (journey) to Jerusalem. 10:32-34
 - Worshiping the resurrected Son of God, the Savior of the World. 1:1; 10:45; 13:26-27; 16:1-8

How Should We Read the Gospel of Mark?

- 1) Literary Reading¹
- Mark is (probably) the first written gospel. It was the first of its genre (a narrative that focuses on the person and work of Jesus). It is primarily a story with subgenres, so it should be read and interpreted like a story. Mark includes many typical gospel subgenres:

i) Calling stories	vii) Miracle stories
ii) Recognition stories	viii) Parables
iii) Witness/testimony stories	ix) Discourses and sermons
iv) Encounter stories	x) Proverbs or sayings
v) Conflict or controversy stories	xi) Passion stories
vi) Pronouncement stories	xii) Resurrection stories
 - Try to forget about chapter and verse divisions, and concentrate more on paragraph divisions and the flow of the narrative. Remember that chapter and verse numeration was added to the Bible centuries later.
 - Pay careful attention to key words that are repeated in sentences, paragraphs, passages, and across adjacent passages. They often give the reader clues as to what is important.

¹ An excellent resource for learning to read the entire Bible from a literary perspective is the *ESV Literary Study Bible*, 2007 by Crossway Bibles.

- d) Look for unity in the flow of the narrative. For example, what is Mark trying to teach us about Jesus by the way he tells the story in chapters 4 and 5?
- e) Read Mark strategically. It is best to read it from start to finish in one sitting (it takes 60-90 minutes to read its 16 chapters). If that is too long for you, divide your reading into chapters 1-8 and 9-16. Take notes of literary devices that you discover anew, are interesting and beautiful in an artistic way, and shed interpretive light on the text. Again, the best way to see Jesus again for the first time in Mark is to read large chunks at a time. It is amazing the effect it has on our understanding and spirit when we read more than a verse or a passage.
- f) No one reads the newspaper ads expecting to be emotionally or spiritually affected. But we do read fictional and nonfictional narrative to be drawn into the world of the story and to be changed by it. Read the Gospel of Mark like a story (a true story)—one that will change you and become a part of you. See yourself in the story and be open to the Holy Spirit leading you to listen and follow and obey Jesus. Remember it is not just a story to be read and analyzed—Mark is Scripture, and thus is truthful, inspired by God, and designed to accomplish its hearers the purpose of God.
- g) Mark at a Glance²

FOCUS	To Serve			To Sacrifice	
REFERENCE	1:1-	2:13-	8:27-	11:1-	16:1-16:20
DIVISION	Presentation of the Servant	Opposition to the Servant	Instruction by the Servant	Rejection of the Servant	Resurrection of the Servant
TOPIC	Sayings and Signs			Sufferings	
	c. 3 Years		c. 6 Months	8 days	
LOCATION	Galilee and Perea			Judea and Jerusalem	
TIME	c. A.D. 29-33				

2) Biblical Theological (Redemptive-Historical) Reading³

- a) As a gospel, Mark's objective is to prove that Jesus is connected to and fulfills the OT expectations of the kingdom of God (although the other 3 gospels are more overt in this objective).

² *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*, 1993 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

³ An excellent resource for learning to read the entire Bible from a biblical theology perspective is Graeme Goldsworthy's *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*, 1991 by Intervarsity.

- b) Trace a particular theme or topic from the OT to the NT. For example, you may want to trace the theme of the Messiah as a suffering servant from Gen 3:15, to Isa 53, to Mark 10:45 and the passion narrative. This method can be profitably employed for numerous themes in Mark's gospel. Don't forget that a redemptive historical reading does not end with the gospels; care must be taken to continue the trace through the NT church age to the consummation of the kingdom of God at the end of the age. Otherwise you might come to conclusions and make life decisions that are contrary to (or at least ignorant of) other NT revelation/instruction.
 - c) Pay careful attention to words and themes that recall the OT. Sometimes the text does the work for you (2:23-28; 12:1-12). If you are familiar with the OT, oftentimes an otherwise opaque reference to the OT will be immediately clear to you. Use cross-references in the margins and study bible notes to assist in connecting the dots between the OT and NT.
- 3) Systematic (Doctrinal) Reading⁴
- a) Ask what can we learn from Mark's gospel about certain biblical doctrines?
 - i) Mark contains Christological teaching on the incarnation of Jesus as one who is both divine and human.
 - ii) Mark addresses the subjects of salvation and faith.
 - iii) Christian ethics and discipleship are modeled in the life of Jesus himself and his teachings.
 - iv) The Olivet Discourse (chapter 13) and other sayings inform eschatology (the doctrine of the end times).
 - b) Note passages that seem to address a particular doctrine.
 - i) Mark 11:20-25 is a passage in which Jesus instructs his disciples on how prayer, faith, and forgiveness are related.
 - ii) Mark 12:18-27 addresses the nature of the resurrection of the dead.
 - iii) Numerous passages that narrate demon exorcisms may be useful for constructing a biblical demonology. Mark 3:20-27; 5:1-20; 9:14-29.
 - c) Beware pressing a passage to say more than it is intended to convey. For example, parables are usually intended teach a single lesson, while the details of the parable are meant only to drive the plot of the story. We should not attempt to derive a biblical doctrine of horticulture from the parable of the Sower. Nor should we derive any significant Christological conclusions regarding Christ's omniscience from Jesus cursing the fig tree that he first saw was in bloom but upon closer inspection had no figs.

⁴ Beside commentaries on individual books of the Bible, an excellent resource for learning how to read the entire Bible doctrinally (systematically) is the Westminster Confession of Faith (with Scriptural proofs).