

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF J. DWIGHT PENTECOST

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The Purpose for the Gospel of Mark

Charles H. Dyer

INTRODUCTION

Throughout his years of ministry J. Dwight Pentecost has been stressing the unity and purposeful arrangement of the four gospels as well as their historical accuracy and inspired nature. When other scholars were dividing the gospels up into various "sources," Dr. Pentecost was arguing that each gospel (and every other book of the Bible) had to be examined as a complete unit with its own theme, purpose, and structure. He further argued that each book, because it was inspired by God, was an accurate account of the events that occurred and could be "harmonized" to reconstruct the events of Christ's ministry on earth.

Today the pendulum of gospel studies is again swinging back toward examining each gospel as a complete literary unit. Unfortunately many of these efforts stress literary design at the expense of historical accuracy.¹ Whereas these scholars are recognizing that each gospel writer arranged his material to present a unique message, they still deny the historical accuracy of the details that the writers included. Redaction criticism and literary criticism are helpful in their stress on the purposeful arrangement of the individual gospels, but to the extent that they deny the historical accuracy of the details they must be rejected by conservative evangelicals.

Dr. Pentecost's contributions to gospel studies have stood the test of

1. The most recent study to stress literary design at the expense of historical accuracy is Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982). One could also add that earlier work of Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (New York: Abingdon, 1969), who pioneered redaction criticism.

time. His stress on the individual "argument" of a book has been most helpful in the studies that have been done on the book of Matthew. His stress on the historicity of the gospels has produced *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*—a book that has helped produce a historical study of the life of Christ.

This article is written with deep appreciation to a man who has influenced countless students at Dallas Theological Seminary to "handle accurately the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). This brief study will apply principles to the gospel of Mark stressed by Dr. Pentecost. The goal is to develop the theme, purpose, and structure of this gospel.

BACKGROUND STUDIES

To understand the purpose of a book one should first try to gain as much information as possible on the author, audience, date of writing, and circumstances for writing. This information is not always available, but whatever can be determined is helpful.

THE AUTHOR

The testimony of the early church is unanimous in ascribing the gospel of Mark to John Mark. Papias, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Jerome all refer to John Mark as the author of the book.² But who is John Mark? He is referred to at least ten times in the New Testament, being called Mark, Marcus, John Mark, or John who was called Mark (cf. Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37, 39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24; 1 Pet. 5:13).

Evidently Mark was from Jerusalem and grew up in a house that served as a gathering place for the early church (Acts 12:12). It is possible that the story of the young man who fled naked at the arrest of Christ (which is preserved only in Mark) is an autobiographical reference to John Mark and his early association with Christ (Mark 14:51-52).³ His mother's name was Mary, and evidently the family was wealthy enough to have servants and a house of a size to serve as a primary meeting place for the church (cf. Acts 12:12-13). Mark's two names also seem to imply that he was from a well-

2. Papias's statement was recorded by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3. 39. 15) as were the statements of Clement of Alexandria (*Ecclesiastical History* 2. 15. 1-2; 6. 14. 6) and Origen (*Ecclesiastical History* 6. 25. 5). For others see Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3. 1-2; Tertullian *Against Marcion* 4. 5; and Jerome *Lives of Illustrious Men* 8.
3. John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1983), pp. 181-82.

to-do family. John was his Jewish name, but he had also been given the Roman name Mark.⁴ This could indicate that his family maintained some ties (possibly commercial or political) with Roman society that would require the use of dual names. However, one cannot be dogmatic on this point.

John Mark again surfaces in connection with the expanding ministry of Barnabas and Paul. When Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch after visiting Jerusalem to minister to the church, they took John Mark along with them (Acts 12:25). Mark was Barnabas's cousin (Col. 4:10), and it is possible that Paul and Barnabas took him along to Antioch to serve them in their ministry. As the first missionary journey began, he was accompanying the duo on their trip and serving as their helper or servant-assistant (Acts 13:5).⁵ However, when the expedition reached Asia Minor, John Mark deserted the group and returned home to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). This was so upsetting to Paul that he refused to take Mark (who evidently expressed a change of heart) on the second missionary journey. Paul felt so strongly about this that he and Barnabas parted ways over the issue (Acts 15:36-40).

Barnabas was able to work with John Mark and mold him into an effective minister for Christ. Later in Paul's life Paul freely admitted that he was a trusted and valued companion in the ministry (2 Tim. 4:11). John Mark also was associated with the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 5:13). Peter's reference to Mark as his "son" has led many to conclude that the apostle was his spiritual father. The tradition of the early church was that John Mark wrote his gospel because of his association with Peter and that the gospel of Mark bears the stamp of Peter's authority. This does seem possible, and the close parallels between Peter's messages in the book of Acts and the gospel of Mark are quite remarkable.⁶

THE DATE OF WRITING

There is no clear evidence in the book that allows one to establish a definite date for the gospel. However, some general parameters can be determined. First, the association between Mark and Peter preserved in the writings of church Fathers clearly implies that the gospel was written near the time of Peter's martyrdom about A.D. 67-68. According to Irenaeus,

4. George G. Parker, "The Argument of the Gospel of Mark" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1967), p. 20.
5. William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 22-23.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

Mark wrote his gospel after the death of Peter.⁷ However, Clement of Alexandria stated that Mark wrote his gospel while Peter was still alive.⁸ In either case the date seems to correspond to the later years of Peter's ministry. Second, the tradition that the book was written in Rome seems to limit the possible date to two periods of time when John Mark was definitely in the city. The first period when John Mark was in Rome would be about A.D. 61 when he was there with the apostle Paul during Paul's first imprisonment (cf. Col. 4:10). The second period when John Mark was in Rome would be about A.D. 66-67 when Timothy was summoned to Rome by the Apostle Paul. The apostle directed Timothy to "pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service" (2 Tim. 4:11). This period seems more likely as the time when John Mark wrote his gospel because tradition also places Peter in Rome at this time.

THE AUDIENCE

For whom did Mark write his gospel? Although some have suggested that it was a Jewish gospel written in Palestine,⁹ most have concluded that it was primarily a Gentile gospel written in Rome.¹⁰ Several reasons point to this conclusion. First, with the sole exception of John Chrysostom the unanimous testimony of the early church Fathers is that Mark's gospel was written in Rome for Gentile Roman Christians.¹¹

Second, the internal evidence supports the view that the gospel was written for Gentiles. Mark translated several Aramaic expressions into Greek (cf. 3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34), implying that his readers did not understand these Jewish expressions. Mark also explained several Jewish customs that would be unfamiliar to a Gentile audience (cf. 7:3-4; 14:12; 15:42), and he gave additional geographical markers

7. "And after the death of these [i.e., Peter and Paul] Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also transmitted to us in writing the things preached by Peter" (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3. 1. 2).
8. "The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present declared that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. After having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it. When Peter learned of this, he neither directly forbade nor encouraged it" (Clement of Alexandria as quoted by Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 6. 14. 6).
9. Marxsen, pp. 66, 106-9, 210. For an analysis of Marxsen's work see D. Trent Hyatt, "An Examination of Willi Marxsen's Redaction-Critical Study of Mark" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973).
10. For a detailed study of Mark's audience see Kenneth Martin Nordby, "Did Mark Write for Gentiles?" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984).
11. John Chrysostom held that Mark wrote his gospel in Egypt (*Homily 1 on Matthew*). For a listing of the early church Fathers who supported the Roman origin of the gospel see the list in footnote 2.

to help an audience that would not be familiar with specific locations in Israel (cf. 11:1; 13:3).

Third, the internal evidence supports the view that the gospel was written for Romans. Mark used several Latin terms instead of their Greek counterparts (cf. 5:9, where Mark uses the Roman military term "Legion"; 6:27, where Mark uses *spekoulatora*, a transliteration of the Latin word for "guardsman"; 12:42, where Mark states the value of the widow's contribution in terms of Roman coinage; and 15:16, where Mark describes the palace by using the Latin loanword "Praetorium"). Mark also stopped to identify Simon of Cyrene (the one forced to carry Christ's cross) as "the father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mark 15:21). This addition seems odd unless Mark was identifying some individuals who would be known to his readers. Rufus is identified in Romans 16:13 as a prominent member of the church in Rome.

All of this evidence when joined together points to a Roman, Gentile audience for Mark's gospel. Very likely John Mark wrote his gospel for the believers in the church at Rome. Most of these believers were Gentiles, though some Jewish believers were also in the congregation. Thus Mark's gospel was more for the edification of believers than for the evangelization of unbelievers.¹²

THE PURPOSE STATED

The purpose of Mark is more difficult to determine. Many have thought that Mark's purpose was to present Jesus Christ as the Servant of God.¹³ These individuals point to Mark 10:45 as the key verse of the book: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." However, there are some problems in seeing this one idea as the dominant theme of the book. First, Mark does not cite the Old Testament passages that refer to Christ as the Servant of Yahweh (cf. Isa. 42:1-4).¹⁴ In fact, in places where Matthew does make this connec-

12. Kenneth Roger Will, "The Pericope of Mark 10:46-52 as It Relates to Mark's Gospel" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), pp. 35-36.
13. Some of those who take the purpose of Mark to be a presentation of Christ as the Servant of the Lord include J. H. Farmer in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1939 ed., s.v. "Mark, The Gospel According to," 3:1993-94; Arthur W. Pink, *Why Four Gospels?* (Swengel, Pa.: Bible Truth Depot, 1921), p. 61; E. Schuyler English, *Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Our Hope, 1943), p. 1; and W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1948), p. 129.
14. For a study of Mark's use of Isaiah see John W. Minnema, "The Use of the Direct Quotations of Isaiah in Mark" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1982).

tion, Mark does not (cf. Matt. 12:10-21 with Mark 3:1-12). One must explain Mark's absence of references to the Old Testament Servant of Yahweh if, indeed, this was the theme that he was trying to develop.

Second, the names that Mark used of Christ do not seem to place a great deal of emphasis on Christ as the Servant. Christ is referred to as "Jesus" (83 times), "Lord" (10), "Son of Man" (14), "Teacher" (12), "Christ" (7), "Rabbi/Rabboni" (4), "Son of David" (4), "Bridegroom" (3), "Prophet" (2), and "My Beloved Son" (2). The following titles are each used once: "the Carpenter," "the Coming One," "His well-beloved Son," "the Holy One of God," "King of Israel," "Shepherd," "the Son," and "the Son of Mary." Mark's emphasis in these references seems to be on the human and divine relationships of Christ rather than on His servanthood.

Third, it is possible that Mark 10:45 is not the theme of the book. The verse is in a section on discipleship, and it is very likely that the verse should be applied only to that particular section. Mark certainly does not use the title "Servant" as a direct title of Christ.

It is this writer's belief that the main theme of the book can be found in the opening verse. There Mark indicated that he was presenting the good news of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark wanted his audience to realize that Jesus (the name he used most often) was both the Christ (the Messiah whom the Jews long awaited) and the divine Son of God. As Vincent Taylor has noted, "The words, moreover, point far beyond the story of the Fore-runner and admirably sum up the substance of the Gospel."¹⁵ Several structural markers were used by Mark to present his message. First, Mark used two major confessions in the book to prove his point. The first is the confession of Peter in 8:27-33. Peter's response of faith to Christ's inquiry was to announce that "Thou art the Christ." The second confession is that of the centurion who stood at the base of the cross during the crucifixion (15:33-39). After observing all the events that happened, the centurion declared, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" It is no accident that this final confession is made by a representative of the people to whom Mark was addressing his gospel.

Second, Mark used two miracles of restoring sight to show the progression of faith in Christ. The first miracle (8:22-26) preceded Peter's confession of faith (8:27-33) and is unique to the gospel of Mark.¹⁶ That miracle, at first glance, seems to have Christ performing an incomplete healing that

15. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. 152.

16. Mark Allen Anderson, "The Miracles Unique to the Gospel of Mark" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980).

He must then redo. And yet, the omnipotence of Christ makes such an assertion ridiculous. Why, then, did Christ perform the miracle in two stages? The answer seems to be that He was trying to show that the faith and understanding of the disciples (represented by the restoration of sight) developed in stages. John D. Grassmick notes that "sight was a widely used metaphor for understanding. This miracle depicts the correct but incomplete understanding of the disciples."¹⁷ This miracle then foreshadows the story of Peter's confession. Peter's confession represented "partial sight" in that he believed Jesus was the Christ but rebuked Christ when He foretold His crucifixion. Peter needed further instruction to understand fully the true mission of Israel's Messiah and the requirements placed on those who would follow the Messiah. Perhaps it was the realization of this truth that later prompted Peter to write about the twofold ministry of the Messiah (1 Pet. 1:10-12) and the response expected of those who have placed their trust in Him (1:13-2:10).

The second miracle of healing (10:46-52) ends the second section of Mark's gospel (8:34-10:52). This section focuses on Christ's teaching to His disciples. Christ was attempting to open fully their eyes of faith. The healing of Bartimaeus (10:46-52) represented the disciples' response of faith to the Messiah. Bartimaeus recognized the messianic character of Jesus ("Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me"), and he refused to be silenced by the multitudes. In response to this confession, Christ performed an instantaneous healing. Kenneth Roger Will sees the significance of Mark's inclusion of this miracle:

Mark focused upon one of the blind men in order to tie the incident to both discipleship and the revelation of Jesus. . . . Thus Mark intends Bartimaeus to model proper discipleship so that even amid opposition his readers might humbly turn to Jesus for help in understanding. Therefore, the significance (application) of the Bartimaeus pericope is this: the kind of disciples Jesus wants are those who not only know who He is, but "see" the implications of that revelation, that is, that following *the* Christ demands a life of self-denying, humble service.¹⁸

Taking all of these elements into consideration, it is this writer's belief that the purpose of the gospel of Mark involved primarily edification. Mark was writing to believers in Rome to help them grow in their faith by intro-

17. Grassmick, p. 138.

18. Will, p. 53.

ducing them to Christ's way of discipleship for His followers. The Messiah of the world was the Son of Man and the Son of God. As the Son of Man He had come to suffer, and as the Son of God He had the power to save. The Romans could look to Christ for salvation and strength, but Mark also forced them to evaluate the implications for their service to Christ. "They needed to understand the nature of discipleship—what it means to follow Jesus—in light of who Jesus is and what He had done and would keep doing for them."¹⁹

THE PURPOSE DEVELOPED

MARK 1:1-20

Mark began his gospel by stating the broad theme that he would develop (1:1). His message announced the good news of Jesus, who was both the Messiah and the Son of God. This good news had been announced earlier by Isaiah the prophet (1:2-3). Isaiah had predicted that one would come to prepare the way for the Lord in the wilderness. That prophecy was fulfilled historically in John the Baptist (1:4-8). John's ministry was one of calling Israel to repentance because of her coming Messiah. The final announcement of Jesus as the Messiah came from heaven itself (1:9-11). As Christ was being baptized by John, the Holy Spirit descended on Him to single Him out as the one chosen by God. A voice from heaven identified Christ as God's beloved Son who enjoyed the favor of God.

The announcement of Jesus as the Messiah was followed by Mark's discussion of the preparation of Jesus as the Messiah (1:12-20). Christ's temptation in the wilderness (1:12-13), His proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (1:14-15), and His call of His disciples (1:16-20) prepared the way for His ministry to the Jews. The temptation by Satan verified the right of Christ to claim His titles of Messiah and Son of God. He was tried by Satan and found to be without sin. This allowed Him to make His other necessary preparations that would establish His claim to Israel's throne.

MARK 1:21—3:19

The Messiah was presenting Himself to Israel, but what authority did He have to back up His claims? Mark presents the authority of Christ in 1:21—3:19. This section has been called Christ's "Early Galilean Minis-

19. Grassmick, p. 101.

try."²⁰ Through a series of miracles Mark showed that Christ had authority over demons (1:21-28), disease (1:29—2:12), tradition (2:13-22), and the Sabbath (2:23—3:6). Throughout this section the religious leaders confronted Christ and questioned His authority. At the same time the claims of Christ were obvious. He was the "Holy One of God" (1:24), who had the authority of God to forgive sin (2:7) and who was Lord of the Sabbath (2:28).

Christ had authority over these areas, and He exercised dominion over them as Israel's Messiah (3:7-19). Mark showed Christ's dominion over the multitudes as He taught the vast crowds that flocked to see and hear Him (3:7-10). His dominion also existed over the demons, who correctly identified Christ as "the Son of God" (3:11-12). Finally, Christ's dominion extended over His disciples (3:13-19). Christ appointed the twelve and sent them out in His authority to preach and to cast out demons.

MARK 3:20—6:29

If Christ was the Messiah, why was He rejected by Israel? Mark had already indicated some opposition to Christ (cf. 3:6), but in 3:20—6:29 he pictures the growing opposition to Christ's claims. Christ was opposed by the people of His hometown, who believed that He had lost His senses (3:20-21). The scribes also rejected Christ. They could not deny that He was performing miracles, so they claimed instead that His power to perform those miracles came from Satan rather than from God (3:22). Christ responded by using parables and direct warnings to show these leaders that in rejecting Him they were rejecting God (3:23-30). Even Christ's family did not accept His claims (3:31-35). This rejection of Christ caused Him to change His ministry.

First, He began to speak in parables (4:1-34). The parables of the sower and the soils, the lamp, the growing seed, and the mustard seed were designed to hide the truth from the unbelieving and to reveal it to the true disciples. Second, Christ began to reveal Himself in more detail to His disciples (4:35—5:43). Again He performed miracles to show His power over nature (4:35—5:43), demons (5:1-20), and disease and death (5:21-43).

The opposition to Christ continued with the people of Nazareth's rejection of Him (6:1-6). They heard His message, but they refused to accept His authority because He was a "hometown boy." Their lack of faith aston-

20. Ibid.

ished even Christ. The twelve had already been appointed and given authority (3:13-21), but Christ now sent them out into Israel to announce His message (6:7-13). Yet even in His commissioning of the twelve, Christ implied that their message would not be accepted (6:14-29). Still, the twelve did carry the name of Christ throughout Israel, and word eventually reached King Herod (6:14-29). Mark ended this section on opposition by focusing on Herod to show that Herod also was opposed to Christ. Herod's opposition was sparked by his earlier murder of John the Baptist. Herod mistakenly thought that Jesus was John the Baptist restored to life.

MARK 6:30—8:33

Jesus had claimed the authority of the Messiah and the Son of God, but His claims had been rejected. He then began to reveal Himself in a special way (primarily to His disciples) as the Messiah (6:30—8:33). He did this first through His provision for the five thousand (6:30-44), revealing His sufficiency to the disciples. Second, Christ revealed His character to the disciples by the miracle of walking on the water (6:45-52). He had power and control over nature, but Mark records that the disciples still did not grasp the meaning of Christ's object lesson.²¹ Several other incidents were designed to reveal the authority and character of Christ. His healing of the multitudes in Gennesaret (6:53-56) showed that many non-Jews were responding to His message. These individuals contrasted sharply with the Pharisees, who accused Christ of breaking their traditions (7:1-23). Christ finally took His disciples to the Gentiles, who again responded to His message (7:24—8:10). The healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter, the healing of a deaf and dumb man from Decapolis, and the feeding of the four thousand taught the disciples that Christ's ministry extended beyond Israel and incorporated the Gentiles as well. Christ instructed the disciples on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and on His sufficiency for their needs (8:11-21), but Mark again notes that the disciples failed to grasp Christ's message.

Mark ended his section on the presentation of Christ as the Messiah (1:1—8:33) by combining two related stories. The first was Jesus' restoration of sight to the blind man (8:22-26). This blind man symbolized the disciples. They had responded in faith to Christ, but their sight was still

21. For a discussion of the three boat scenes in the gospel of Mark (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21) and their relationship to the argument of the book see Raymond E. Good, "The Significance of the Boat Scenes in Mark's Gospel" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1983).

dim. Their spiritual sight had been partially restored, but it still had to be restored further. Christ's miracle showed the gradual progression of faith and understanding on the part of His disciples. This miracle was followed by the story of Peter's confession (8:27-33). Peter displayed his (and the disciples') partial sight by confession that Jesus was the *Messiah*.

Some scholars wrongly argue that Mark's account alone preserves the original statement of Peter and that the accounts in Matthew and Luke have added words that were not actually spoken.²² It is better to allow the texts to be harmonized and to conclude with Carrington that "we need not suppose that Mark intended that the four words, 'Thou art the Christ,' were all that Peter said on this occasion."²³ Mark did not include "the Son of the living God" (cf. Matt. 16:16) in Peter's confession because Mark's purpose through this first section was to focus on Christ's messiahship. (Though the phrase "Son of God" was also used as a messianic title [cf. Matt. 26:63], it seemed to emphasize the divine origin of Jesus more than His claim to be Israel's king). That is what Peter's confession was to highlight. And yet, Peter's sight was only partial, because as Christ began to explain His coming death, Peter rebuked Him (Mark 8:31-33). The disciples were in need of instruction from their Messiah on what His messiahship entailed and on how they were to live in light of His claims as Messiah.

MARK 8:34—10:52

The second section of Mark's gospel focuses on the instruction given by the Messiah to His disciples (8:34—10:52). Geographically this section has been entitled the "Journey to Jerusalem."²⁴ It includes much of Christ's teaching on the life of a disciple. Mark opened the section by revealing Christ's explanation of the cost of discipleship (8:34-38). Christ's followers were to take up their cross and follow Him.²⁵ And yet, there is a hope given to these disciples. The transfiguration was designed to give them a foretaste of the glory of the kingdom (9:1-13). It was a demonstration to the disciples of the power and glory of their Messiah that would one day be revealed (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-18).

The key to discipleship was a life of faith. Mark recorded the incident of

22. Cf. Taylor, p. 376.

23. Philip Carrington, *The Gospel According to Mark: A Running Commentary on the Oldest Gospel* (Cambridge: At the U. Press, 1960), p. 176.

24. Grassmick, p. 102.

25. Michael P. Green, "The Meaning of Cross-Bearing," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (April-June 1983):117-33.

the demon-possessed son (9:14-29) to show the importance of faith in accomplishing Christ's will. Christ again reminded the disciples of the certainty of His death (9:30-32), but they still failed to grasp the true meaning of His statement.

The middle section of the gospel of Mark ends with Christ's instruction on the life of a disciple (9:33—10:45).²⁶ Christ explained to His followers the true attitude that they should have toward service (9:33-37), and He warned them to avoid causing stumbling (9:42-50) and to remain faithful in marriage (10:1-12). Christ also went on to teach His disciples the importance of childlike faith (10:13-16) and of maintaining a proper attitude toward wealth (10:17-31). For a third time He explained His coming death (10:32-34), but again the disciples failed to understand as they sought for positions of honor in the coming kingdom (10:35-37). Christ was forced to explain the need for the disciples to follow His example of sacrificial service (10:38-45). This section ends with the second story of a blind man (10:46-52). Mark used the story of Bartimaeus as an illustration of the faith of a true disciple.²⁷ Bartimaeus recognized Jesus as the Messiah (the "Son of David"), and he refused to let the unbelieving multitudes silence his public confession of faith. He received full physical sight because of his spiritual sight. He had grasped the teaching of the Messiah that the disciples did not yet understand.

MARK 11:1—16:20

The final section of the book of Mark records the sacrificial death of the Son of God (11:1—16:20). Geographically this section has been entitled the "Ministry in and Around Jerusalem."²⁸ This is the fulfillment of what Christ had already predicted to His disciples three times (8:31; 9:31-32; 10:32-34). Mark began this final section by recording the presentation of the Son of God to Israel (11:1-26). Christ rode into Jerusalem as Israel's Messiah to claim His throne. And yet, by including the story of the barren fig tree in this account (11:12-26), Mark indicated what Israel's response would be. Israel's faith was barren profession, and therefore it would be judged.

26. Rage Anderaas, "Lordship of Christ: God's Pattern for the Christian Life as Seen in the Gospel of Mark" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), pp. 62-67.

27. Will, p. 39-45, shows that Mark's use of structure, symbolism (i.e., "blindness"), and terms that denote discipleship such as "way" (*hodos*, 10:52) and "follow" (*akoloutheō*, 10:52) all point to Mark's use of the story as a fitting conclusion to his section on discipleship.

28. Grassmick, p. 102.

The purpose in the illustration of the fig tree is borne out by the response of the leaders of the nation. Instead of accepting their Messiah, the leaders opposed Him and tried to discredit Him (11:27—12:44). Christ answered all of their objections, and then He posed a question for them (12:35-44). His question is important because it was designed to show that the Messiah was also the Lord. When the leaders refused to answer Christ, He rebuked them for their false pride and sinful actions. The rejection of these leaders sealed Israel's judgment. Christ therefore described to the disciples the judgment and persecution that would prevail until the time of His second coming (13:1-13). Christ's emphasis was again on faithfulness amidst opposition.

The story of Christ's passion is given in 14:1—15:47. Mark recorded the Passover Supper/Lord's Supper and the plot by Judas to betray Christ. The time of prayer in Gethsemane and arrest of Christ are followed by the accounts of the trials and crucifixion. Perhaps the highlight that Mark recorded was the response of the Roman centurion at the cross. After observing all the events of the crucifixion, this representative of Roman society confessed, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39). This was the purpose toward which Mark was moving throughout his book. As Lane has noted, "the centurion's words constitute an appropriate complement to the affirmation of Peter that Jesus is the Messiah in Chapter 8:29 and the triumphant climax to the gospel in terms of the pragmatic confession of Jesus in Chapter 1:1."²⁹ What the Jews had failed to grasp was understood by the Gentiles. Jesus the Messiah was also the Son of God, who had died for the sins of the world.

Mark closed his gospel by recording the resurrection of the Son of God. He does not spend a great deal of time on this section because it was not the main point of his story. However, he did record that Christ arose from the dead (16:1-8), that He appeared to many individuals (16:9-18), and that He ascended into heaven after commanding the disciples to carry His message into all the world (16:19-20).³⁰ That is why the gospel message had been brought to Rome. The gospel of Mark contained a call to commitment and discipleship from the divine Messiah, Jesus.

29. Lane, p. 576.

30. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the problem of the ending of Mark's gospel. The entire question is much in doubt, but this writer believes there is some evidence for holding to the longer ending.

CONCLUSION

The gospel of Mark is more than a condensed version of Matthew or Luke. It is more than just a biography of Christ. It is more than a compilation of the key events in Jesus' ministry. The gospel of Mark is a carefully constructed work with a specific purpose for a specific audience. Those who hold dear the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration must follow the trail blazed by J. Dwight Pentecost in stressing the purposeful arrangement and unique message of each part of God's Word. Only then will each believer be able to present himself to God as an approved workman "who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).