



A Course

In

**MARK'S
GOSPEL,
STUDIES IN**

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

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Copyright

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Pineland, Florida 33945

INTRODUCTION

As you study the Scriptures you will find that it is of the greatest importance to approach the Bible in a reverent attitude of mind, looking upon it as the inspired Word of God, and not just an ordinary piece of literature. If the Bible is studied in the same manner as one studies Shakespeare, Milton or some historical work, it may be found interesting and profitable. But by this approach, the Bible student, persistent though he may be, will never find its rich treasures. The Apostle Paul says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). For the profitable study of the Word of God, the right spiritual attitude is indispensable.

The Scriptures should be studied as eagerly as a hungry person seeks for food. The formal reading of a portion of the Bible may have some worth as a religious exercise, but in order that the complete benefit may be obtained from its truths, they must be appropriated to personal needs. A milkman may deliver thousands of quarts of milk each day and yet go home thirsty. The Bible student may read large portions of the Bible with little benefit, unless he makes it his own by personal appropriation and feeds upon it.

In your studies of the Bible will you appropriate the riches thereof to your own personal use, or will you read as you would read a book of fiction, a mystery, etc? In order to make full use of the pearls of wisdom

contained in the Bible readings, it is suggested you reread them. Go into its wonderful fields of truth; go down into its valleys; climb its mountain peaks of vision; follow its streams of inspiration; enter its halls of learning. Many Bible truths do not appear on the surface; they must be dug up and be brought into the light by toil and effort.

There are various methods of Bible study, such as the topical method, the study of books, the study by chapters, the study of important passages, and the biographical method. In our approach we are following the last method the biographical (storytelling) method or the study of various Biblical Characters. In this way the Bible heroes are made to walk across the stage of life again and to furnish us, as Christian believers, lessons of life and inspiration.

The General Bible Survey course is formatted in the historical story-telling method. This method is utilized in order that the student may see the Bible as a complete unit telling His-story history. Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writer to occasionally condense a passage in his own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that A. B. C. is correcting God's Word.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Book of Mark.

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INSIGHTS INTO THE FIRST OF THE GOSPELS

THROUGH all the ages mankind longed for a more intimate knowledge of God. In the fullness of time, God answered this universal longing by sending his Son into the world, "who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb.1:3). This story of God's revelation of himself in human form has been recorded in the Four Gospels.

Each of the Gospel writers tells his story from a slightly different point of view and with a different purpose in mind. Matthew, writing with Jewish believers in mind, presents Jesus as the promised Messiah and indicates, over and over again, how the Scriptures were fulfilled in his life and ministry. Luke, who wrote for Gentile believers, emphasizes the universal saviourhood of Jesus. John wrote in a day when men were questioning the eternal existence of Jesus, so he presents Jesus as the eternal Christ. Mark is primarily concerned with the activity of Jesus upon the earth as he introduced the kingdom of God among men.

Though the precise date on which each of these books was written is not known, it is fairly certain that Mark's Gospel was the first of them. Evidence for this assertion is found partly in the fact that all but some twenty verses in Mark's Gospel are included in either Matthew or Luke. It is assumed that Mark's Gospel had been in circulation long enough to have come to the attention of the other two Gospel writers before they wrote their manuscripts. John's Gospel was quite evidently written at a still later date. Some scholars have placed the date of the writing of Mark's Gospel between A.D. 55-60. Others place it somewhere between A.D. 65-70 - shortly after

the death of both Paul and Peter and shortly before the fall of Jerusalem.

I. THE AUTHOR OF THE FIRST OF THE GOSPELS

As you read the Four Gospels, you will notice that in no case is the name of the writer clearly indicated in the text of the book. In the book attributed to him, John makes certain references to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and to "the other disciple," which seem to indicate that the book came from his pen. Luke gives us a clue to the authorship of the Third Gospel as he begins the Acts of the Apostles, which he most certainly wrote (see Acts 1:1). But there is no such clue to the author's identity in the Gospel of Mark. Early Christian tradition, however, claimed that Mark was its author.

The only person of that name who was intimately connected with the New Testament story was John Mark, who is mentioned several times in the book of Acts (12:12; 12:25; 15:37-39), and in the writings of Paul (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim: 4:11; Philemon 24), and once in the First Epistle of Peter (1 Peter 5:13).

1. *Son of Mary Who lived in Jerusalem*

From the references cited, it would appear that the writer of the first of the Gospels was John Mark, who lived with his mother Mary, in Jerusalem. It was in their house that the disciples met to pray for the release of Peter from prison. It was to this house that Peter went after his miraculous deliverance by the angel of the Lord.

It is supposed by some Bible scholars that the upper room where Jesus observed the Passover meal with his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion was also in the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, and that it was in this house that the disciples gathered after our Lord's ascension into heaven. All of these circumstances would mean that Mark was in close contact with the immediate followers of Jesus in his youth. Many of the stories of Jesus that the Gospel writer tells so simply, but in such minute detail, he no doubt first heard from the lips of the apostles.

2. *Companion of Paul and Barnabas*

When Barnabas and Paul left Jerusalem to take up residence at Antioch, they "took with them John, whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:25). When the Holy Spirit said to the Christians at

Antioch, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2), these first two Christian missionaries agreed to make the young man, Mark, their traveling companion. It was an unhappy experience for Mark. When the company arrived at Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13), Mark evidently decided that he had had enough and returned to Jerusalem.

Paul was quite disappointed in the young man and, when plans were being made for the second missionary journey, Paul steadfastly refused to give Mark another chance." And the contention was so sharp between them [Barnabas and Paul], that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus" (Acts 15:39). Mark's acquaintanceship with Paul, at that time, was short-lived. Mark was with Paul long enough, however, to hear a great deal about Jesus as Paul had come to learn about Jesus in his own experience and in his conversations with the apostles upon his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion.

3. *With Paul in Rome*

The estrangement between Paul and Mark eventually came to an end. When Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossians, probably about A.D. 62, Mark was with him in Rome. Paul was apparently concerned that the Colossians might hold against Mark his previous unfaithfulness to the cause. He urged them to receive Mark, to take him to their hearts, as it were (Col. 4:10). In the letter to Philemon (v. 24) written from Rome at the same time, Paul honors Mark with the title "fellow laborers." Paul's genuine affection for Mark is evident in his word to Timothy as he wrote: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

In his attitude toward Mark, near the end of his life, Paul had caught the spirit of Jesus who taught forgiveness. Paul had decided that it was not good to hold one grievous mistake against a man for the rest of his days. He was quite willing to give the young man a chance to prove himself, and Mark had gladly seized the opportunity to make good.

4. *With Peter in Rome*

Mark learned many of the facts concerning Jesus that he would include in his Gospel, from

Paul and from the disciples in Jerusalem and, indeed, from Barnabas as they labored together in Cyprus. It is believed that Mark was perhaps still more influenced and instructed by the apostle Peter, possibly in Rome (see I Peter 5:13). The relationship between Peter and Mark was quite close. Peter's brief reference to Mark as his "son" has led many to believe that Mark owed his conversion to the apostle Peter.

During the year or more that Peter and Mark were so closely associated, they must have engaged in many earnest conversations about their Lord, whom both loved so dearly and whom Peter knew so well. Papias, one of the outstanding Christian writers of the second century, went so far as to say that much of Mark's Gospel is a reproduction of the sermons which Peter preached in his last days in Rome. Papias claims to have received this information from the apostle John, whom he knew personally. Here is what Papias wrote, in about the year A.D. 140, as quoted by the noted church historian, Eusebius:

This also the presbyter (John) used to say: Mark, indeed who became the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, as far as he remembered them, the things said or done by the Lord but not in order. For he (Mark) had neither heard the Lord nor been his personal follower, but at a later stage, as I said, he had followed Peter, who used to adapt his teachings to the needs of the moment, but not as though he were drawing up a connected account of the oracles of our Lord: so that Mark committed no error in writing certain matters just as he remembered them. For he had only one object in view, namely, to leave out nothing of the things which he had heard, and to include no false statement among them.¹

To those of us who have sometimes wondered why Peter never wrote the story of Jesus, this testimony gives a possible answer. In, some sense at least, the Gospel of Mark is the story of Jesus according to Peter, as preserved by Mark under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In a sense it is the story of an eyewitness, since Mark saw Jesus through the eyes of one of our Lord's closest disciples

II. WHY MARK WROTE HIS GOSPEL

The meaning of Mark's Gospel can best be understood as we bear in mind the purposes for which it was written.

1. *Led by the Holy Spirit*

Uppermost in Mark's mind, surely, was the conviction that he was led by the Holy Spirit to produce a dependable and authentic written record of the life and work of his Lord for the edification and instruction of the Christians of his day and especially, perhaps, for the Christians in and around the city of Rome. Mark had no way of knowing that his story would be preserved through the ages, by the providence of God, as a part of the sacred Scriptures. Nevertheless, he must have had the conviction born in his heart by the Holy Spirit that his words would reveal the truth about Jesus Christ to those who read them and would thus lead them into a knowledge of Christ as Saviour and Lord.

2. *Need for a Written Record*

Mark not only felt the leadership of the Spirit; he also sensed the real need for a written record of the earthly ministry of Jesus. Up until that time, the followers of Christ had to depend very largely for their knowledge of the story of Jesus upon "oral tradition," although there were some written records available at a very early date, as Luke indicates in the opening words of his Gospel (Luke 1:1). For the most part, however, in those early days groups of believers would hear the story from the lips of one of the apostles, perhaps. They would pass the message on to others; and these, to still others.

It is reasonable to suppose that Mark sensed the fact that the wonderful stories of Jesus might undergo change and distortion in the constant retelling through the years, if someone did not make a permanent and dependable record of them. And indeed, there would doubtless be occasions when certain groups would have no one in their midst who was intimately acquainted with the basic facts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ the Lord. If Mark could provide a written record for the use of the churches in that day, it would make the good news of Jesus

Christ the Son of God more easily accessible to a larger number of people.

3. *Strength and Comfort for Persecuted Christians*

There was a growing apprehension among the early Christians concerning the martyrdom of the saints. They doubtless were constantly asking, "Why do God's good servants have to die such cruel deaths?" The widely-heralded executions of Paul and Peter were quite fresh in the minds of the Christians of that day. Besides, many of them had been stunned by the ruthless slaughter of their own relatives and friends, for no other reason than that they were Christians. In addition to all of this, Jesus himself, the Son of God, had suffered death upon a cross. How could these things be? The early Christians needed a strong word of encouragement and explanation.

In his Gospel, Mark undertook to give the needed word. Jesus died, Mark declared, because of the hatred and antipathy of the religious leaders of his day. Jesus would not compromise the truth nor stand aside from his divinely appointed mission, even though it should mean his death upon a cross. By the same token, Mark inferred, Christians of every generation must stand firm and unafraid in the face of the most brutal persecution. The way of the Christian is the way of the cross—the way of self-renunciation and self-sacrifice (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34).

Mark also reveals in his Gospel that Jesus died because he chose to die. For that very purpose he came to earth (10:45). Christ died for the sins of the world. Though he knew that his last journey would terminate in his crucifixion, he nonetheless boldly went forth to meet his enemies there. The death of Jesus was not simply a tragedy. It was all in accordance with the divine purpose to overcome the evil one and effect redemption for sin.

In recording all of this, Mark leaves the clear inference that the sufferings of saints also have a place in the plan and the purpose of God, though to a far less degree. In truth, the blood of the martyrs would become the seed of the church. In their suffering and dying, the saints of that day were lighting a lamp that could never be put out.

4. *The Mighty Works of Jesus*

With such a purpose in mind, Mark proceeded to describe Jesus as "the strong Son of God" who answered the challenge of his critics with mighty deeds and, at the same time, met the crying needs of the multitudes with miraculous works of love and compassion. It has properly been pointed out by biblical scholars that Mark's story of Jesus is much more a record of his deeds than of his words.

It is noteworthy that the extended passages of the teachings of Jesus that occur in Matthew (the Sermon on the Mount, for example), and in John (such as John 14-17) do not appear in Mark's Gospel. Mark is more concerned with what Jesus did in his public ministry than with what he said, and especially with what he did in giving himself for the sins of the world upon the cross of Calvary. The Gospel of Mark is predominately the story of divine action in the midst of a sinful world.

III. THE PLAN OF MARKS GOSPEL

The Gospel of Mark may be divided into five main sections, which we will further divide as we proceed with our study.

1. *An Introduction (1:1-20)*

Mark begins his book by linking his story with the Old Testament. The Old Testament saints through the centuries had looked for a coming Deliverer whose advent was to be announced by a heaven-sent messenger. By identifying John the Baptist as the promised messenger, Mark indicates that Jesus was the fulfillment of these prophecies. In his introduction Mark omits any reference to the birth and childhood of Jesus and introduces him in his baptism, showing that at the very outset of his public ministry, God the Father acknowledged Jesus to be his Son.

Mark follows a brief mention of the baptism with an equally brief reference to our Lord's temptation. He does not go into the meaning of this experience. He mentions it and then records the calling of the first disciples.

2. *The Great Galilean Ministry (1:21 to 6:13)*

After his brief introduction, Mark launches out upon a description of our Lord's great Galilean ministry, which possibly extended over a period of about a year and a half. This section of Mark's Gospel begins, after the story of the calling of

the first disciples, with an account of several miracles of healing wrought by Jesus (1:21 to 2:12) and continues with a description of the almost immediate opposition to him by the religious leaders (2:15 to 3:6).

After telling of the calling of the twelve (3:13-19), Mark discusses the response of certain groups to the ministry of Jesus (3:20-35); records a few of the parables of Jesus that had to do, chiefly, with the nature of the kingdom of God; describes further miracles; and relates the mission of the twelve.

3. *Ministry in Areas Outside of Galilee* (6:14 to 10:52)

With the death of John the Baptist at the instigation of Herod Antipas (6:14-29), the dark storms of opposition gathered rapidly. Jesus decided to withdraw from his native province of Galilee to avoid facing a crisis at that stage of his public ministry. Besides, he desired to get away from the crowds in order to devote more time to the special training of the twelve. It was during this period that Peter made his "great confession," after which Jesus was transfigured. This section concludes with an account of the last journey to Jerusalem, through Galilee (9:30-50), and Perea and Judea (10:1-52).

4. *Final Ministry in Jerusalem* (11:1 to 14:42)

The dramatic entrance into Jerusalem (11:1-10) brought Jesus into immediate conflict with the religious leaders. He left the city after a long day of controversy, to spend his final hours before the crucifixion with his friends and his disciples.

5. *The Crucifixion and Resurrection* (14:43 to 16:20)

The final section of Mark's Gospel deals with the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. The entire story moves steadily towards these crowning events—recorded as the supreme evidence of Jesus' devotion to the purpose for which he was sent of the Father to dwell among men.

IV. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MARK'S GOSPEL

Questions are bound to arise as to how Mark's Gospel differs from the other three Gospels.

Does the book of Mark have certain distinguishing characteristics? It certainly does. Some of these may be listed as follows:

1. *The Simple Story of Jesus*

Mark's Gospel is by no means a theological discourse. It is the simple story of the activities of Jesus throughout his public ministry. In keeping with his purpose, Mark's style is direct and forthright and pictorial. He invariably adds a touch of detail here and there that never fails to brighten up his story.

Mark seems to steer clear of giving an interpretation of the outstanding events in the life of our Lord. In the case of the temptation of Jesus, for example, he does not dwell at length upon the significance of this experience in the ministry of Jesus, although it was of tremendous significance. Mark merely records the facts and leaves his readers to make their own interpretation. In the most dramatic and forthright way he tells what happened, but he refrains from going on to tell what these happenings mean for the followers of Jesus Christ throughout the ages. It is partly for this reason that Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four.

2. *Written for Gentile Believers*

Mark wrote, immediately, for the Christians at Rome and the surrounding areas. To be sure, many of them were converted Jews, but many of them were Gentiles. For that reason, there are several instances in this Gospel where matters of particular concern to the Jews are omitted and matters that would be of special interest to Gentile believers are included. Also for this reason, Mark quotes the Old Testament sparingly and, quite unlike Matthew, he makes scant mention of the fulfillment of prophecy. He speaks in the language of the common man. His style is much less literary than that of the other three Gospel writers. The Gospel of Mark has often been called "the people's Gospel."

3. *The Deity of Jesus*

The mystery of the incarnation is, of course, that Jesus was both human and divine. In Jesus, God tabernacled in human flesh. Mark places great emphasis on the deity of Jesus. At the beginning of his ministry, Mark records, God acknowledged Jesus to be his Son. God repeated

this acknowledgment on the Mount of Transfiguration, at the height of Jesus' public ministry. Mark points out, over and over again, that the multitudes who listened to Jesus were profoundly impressed with his uniqueness as a teacher and as a worker of miracles. In every situation, Mark portray Jesus as the strong "Son of God," with power over the elements, over demons, over all manner of evil, over his enemies and, finally, with power over death.

4. The Humanity of Jesus

Mark also recognized the humanity of Jesus. Mark has a great deal to say about the human emotions of Jesus. He sighed deeply in his spirit (8:12); he looked with anger on his merciless critics (3:5); he was, at times, greatly distressed (14:33); he was much displeased when the disciples sought to turn the little children away from him (10:14); he took those same children up in his arms with all of the tenderness of a parent (10:16); he became weary and needed rest (6:31). According to Mark, the incarnation was very real. Jesus was, of a truth, both God and man.

¹ Frederick C. Grant, *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951), VII, 620

END OF SAMPLE