

Mark Distinctives

Isaiah

Wilderness:

Hardness of heart & blindness

Is. 6:9-13; 32:1-3; 35:5-6

Suffering servant

"Gospel"

Isaiah 40:9; 52:7; 61:1

Exodus

Sandwiches

Tempo & Feel

Excitement

Fear

The Messianic secret

Rejection (right from the start!)

Satan/demons

Characters

Tscs

Mscs

Dscs

A greater focus on the disciples

The 'Plural-to-singular' narrative device

[The plural-to-singular narrative device] is a form of internal focalization, which, as we have argued, enables the reader to view the incident that follows from the perspective of the disciples who have arrived on the scene with Jesus.¹

Readers or hearers seem to be traveling with the group of Jesus and his disciples and arriving with them at a scene where they then observe Jesus from the perspective of the disciples.²

A special focus on their failings, and especially Peter

What then accounts for Peter's prominence in Mark? We need to account for the large extent to which the point of view that the narrative gives its readers or hearers is either Peter's "we" perspective (the plural-to-singular narrative device) or Peter's "I" perspective (when Peter acts as an individual in the story). Taken together, these features make Mark a Gospel that presents, to a far larger degree than the others, a Petrine perspective on the story of Jesus. The explanation must have two aspects: relating to the source of Mark's traditions and to the way in which Mark has shaped these traditions in the service of his main concerns in his overall composition of the Gospel.³

¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitness Testimony*, 163.

² Ibid. 168.

³ Ibid. 171.

Mark's distinctive characterization of Peter . . . does not employ direct character description, but constructs Peter's character by means of his acts and words. Peter is a man of initiative (1:36?) and self-confidence, the one who speaks out when other do not (8:29, 32; 10:28), sometimes with insight (8:29), sometimes altogether too impulsively (8:32; 9:5-6). Even in these latter cases, Peter means well and shows his concern for Jesus even as he misunderstands him. In his enthusiastic and self-confident loyalty to Jesus he thinks himself second to none (14:29-31). He does display more courage in his loyalty to Jesus than the others do (14:50, 54), but loyalty and fear are at odds in his motivation. In his fearful, self-interested denial of Jesus he slips from a relatively mild dissociation from Jesus to the most extreme repudiation (14:68-71). But his loyalty and love for Jesus regain their primacy and express themselves in emotional remorse (14:72). The implication here of a moment of self-recognition, as his illusory self-confidence is destroyed, is also important in showing that Peter is not a static character, but one who acquires fresh self-awareness in a life-changing experience.⁴

Background and Audience

Peter as the source

1 Peter 5:13

She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.

Papias (140AD)

And the Elder said this also: "Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatever he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord."

Widely used prologue to the gospels (160-180AD)

Mark...was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy.

Irenaeus (175AD)

After the death of [Peter and Paul] Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also transmitted to us in writing the things preached by Peter.

Persecution in Rome as the occasion

Tacitus:

Nero falsely accused and executed with the most exquisite punishments those people called Christians, who were infamous for their abominations. The originator of the name, Christ, was executed as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius; and though

⁴ Ibid. 175.

repressed, this destructive superstition erupted again, not only through Judea, which was the origin of this evil, but also through the city of Rome, to which all that is horrible and shameful floods together and is celebrated. Therefore, first those were seized who admitted their faith, and then, using the information they provided, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much for the crime of burning the city, but for hatred of the human race. And perishing they were additionally made into sports: they were killed by dogs by having the hides of beasts attached to them, or they were nailed to crosses or set aflame, and, when the daylight passed away, they were used as night-time lamps.⁵

Hints of a context of persecution in Mark:

1:13 - "Wild animals" (unique to Mark) - Roman arena??

1:14 - John's arrest mentioned early.

5:9 - "Legion" (not in Matthew).

8:38 - "whoever is ashamed of me" (not in Matthew).

10:30 - "with persecutions" (unique to Mark).

15:39 - A Roman Centurion sees and believes!

When Roman believers received the Gospel of Mark they found that it spoke to the situation of the Christian community in Nero's Rome. Reduced to a catacomb existence, they read of the Lord who was driven deep into the wilderness (Ch. 1:12 f.). The detail, recorded only by Mark, that in the wilderness Jesus was with the wild beasts (Ch. 1:13) was filled with special significance for those called to enter the arena where they stood helpless in the presence of wild beasts. In Mark's Gospel they found that nothing they could suffer from Nero was alien to the experience of Jesus. Like them, he had been misrepresented to the people and falsely labelled (Ch. 3:21 f., 30). And if they knew the experience of betrayal from within the circle of intimate friends it was sobering to recollect that one of the Twelve had been "Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him" (Ch. 3:19).⁶

Could this explain the themes of fear & amazement?

⁵ Tacitus

⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark (NICNT)*, 15.

Mark Overview

Section	Main Theme	Response
1:1-4:34	The authority of the King	LISTEN!
4:35-8:30	The rescuing power of the King	BELIEVE!
8:22-10:52	The suffering servanthood of the King	FOLLOW!
11-13	The judgment of the King	ENDURE/STAY AWAKE!
14-16	The Passover/sacrifice/ransom of the King	Adore Jesus Be assured Be bold

Teaching Mark

Narrative

Synoptics

Tone

Resources:

- Dig Deeper into the Gospels (Sach & Hiorns)
- Commentaries by R.T. France & William Lane.

Mark Section Outline

