

7.7

Distinctive Characteristics of Mark's Gospel

A. Mark's Gospel is sparse and brief compared to the others.

- no genealogy or stories about Jesus's birth
- no Beatitudes, Lord's Prayer, or Golden Rule
- no resurrection appearances

B. Mark's Gospel ends abruptly.

- "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8).

C. The linguistic style of Mark's Gospel tends to be unrefined.

- Verbs in the "historical present" (present-tense used for past action) are used often.
- Pronouns frequently lack clear antecedents.

D. Mark's Gospel displays a special knack for the art of storytelling.

- Narrative anticipations that "glue" independent stories together:
 - "have a boat ready" (3:9) (to prepare for 4:1)
- Two-step progressions:
 - "That evening, at sunset" (1:32)

- Intercalation (“sandwich” stories):

disciples mission/death of John the Baptist (6:7–30)

cursing the fig tree/expulsion of money changers (11:12–20)

E. Mark emphasizes Jesus’s deeds over his words (as compared to the other Gospels).

- Miracle stories take up a greater part of the total book and are told in greater detail.
- Jesus’s teaching takes up a lesser part of the total book and is told in less detail.

F. Mark’s story is dominated by Jesus’s passion.

- plot to kill Jesus formed already in 3:6 (cf. with Matt. 12:14; Luke 19:47)
- three predictions of the passion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34)

G. Mark’s Gospel is marked by a sense of eschatological urgency.

- “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (1:15).
- “This generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (13:30; cf. 9:1).
- Note also the “historical presents” and the repeated use of “immediately” throughout the narrative.

H. Mark seems to have a special interest in Galilee.

- The first half of this Gospel is devoted to Jesus's ministry in Galilee.
- Jesus predicts a postresurrection reunion with his disciples in Galilee (14:28; 16:7).

(Cf. this to Luke's emphasis on Jerusalem.)

I. Mark frequently explains Jewish matters, but not Roman ones.

- Compare 7:3–4, where Jewish custom of purification is explained, with 10:12, where knowledge of Roman divorce law is assumed.
- Defines Aramaic words: *Boanerges* (3:17), *talitha cum* (5:41), *corban* (7:11), *ephphatha* (7:34), *Bartimaeus* (10:46), *Abba* (14:36), *Golgotha* (15:22), *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani* (15:34).
- Does not define Latin words: *legion* (5:9, 15), *denarius* (12:15), *praetorium* (15:16), *centurion* (15:39).

J. Mark assumes his readers already have a basic knowledge of Christian tradition.

- He assumes that they know what he means by the term "gospel" (1:1, 14–15; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9).

- He assumes that they regard the Scriptures of Israel as the word of God (7:8).
- He assumes that they will understand what it means to say that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29) and that he gives his life as a ransom (10:45).
- He expects them to recognize otherwise unidentified characters such as John the Baptist (1:4) and Simon and Andrew (1:16).

K. Mark's Gospel is imbued with a motif of secrecy.

- Jesus's own disciples do not understand who he is (4:41; 6:51–52).
- Jesus commands others to keep his identity or miraculous deeds a secret (1:23–25, 43–44; 3:11–12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9).
- Jesus speaks in parables so that people won't understand what he says (4:10–12).

L. Mark's Gospel offers the most human portrait of Jesus.

- Jesus becomes hungry (11:12) and tired (6:31).
- He exhibits a full range of human emotions, including pity (1:41), anger (3:5), sadness (3:5), wonder (6:6), compassion (6:34), indignation (10:14), love (10:21), and anguish (14:34).

- Jesus does not know everything (13:32), and his power is limited (6:5).

M. Mark highlights the failures of Jesus's disciples.

- unperceptive (4:41; 6:51–52; 8:14–21)
- self-interest (8:32; 9:32–34; 10:35–41)
- betray, deny, and forsake Jesus (14:10–11, 17–21, 26–31, 37–38, 44–45, 50, 66–72)
- Mark's Gospel ends without recording any redress of the disciples' faithlessness, such as the remorse of Judas (Matt. 27:3–10), the recovery of Peter (John 21:15–19), or the postresurrection reconciliation of the eleven with Jesus (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:36–53; John 20:19–21:14).