

READING A GOSPEL

It has been suggested that you should start your biblical reading with a Gospel which well represents the ministry and teaching of Jesus and then using this as a key in your study of the rest of the Bible.

The Gospels

The Gospels were written by various persons, each with his own perspective and often representing the views of a particular Christian community. It is to the credit of early Christianity that in the Gospels four somewhat differing perspectives were preserved rather than just including one story. This kept the focus on the person of Jesus rather than a particular view of him and affirmed that variety of perspective was legitimate.

The earliest materials were transmitted orally and in memory, the memory of those who had seen and of those to whom the materials were transmitted. Luke in his Gospel (1:1-4) describes this as he discusses his purpose and research:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

Luke indicates that he used the oral tradition delivered by those who had been there and seen, and that others had compiled a narrative before him. He writes in order to provide trustworthy information about the things of which Theophilus (“Friend of God” perhaps a person, but more likely a term for Gentile converts) had been informed. The word in Greek for “informed” gives us “catechism” in English and indicated oral instruction at that time.

Luke indicates that others wrote before he did. He may have used some of these as sources, though he argues that he made independent investigation. Modern scholarship concludes that Matthew (one of the latest Gospels) used Mark as a narrative source (about 90% of the stories in Mark are included in Matthew, though Matthew modifies and abbreviates them). The final author or editor of the Gospel of John in 21:24 mentions his dependence on a disciple “who has written these things.” The earliest Gospel was Mark’s (about 64 AD) and there may have been an early version of Luke written about 62. Matthew, John, and the present Luke are usually located somewhere from 80-90 AD. One way of dating a Gospel is to see whether it reflects knowledge of the catastrophic war of the Jews with the Romans (66-72) and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The basic story of Jesus contained in the Gospels began with the story of John the Baptist and his baptism of Jesus and ended with Jesus’ resurrection/ascension (much thinking in the early church put these two together so that when Jesus was raised he went directly to heaven and then returned to appear to his disciples). This compass of events is what the disciples had witnessed. It probably was a period of only about one and a half years long. Thus the information we have is rather good for such a short time. This means that we know very little about the thirty years of Jesus’ life before that. Any information about Jesus’ life before his public ministry would have had to have come from him or his family. The disciples were not there. This material about his earlier life was treated as a prologue to the Gospel story, but not a part of the main story. Matthew and Luke have prologues of narrative materials which are quite different.

John has a prologue which describes Jesus as the Word/Wisdom of God who created the world, was God's agent in history, and now became flesh in Jesus -- quite a different type of prologue. Mark does not have such a prologue. Mark begins with the statement "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The word "beginning" in Greek can mean a point in time, but philosophically it often meant "fundamental principle" or "fundamental material". Thus Mark 1:1 can be understood as "The fundamental material of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called "synoptic" from a Greek word that essentially means "look alike". The Gospel of John, because of its unique nature, is usually understood as not related to the others and representing a separate stream of information about Jesus. John 21:24 indicates that the source of the Gospel was an earlier Gospel written by a disciple very close to Jesus.

A simple outline of the Gospels with emphasis on the geographical locations of Jesus' ministry is:

- A Prologue, usually in the form of a story of Jesus' birth and infancy (not in Mark)
- Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and the beginnings of his ministry in Judaea
- A ministry in Galilee (northern Palestine, the area from which Jesus came) which in Matthew, Mark and Luke represented a major portion of his ministry
- A exploratory ministry in Gentile areas (only mentioned in Mark and Matthew)
- A ministry in the south in Judaea and Jerusalem
- The last days in Jerusalem: Jesus arrest, trial, death and resurrection (often called the Passion Story). This may occupy as much as 1/3 of the Gospel materials, so it is clear how important this segment is.

[Besides the narrative portions of the Gospels, there are gatherings of Jesus' sayings at various points, sometimes arranged topically as in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7, or the sermon about the end of time (Mk. 13, the Little Apocalypse). There is a large collection in Luke 9:51-19:27 of material uniquely Lukan containing many sayings. Jesus was also regarded as a teacher and his teachings were remembered.]

The Gospel materials are significant not only because the structure of the Gospel tradition follows a basic outline of Christ's brief ministry, but the material also seems to be organized to parallel the experience of Christ with the experience of the believer. Certainly early Christians must have read the Gospels this way. The Gospel of Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus which contains many of the elements of the believer's baptism, then comes the testing (temptation) of the identity established in baptism. This is followed by the "day in the life of Jesus" in 1:14-39 which expresses many of the essential components of the Christian message and experience. Following that one encounters the controversies of chapters 2-3, similar to those experienced by early Christians. Then the problem of understanding the Gospel is dealt with in 4 in the context of an extended treatment of Jesus' parables. This is followed by the healings of chapter 5 and the description of the Christian mission in 6-8:21, of which the confession of Peter and the Transfiguration is the climax. And one could go on.

The Gospel of John provides rich resources. The Prologue alone speaks of the Word/Wisdom of God, with God before creation, agent of God in creation, and present throughout all history seeking to bring life and light and to enable persons to become God's children. This Word becomes incarnate in Jesus. What is disclosed in the action of the Word is "grace and truth", God's "gracious love and faithfulness."

Following the Prologue John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as the one on whom the Spirit descends and who will baptize with the Spirit. He directs two of his disciples to Jesus by proclaiming, "Behold, the Lamb of God.!" They follow Jesus and Jesus asks what they seek, inviting them to "come and see", an invitation repeated by Philip to Nathanael. The encounter with Jesus is central. Each pericope in John deals with an

encounter and ends with a confession. One may then see the stories following chapter one as dealing with what happens in encounter with Jesus to a variety of persons: Nathaniel, the young visionary; the wedding where Jesus was present incognito; the cleansing of the Temple; Nicodemus and his questions of the older years; the Samaritan woman; the official and his son; and the man who didn't want to be healed in chapter 5. Again one could go on.

Yet the Gospel narratives do more than narrate the public ministry of Jesus and parallel the experience of the believer. They provide the material the remembrance of which forms and shapes the life of the church. The Gospel narrative treating Palm Sunday to the Resurrection of Jesus, covering a period only a week long, is usually about one third of the total material in each Gospel. To historians this meant that it was probably one of the earliest continuous narratives constructed by the early church from the Jesus tradition. The context in the life of the early church for the assembling and use of this narrative is probably given by Paul in I Cor. 11:23-26. Here Jesus' command to do this in remembrance of him would necessitate the construction of the narrative which would facilitate that remembrance. This remembrance is not a delving into the past but the making present of the past reality of Christ's death so that the lives of persons and the church might be shaped by it, similar to the way the narrative of Passover was used in Judaism.

An Approach to the Study of a Gospel

It is suggested that you adopt a method for the study of Mark which is appropriate to whether you plan to study it in a group or as an individual. As an individual you may wish to select one of the devotional methods previously suggested or to use the method outlined below. If you are studying this in a group, you need to use a method which allows group process and suits the limits of your time together. In the section on Methods there is a devotional meditation on the Baptism of Jesus designed for a group.

The following method may be utilized by an individual or a group and it combines both the historical and devotional approaches to Scripture. There are basic questions which you need to ask as you study each story or passage:

1. **Author's meaning:** *Why did the author of the Gospel include this story? What did he want us to get out of it? I have placed the question of the author's intent first since we are confronted with his literary work and his purpose is before us in his work. What Jesus intended can only be explored after asking what the author intended.*
2. **Jesus' meaning:** *What did Jesus intend by what he said and did or what did Jesus experience? What difficulties do we have in understanding this through what the author presented?*
3. **Meaning for me:** *What does God say to me through this passage? What in my life is similar to the story in this passage?*
4. Because you are reading a story of Jesus' ministry and teaching, it would also be good to ask, *What would Jesus teach me through this passage?* The Gospels are a way of letting Jesus continue to teach us and their collection of narrative and sayings were intended to do this.

It would be helpful to keep a *simple record or journal* listing the passage studied and the insights which came to you through this passage.

What you feel God has said to you through the passage should in some way be *carried with you into your day* -- perhaps by occasionally reminding yourself of it.

A Sample Study of Mark 1:9-13 Jesus' Baptism and Temptation

When one approaches a passage with which one is not very familiar, unless one has a commentary or an annotated Bible, it is probably true that much of the meaning of the passage will be in question. Yet to pose the right questions to the passage, even though one may not have answers at hand, will sharpen observations and start the process of understanding on its way. The questions are as important as the answers. In fact, if you think you have the answers right away you may neglect the right questions and so miss some of the potential answers. What follows is an amplification of the basic questions just discussed.

First, what did the author intend to say to us through this story. If we remember anything of the other Gospels we will note that it is a much briefer presentation of the events of the baptism and temptation of Jesus than we find in the others. This is especially clear in the temptation part of the story. This passage is located near the beginning of the Gospel, right after the story of John the Baptist, and it is the first story about Jesus. It is also located just before the description of Jesus' preaching in Galilee. It must then be important and may set the stage for much of the later description of Jesus' ministry. If one presupposes that Mark intended the reader to identify with the story of Jesus and that Jesus' story somehow parallels the story of the believer, what does it mean to the reader to have this story narrated at the beginning of this Gospel with which she or he is to identify?

When one reads this story over there seems to be so many questions which might be asked of its terse detail. Why did Jesus come from Nazareth? What did he leave behind? What attracted him to John? Why was he baptized? What was baptism then? Was it like our baptism? What is our baptism? Why was John by the Jordan river? When Jesus came out of the water he saw the heavens opened. What does this mean in the religious language of his time and culture? What did it mean when he saw the Spirit as a dove coming down on him? What was the Spirit? Why did he hear a voice? What did this mean? What did it mean that the voice said: "You are my beloved son, in you I am well-pleased"? Since this was a voice from heaven, did this have any special meaning in the religious language of the time?

Why did the Spirit "throw him out" into the wilderness where he was tempted/tried for 40 days? Why 40 days? What was the wilderness? Did it serve any symbolic function? What did it mean that he was with wild beasts and that angels served him?

Remember that these questions need to be asked first from the perspective of the author who had clear and definite intentions for what he was writing and intended us to understand something.

Second, what did this experience mean to Jesus? Some of our understanding of this could be derived from our answers to the questions about what the author intended to say and portray. Do you think that there is anything that the author is not telling us? What can we guess at that the author does not tell us? What would this experience have meant to Jesus? What did he intend by submitting to these experiences? Did he have any choice? How did these events fit into the story of his life?

Third, what does God say to me through this passage? Can I in my imagination enter into this story so that I not only watch what happened, but feel what is going on? Have I had any experiences like the ones of Jesus described here? Is there anything going on in my life now which this seems to speak to? Did my baptism mean anything like Jesus'? Have I ever been tried as he was?

Fourth, what would Jesus, as my Lord and teacher, as one who went through these experiences in the story, want to teach me? This is different from the third question as here we are not trying to explore how this experience of Jesus is similar to ours and find out what he would teach us from the story. We are

opening ourselves to Jesus so that the Jesus of the story can teach us about whatever. What he may teach us may not be specifically drawn from this story. The easiest way to do this is to spend a short time in silence with Jesus and allow him to develop a dialogue with you. This dialogue may be his doing or it may be the creation of your own mind. It may draw its content from the passage, or it may not. But you will learn something.

Some helpful information for the story in this passage is: “Those days” in which Jesus came to the Jordan were when John the Baptist was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus came from Galilee at the time of his maturity (about 30 years old), where he left his family, to John by whom he must have been attracted in some way. He was baptized by John (In Matthew, not Mark, John protests that Jesus does not really need to be baptized. In the Gospel of John Jesus is not baptized, but only the Spirit comes on him. This must reflect a struggle in the early church as to why Jesus needed to be baptized.). That the heavens opened meant that he saw a heavenly vision. The usual mystical vision of Judaism was that of the throne of God, such as in Is. 6 and Rev. 4-5. The Spirit came down from heaven as a dove. Language about the Spirit coming on Jesus is one way the early church had to describe that God was in him. In some Gospels the Spirit came upon him also in his birth (Matt. and Lk.) and in the Gospel of John eternal Wisdom/Word came upon him (John 1:1-18). The words of the heavenly voice are often thought to represent the bringing together of Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1. Ps. 2 is a psalm of royal enthronement, which was interpreted to be about the Messiah as well as the king, and Is. 42 is part of the Servant Passages in the book of Isaiah. This could mean that Jesus was identified to himself as the Messiah, but this was recast in terms of the suffering Servant in Isaiah. The temptation has none of the detail that Matt. and Lk. do (which describes the temptations as temptations to be the wrong sort of Messiah) and thus we can much more readily identify with this experience. God put Jesus in the wilderness, but God did not tempt him. Satan tempted him, tried his faith. There were many dangers there, represented by the wild beasts. But God’s angels also served him there. God cared for him in difficult circumstances. Since both the baptism and temptation are at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, they must help to prepare him for his ministry. The baptismal experience gave him his identity while the temptation prepared him for the struggles of his ministry where he would also face the attacks of Satan.

Outline of the Gospel of Mark

Each Gospel is composed from the tradition about Jesus available to and selected by the writers and their religious communities. At some stage this tradition was translated into Greek since it was initially in Aramic and all of our Gospels are in Greek. It is important to remember that Jesus' ministry covered a period likely not more than 1 ½ years, and though there were crucial events which needed to be included in any Gospel and there was a memory of the basic outline of Jesus ministry, yet the short period his ministry occupied also limited the length and details of the stories about him. All of the Gospels include a long "Passion Narrative," the story of events from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the resurrection. In Mark this amounts to six out of the sixteen chapters for a period that covered one week of time. This was likely the first type of narrative constructed, before any of the Gospels, and it was used as a background story for the Lord's Supper.

This outline treats many sections of Mark interpretively. Space does not always allow a presentation of the reasons for these interpretations, some of which may be open to question. However, the nature of Mark necessitates such a treatment. Mark preserves the tradition about Jesus which existed in the church at Rome and states it without much in the way of interpretive comment. Undoubtedly the church was aware of the way this material should be understood, but for us some of it becomes clear only through a careful study and a little detective work. Thus a mere topical outline will not give the reader of Mark sufficient help. In offering an interpretation of the Markan material we are doing the same thing Matthew did in his use of Mark, although some of our interpretations will differ from those of Matthew and will in some ways, I believe, be closer to the original intent of the Markan material and the life of the historical Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark was likely written about 64 AD, around the time of the rising opposition of Rome to Christianity in Rome, the capital. In 64 the city of Rome burned and the emperor Nero blamed Christians. Consequently Christians experienced the first persecution at the hands of Roman government, though this was yet a local persecution. Tradition assigns the location of the Gospel's origin to Rome and sees Mark (an associate at times of Paul and Peter) as its author who depended on the preaching of Peter for information. It is interesting that I Peter seems to reflect a similar historical situation and was likely written from Rome at about the same time. A major theme in I Peter is suffering and the author explicitly discusses the relationship of Christians with the Roman state (2:11-17). In this difficult time it became important to see how the teaching of Jesus would help them deal with suffering and develop an approach to Roman authority. Jesus had to deal with the same issues. In Mark the kingdom of God (the presence and rule of God) is portrayed not as something of power, but as seed (4:26-29), a mystery (4:11 "secret" is a wrong translation). Jesus rejects the use of power and assumes the role of a servant (10:35-45). He speaks often of his suffering (e.g. 8:31-38) and in the cleansing of the Temple says: "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*'? But you have made it a den of robbers." Jesus quotes from Is. 56:7 and "for all nations" is in the Isaiah passage, but it is only included in Mark. "Robbers" is a contemporary term for "revolutionaries". Thus Jesus

criticizes the exclusion of Gentiles from the Temple. The business of the Temple was set up in the Court of the Gentiles, the only place in the Temple where Gentiles could go. Jesus says that they have made the Temple a symbol for revolution.

At the end of the Gospel Mark concludes with the story of the women who were told by a “young man” that Jesus had risen, but no resurrection narratives are included. This is Mark’s way of saying that his readers have heard the story; the resurrected Christ they cannot see as the women could not see him. The readers like the women needed at first to believe from the story that was told them.

The Gospel of Mark also seems to have been developed and molded by a desire to indicate parallels in the life of Jesus to the life of the believer. Of course it must tell the story of Jesus and so therefore cannot merely indicate parallel events and experiences. But it helps to understand the Gospel to know that this is a major concern. Thus to hear Jesus' story is also to hear many resonances with my story, and I miss part of the Gospel's meaning if I do not listen for this and explore this. I have located themes relevant to my and your story in frames on the right edge of the page.

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| 1:1 | Title: The “Beginning” (the Greek word “beginning” may mean beginning in time but also can mean “fundamental content”) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ |
| JUDEA | |
| 1:2-13 | |
| 1: 2-11 1:12-13 | John the Baptist and Jesus; Jesus' Baptism by John The Temptation of Jesus (the details in Luke and Matt. are not here and so one may identify in a more general way with Jesus’ experience) |

My story also begins with my Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection and the awareness that I am God's son or daughter, as the heavenly voice indicated to Jesus. To be baptized raises questions about many other things in my life and when I think of this or when I try to live out my baptism I am tried and tested as Jesus was in the wilderness. But I also discover that God's Spirit cares for me in the wildernesses of life and I do not need to be afraid. Mark does not give details for Jesus' temptation because to leave out the details helps us to better enter Jesus' experience. Satan for persons in Jesus time represented all that was wrong with the world and all that would keep persons from being God's son or daughter.

GALILEE

1:14--9:50

(with mention of
some activity
north of Galilee)

- 1:14-2:17 The Kingdom (God's desire to exercise His Rule) announced and enacted (as was customary with the O.T. prophets, Jesus does a number of things to demonstrate his message besides announcing his message; Mark 1:16-39 is a sample day in the life of Jesus in which he does a number of things related to his message; this section includes a series of miracle stories which are often included in groups)
- 1:14-15 Kingdom (Rule, Presence of God) Announced
 - 1:16-20 Some disciples called
 - 1:21-28 Capernaum Synagogue-Unclean spirit cast out
 - 1:29-31 Simon's (Peter's) mother-in-law healed
 - 1:32-39 Many healed, but Jesus' main purpose is to preach, not heal
 - 1:40-45 Leper healed
 - 2: 1-12 Paralytic healed and his sins forgiven
 - 2:13-17 Levi (Matthew ?) called and Jesus fellowships with sinners and tax collectors (to show in whom He is interested)

What does Jesus' message mean? In 1:14-2:17 we are given a brief summary of his message and mission (the kingdom, rule, presence of God is announced) and then we have a number of stories which demonstrate what it means. This is sometimes called a "sample day in the life of Jesus." It's interesting to note that in 1:32-39 Jesus primary purpose is to announce the kingdom, the presence of God, not merely to get involved in many healings.

What are the possibilities for you in these stories?

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| 2:18-3:6 | <p>Controversies</p> <p>2:18-22 His disciples don't fast - Jesus is bringing something new</p> <p>2:23-3:6 Keeping the Sabbath - 2 incidents - "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath."</p> | <p>Controversy; resistance to the message where the new confronts the old. Even Jesus family had difficulty with what he was doing. What is your resistance?</p> |
| 3:7-3:30 | <p>The Attack Against Satan's Kingdom and Authority (which was necessary to the coming of God's Rule or Kingdom)</p> <p>3: 7-12 Exorcisms (unclean spirits cast out)</p> <p>3:13-19 Commissioning of the 12 to preach and exorcise</p> <p>3:20-30 By whose power does Jesus cast our demons? What is the source of his authority?</p> | |
| 3:31-35 | <p>Opposition of Jesus' Family (Jesus statement here presupposes that his family did not comprehend what he was doing. In 3:10-21 the "friends" who thought he was beside himself according to the Greek text may have been his family.)</p> | |
| 4: 1-34 | <p>The Problem of Understanding and Accepting the Kingdom as Present in Jesus</p> <p>4: 1-9 Jesus tells a parable about a generous sower and about the problem of understanding (the seed falls on different types of soil) to people who are having difficulty understanding the parables he is telling them.</p> <p>4:10-12 Jesus tells his disciples that they have to accept the "mystery of the Kingdom" before his parables become understandable. (The term "mystery" is the correct translation of the Greek word, not "secret".) The mystery is that the Kingdom is already present in Jesus and that it will not involve the national restoration of Israel as hoped, but that it involves a restoration of relationship between God and humanity and a life of service (not power and prestige). Jesus had used the parables with the crowd not only to communicate his understanding but to limit the response of people to those who accepted his approach. His illustrative parables only became clear to those who accepted His views. He did not want to draw to himself contemporary groups looking for a political Messiah. For this reason Jesus uses the parables as a means to keep his Messiahship secret. Mark 4:12 is a quotation from Is. 6:9-10 (where the response of people to Isaiah's mission is described) and its proper translation is highly debated. At first it sounds like Jesus does not want people to understand. Vs. 12 should be translated "so that they may indeed see but not perceive and may indeed hear but not understand; <i>unless</i> they should turn again and be forgiven." They need to turn and accept a new point of view.</p> | <p>4:1-34 The Mystery of the Kingdom: God sows it but it doesn't seem here unless we change our idea of what is to be expected. A new point of view is needed to see what is here.</p> |

- 4:13-20 Explanation of the parable of the sower (usually Jesus does not explain, Matt. explains 2)
 4:21-25 Jesus intention is not to hide his message (one doesn't hide a lamp), but one must have ears to hear and understand. One needs to be responsive to Jesus' reinterpretation of the contemporary Jewish ideas.
 4:26-32 Two parables of the Kingdom emphasizing Jesus' reinterpretation of the Kingdom: it begins small, grows slowly and mysteriously, but eventually the fulfillment comes.
 4:33-34 Concluding statement about Jesus' use of parables with the crowds to which he spoke. To his disciples he privately gave the explanations.

- 4:35-6:6 Mighty Works of the Kingdom (A collection of miracle stories)
 4:33-41 Jesus stills a storm
 5:1-20 Gerasene man with unclean spirit healed
 5:21-43 Jairus' daughter made alive and woman with flow of blood healed

A collection of miracles. Such collections existed in the early church. Do they illustrate things about Jesus's message? In Mark Jesus plays down miracles though he performs them.

6:1-29 Responses to Jesus

- 6: 1-6 Problems in the Nazareth Synagogue - Jesus' townspeople take offense at the hometown boy. He did no mighty work there.
 6:7-13 Jesus sends the Twelve on a Mission
 6:14-29 Response of Herod Antipas to Jesus' Activity - and the story of what happened to John the Baptist. The speculations raised about who Jesus is anticipate Peter's confession (8:27-30)

Reactions to Jesus which anticipate the debate with James and John (10:35-45) and the Confession of Peter (8:27-38).

- 6:30-8:26 The Feeding Miracles - Jesus enacts Exodus history (Moses' feeding the multitude in the wilderness) and also anticipates the great Messianic Banquet (when the Messiah will gather together with all God's people at a banquet when the final age in history arrives). 8:14-21 is the key to this section for in it Jesus explains that the number of baskets of food remains gathered up had special significance. Jesus, as the prophets of old, is enacting and dramatizing His message.
- 6:30-44 Feeding of the 5,000
- 6:45-52 Sea trip to Bethsaida - Jesus stills the wind
- 6:53-56 Many healings
- [7:1-8:10 Jesus takes his disciples on a mission into Gentile areas]
- 7:1-23 What truly defiles a man (remember that Jews were not able to have fellowship with Gentiles because of their laws on cleanness)
- 7:24-30 Daughter of Greek (Syrophenician) woman healed. Jesus reflects back to his disciples their attitude towards the Gentiles.
- 7:31-37 Deaf and dumb man healed in the Decapolis
- 8: 1-10 Feeding of the 4,000 This seems to be a feeding of those who were not Jews, while the Feeding of the 5000 was primarily for Jews.
- 8:11-13 Pharisees seek a sign
- 8:14-21 Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. Leaven (old dough soured for raising the bread) represents the influence of the ideas of the Pharisees and Herod (or Herodians). The Pharisees sought a political Messiah and asked for a convincing sign of his power and authority while Herod was all too willing to compromise with the Romans. This seems to criticize too narrow and too broad a view. Here Jesus seems to be expressing the idea that he has the proper "bread" (see John 6:32, 35) and that when what he has to offer is accepted there will be gathered up not only the twelve tribes of Israel (symbolized in the 12 baskets gathered up from the Feeding of the 5,000) but also people from all nations (7 baskets are gathered up from the Feeding of the 4,000 and 7 is the complete number). The Feeding of the 4,000 which symbolizes and dramatizes the feeding and gathering up of all nations is preceded by a discussion of what

6:30-8:26 is a long section focusing around the meaning of two feeding miracles and stressing that Christ includes all in his mission, even the Gentiles. He even leads his disciples on a unique experimental mission among the Gentiles. If this is historical it means that the mission to the Gentiles was given earlier than the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) and earlier than the Gentile mission which develops in Acts. It was always Jesus intention to be inclusive. *He came for all, not only the good and the righteous and the pure.* The emphasis on food in the feeding miracles becomes a reference to Holy Communion in John 6.

defiles a person and the healing of several Gentiles, all of which pointed up the mission beyond Israel to all nations.

8:22-26 Blind Man at Bethsaida

Jesus can bring in-sight.

8:27-9:29 Climax of the Gospel

8:27-30 Peter's confession of Jesus as Christ, Messiah

8:31-33 Jesus says the Son of Man must suffer, be killed and rise again. Peter rebukes Jesus. Jesus tries to make sure His disciples won't understand Him as a political Messiah, but Peter has difficulty accepting this. Jesus reasserts this idea several times from this point on. Jesus' prophecy of his resurrection must be seen in the light of the O.T. theme of the vindication of God's faithful servant (e.g., Is. 52:13ff and 53:10)

8:34-38 Disciples also may have to suffer

9: 1 Promise of the Kingdom in Power (this may refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Acts 2)

9: 2-13 Transfiguration - Jesus is revealed to be what Peter confessed. Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus here may represent Jesus' fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. Jesus' statement that the prophecy of the returned of Elijah (Malachi 4:5) has already been fulfilled must refer to John the Baptist as its fulfillment.

9:14-29 Healing of an epileptic boy - This story points out the ability of Jesus in contrast to the failure of the disciples to heal the boy. An important issue dealt with here is that of faith: the father says, "I believe, help my unbelief."

A time to confess.

The Gospel climaxes in Peter's Confession of Jesus, his misunderstanding of Jesus, Jesus' clarification, and then the Transfiguration. This is the moment when the reader is called to faith and to reflect on whether she or he is ready to come to terms with Jesus and his understanding of God and life. As to "she", Mark has no difficulty placing women in crucial places (see chapters 5,7,14,16) The role of women in the church is treated more extensively in John and Luke.

- 9:30-10:52 Teaching - It is at this point in the narrative when Jesus' activity in Galilee comes to an end and he goes to Jerusalem that Mark includes a good deal of teaching material. The historical and chronological setting of this material is vague (except for 9:33, 10:1 and 10:46). Luke does the same thing at this point in his Gospel by inserting his great interpolation (9:51-19:27). Having presented the essentials of Jesus' significance and ministry (with the exception of the last climactic moments of his life in Jerusalem), it is natural that some aspects of Jesus teaching would be presented here. Moreover, much of the material here directly relates to his going to Jerusalem by speaking of the nature of his mission (and that of his disciples) and his coming death.
- 9:30-32 Another prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection
- 9:33-37 Nature of discipleship pointed out when some discuss who is greatest.
- 9:38-41 Disciples ask about a man who does Jesus' work but doesn't belong to their group.
- 9:45-50 Eliminate the cause of sin - maintain your flavor (saltiness). The statement about cutting off parts of the body is hyperbole and not intended to be taken literally.
- 10:1-12 Divorce
- 10:12-16 God's Kingdom belongs to children
- 10:17-31 Some will have difficulty entering God's Kingdom (the rich), but with God it is not impossible.
- 10:32-34 Another prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection.
- 10:35-45 James and John request special privilege in the Kingdom, but Jesus points out that the great are those who serve. It is in this way he understands his mission. He is to be a servant as are his disciples (the idea of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 40 and following is probably reflected here).
- 10:46-52 Healing of blind Bartimaeus. The blind man acknowledges Jesus as Messiah, Son of David, about which Jesus makes no comment.

Various things to think on.
 This section has a number of stories which deal with various subjects. They don't seem as if they necessarily belong together in some order but each story has its message. What unifies it to an extent are the predictions of Jesus death and resurrection leading up to the debate with James and John which is a climactic moment. As the healing of a blind man symbolically preceeds Peter's Confession so here the healing of a blind man follows the debate with James and John.

JERUSALEM

11-16

- 11-16 The "Passion Story" Triumphal Entry through the Resurrection
The oldest part of the Gospel narrative.
- 11:1-13:37 Christ Confronts Jerusalem for its Moment of Decision
- 11:1-11 The King of Peace enters. Jesus seems to plan an entry into Jerusalem which will portray His nature and mission. Matthew (21:4) makes reference to Jesus doing this in fulfillment of a prophecy (Zachariaiah 9:9) about a King of Peace, and this may very well have been Jesus' intention. Interestingly Mark portrays Jesus' intentionality by having Jesus enter Jerusalem in the "Triumphal Entry", look around the Temple, go back to Bethany for the night, and return on the next day for the Temple cleansing. In Mark this is no impulsive action.
- 11:12-26 Cursing of fig tree and Temple cleansing. - Jesus calls Israel's attention to her mission to the world and God's judgment if she fails. 12-14 deals with the cursing of a fig tree. this is not an act of anger, but a dramatization of the fate of Israel if she does not bear fruit. Remember that this is not just a religious issue, but revolution was already underway which led to the Jewish revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. vs. 15-19 deal with Jesus driving the money-changers and sellers of animals out of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple compound. This is the part of the Temple where Israel should be ministering to the Gentiles ("My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all nations.*") 20-26 are the sequel to the cursing of the fig tree. Peter, frightened called Jesus attention to the death of the tree and his words imply the question, "What will happen to Israel?" Jesus replies, "Have faith in God." These incidents precipitate the decision on the part of the Jewish leaders to get rid of Jesus (vs. 18).
- 11:27-33 Jewish leaders question Jesus' authority to do what he did.
- 12:1-12 Parable of the vineyard. - Tenants (probably referring to Israel) are judged for the rejection of the owner of the vineyard's right to receive fruit from it and their abuse of his servants and son.
[It is important to remember that such materials reflect Jesus' historic conflict with Jewish leaders and the conflict between Christianity and Judaism which began later. We should be careful that such does not become the basis for present anti-Jewish attitudes.]
- 12:13-40 Series of Controversies
- 12:12-17 Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar?
- 12:18-27 A question about the resurrection by Sadducees who don't believe in it.
- 12:28-34 The two great commandments.
- 12:35-37 Jesus denies Davidic descent of the Christ (Messiah) which then disavows political hopes in connection with the restoration of David's kingdom.

12:38-40 Criticism of the Scribes.

12:41-44 The widow's mite - an example of total dedication

13:1-37 The Little Apocalypse - This passage begins with Jesus' prophecy about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This then seems to be identified with the coming of the end of the world when the Son of Man will return in glory. Various signs are mentioned which will indicate the nearness of the end. This is called the Little Apocalypse because it seems like a small piece of Apocalyptic literature. Some scholars suggest that vs. 5-31 are not totally from Jesus but that this was an Apocalypse based on some sayings of Jesus which circulated in the early church prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Verses 32-37 seem to militate against the type of prediction of the end that 5-31 seem to suggest and may better reflect Jesus' true attitude. The basic question involved here is how much of this passage really reflects his thinking. Jesus' discussion of the Kingdom in Mark 4 does not seem to fit well with what is expressed in 5-31.

The Final Drama and Conflict

The Moment of Decision

All of Jesus' previous debates with his contemporaries come to a focus in this last week of his life. This time also involves the establishment of Holy Communion, his death, and his resurrection. All this is placed in the context of the expected end of the world, so what is struggled out here is a cosmic struggle. After having moved through these foundational stories, he promises to again lead his disciples into the world as a shepherd leads his sheep.

In the Moravian tradition this time is experienced through the Readings for Holy Week which is a harmony of the Passion Narratives of the Gospels. However, as a harmony the intentionality and strategy of any individual Gospel is lost and this is then provided through the selection of passages now brought together into a narrative.

- 14:1-42 Preparation for Jesus' Death
- 14: 1-2 The plot against Jesus
 - 14: 3-9 Anointed for death
 - 14:10-11 Judas' arrangement with the priests
 - 14:12-25 Last Supper - It is mentioned that Jesus is to be betrayed. Here Jesus institutes a means of remembering his death and offers a pledge of their being together again in the future.
 - 14:26-31 Peter protests his loyalty
 - 14:32-42 Jesus prepares himself in the garden of Gethsemene
- 14:43-15:20 Arrest and Trial
- 14:43-52 Judas' betrayal and Jesus' arrest - some think the young man mentioned in 51-52 may have been the author of the Gospel.
 - 14:53-65 Trial before the high priest - Jesus is accused of saying He will destroy the Temple and for the first time openly accepts the title of Christ (i.e. Messiah - previously he had tried to keep this from becoming known by the general public). This also leads to an accusation of blasphemy (which may have been made on the basis of his statement about the coming Son of Man - the Son of Man could be a divine figure while the Messiah was usually understood to be a man.,)
 - 14:66-72 Peter's denial of Christ.
 - 15:1-20 Jesus' trial before Pilate - Jesus' being called "King of the Jews" would have to do with the question of whether he was the Messiah of royal (Davidic) lineage.
- 15:24-41 The Crucifixion - The rending of the curtain of the Temple in vs. 38 may be symbolical as it was this curtain, between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, that separated Israel from the immediate presence of God.
- 15:42-47 The Burial
- 16: 1-8 The Resurrection - The Gospel of Mark, in the form in which we now have it, ends at 16:8. There has been much speculation as to whether the end was originally longer and contained an account of Christ's resurrection appearances as do the other Gospels. The early church felt that something was lacking in ending the Gospel at 16:8 and composed *two different endings* to round off the account of the resurrection. The content of the most familiar and longer ending is most likely derived from the other Gospels. The shorter ending has very little to say.

He's alive! They told me so. But I still have to discover it in my experience of life. It is said he will go before me. Since he is before me, if I do not follow I can not discover that he is really there. All Jesus' reinterpretation of the Kingdom and his mission, including his rejection of power and his suffering, must define the nature of the One I seek in my experience and journey.

The ending of Mark as it stands includes the arrival of the woman at the tomb on the 1st day of the week to anoint Jesus' body. There they find the stone door of the tomb rolled back and a young man (angel -?) who tells them that Jesus has risen. He tells them to report to the disciples (with perhaps a special gracious mention of Peter because Peter has denied him or because Peter had assumed a special position in the group.) They are to tell the disciples that Jesus is going before them to Galilee as he said. The reference to Galilee is puzzling as we have little record of Jesus' appearance to His disciples in Galilee after his resurrection. In the light of Jesus' own statement concerning this in 14:27-28 it basically means that after his resurrection Jesus (the Shepherd) will again lead (go before) his sheep (disciples). A Palestinian shepherd led his sheep rather than driving them ahead of him. It could mean that Jesus would eventually lead his disciples back to their home (most were from Galilee) and the location where they had carried on most of their ministry. 16:6-8 in its present form would mean that the disciples should first go to Galilee and that Jesus would then meet them there. This does not fit well with Jesus' own statement in 14:27-28 nor does it fit well with what we know of the resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospels of Luke and John. Can it be that vs. 6-8 were retouched by the early church to refer to an appearance of Jesus immediately in Galilee in order to supply the lack of a resurrection appearance in the original ending? If you remove the words "there you will see him" in vs. 7 these verses would agree with Jesus' statement in 14:27-28 and would mean that the man (or angel) at the tomb tells the woman to remind the disciples of Jesus' promise that He will soon again be at their head and lead them.

The absence of information about resurrection appearances of Christ in our earliest Gospel should not disturb us as there is an account which antedates the Gospel of Mark by at least 10 years in I Cor. 15.