The Bible and Bread

Context, Themes, and Word Study

The Gospel of Mark

Mark's gospel is a relentless story about Jesus' announcement of God's righteous kingdom and the acts that accompany this proclamation. Throughout his ministry, Jesus encounters resistance. Evil is manifested in the demonic and in the actions of human beings. Human characters in Mark are often fearful and stubborn, and at times extremely violent. Self-seeking and the desire for honor work at cross-purposes with God's will. Evil, however, is being defeated: Jesus banishes demons, teaches about God's kingdom, and challenges religious and political structures that are harmful to human well-being. At times, people respond in faith, trusting in Jesus' compassion and divine authority. Though Jesus dies on the cross, once again evil is overcome as God raises him from the dead.

~ *The Wesley Study Bible Introduction to Mark*

Peterson's Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Mark wastes no time in getting down to business—a single-sentence introduction, and not a digression to be found from beginning to end. An event has taken place that radically changes the way we look at and experience the world, and he can't wait to tell us about it. There's an air of breathless excitement in nearly every sentence he writes. The sooner we get the message, the better off we'll be, for the message is good, incredibly good: God is here, and he's on our side. The bare announcement that God exists doesn't particularly qualify as news. Most people in most centuries have believed in the existence of God or gods. It may well be, in fact, that human beings in aggregate and through the centuries have given more attention and concern to divinity than to all their other concerns put together—food, housing, clothing, pleasure, work, family, whatever.

But that God is here right now, and on our side, actively seeking to help us in the way we most need help—this qualifies as news. For, common as belief in God is, there is also an enormous amount of guesswork and gossip surrounding the subject, which results in runaway superstition, anxiety, and exploitation. So Mark, understandably, is in a hurry to tell us what happened in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the Event that reveals the truth of God to us, so that we can live in reality and not illusion. He doesn't want us to waste a minute of these precious lives of ours ignorant of this most practical of all matters—that God is passionate to save us.

~ *Eugene Peterson*

The Gospel of Mark Chapter 1:

- no genealogy (Matthew 1)
- no birth narrative (Matthew 1)
- no visit of the magi (Matthew 2)
- no escape to Egypt (Matthew 2)
- no massacre of the infants (Matthew 2)
- no return from Egypt… (Matthew 2)

The Proclamation of John the Baptist
(Mark 1:1…, Matthew 3:1…)

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

Mark 1:1-8

J.B. aka "the hinge"
https://orthochristian.com/73542.html see paragraph 4

J.B. aka "the bridge"
https://michaelckw.blogspot.com/2019/12/the-bridge-between-old-and-new.html see 2nd paragraph

Mark 1:1-8 1 The beginning of the good news[a] of Jesus Christ.[b]
2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,[c]
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,[d]
who will prepare your way,
3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight,' "
4 so John the baptizer appeared[e] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with[f] water, but he will baptize you with[g] the Holy Spirit."

a.1.1 Or *gospel* b.1.1 Other ancient authorities add *Son of God*
c.1.2 Other ancient authorities read *in the prophets* d.1.2 Gk *before your face* e.1.4 Other ancient authorities read *John was baptizing*
f.1.8 Or *in* g.1.8 Or *in*

see **Matthew 3:11-17**

The Baptism of Jesus

Mark 1:9-11 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was
baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of
the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a
dove upon him. 11 And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my Son,
the Beloved;[h] with you I am well pleased.”

h.1.11 Or *my beloved Son*

see Matthew 3:11-17

The Testing of Jesus

Mark 1:12-13 [12] And the Spirit *immediately drove him out into the wilderness. [13] He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

see Matthew 4:1-11

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the
good news[i] of[j] God 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the
kingdom of God has come near;[k] repent, and believe in the good
news.”[l]

1.14 Or *gospel*
1.14 Other ancient authorities add *of the kingdom of*
1.15 Or *is at hand*
1.15 Or *gospel*

see Matthew 4:12-17

**immediately* ~ 87 occurrences in New Testament:

Matthew 18x

Mark 41x ~ 11x in Chapter 1 ~ Mark, using the shorter form εὐθύς, strings events together so the reader feels the urgent march of Messianic ministry (Mark 1:10-43; 2:8-12; 4:15-29; 5:2-42). The word appears some forty-one times, creating Mark's signature "breathless" style. see https://biblehub.com/greek/2112.htm

Luke 7x

John 6x

The Bible for Normal People | Episode 309: Elizabeth Shively – The Gospel of Mark Explained

Mark has an abrupt beginning and abrupt ending.

Mark distinctively connects Jesus' path of suffering and death and resurrection to the path of his followers.

…a story that shapes what it means to follow Jesus.

…tells the truth about human frailty and divine faithfulness.

Mark leaves things kind of messy … we have to wrestle with what it means to follow a suffering Messiah.

Mark's apocalyptic imagination is less about timelines and more about perspective. It's about, how do we see the world? It's about showing that God has broken into the world and is doing things in the world now, and the world is going towards a certain end that God's in charge of.

…revealing a deeper reality that's not always visible to the naked eye.

…there is this sense [from the people] of the Messiah coming to vanquish the enemies of God's people. But Mark, [at the very beginning, turns this conquering-of-human-enemies notion around]. Yes, Jesus is coming in fulfillment of what Isaiah promises. But this is going to look like Jesus being filled with the Spirit …Jesus doing battle with Satan… we can't see that with the human eye…

Mark is showing from the beginning… Jesus being filled with the Spirit, the Spirit throwing [Jesus] out in the wilderness to do battle with Satan …giving us eyes to see from the get-go this reality that's taking place …behind the scenes …what's playing out on the ground.

…how can the suffering Messiah be ushering God's kingdom, how can Jesus' followers who are suffering be part of that kingdom?

…apocalyptic imagination gives us eyes to see a… future that is blossoming that we can't see through… our human perception.

Mark [narrates an unsettledness of humanity that shifts] between fear and faith

Mark is inviting us to see the world more clearly, to… pull back the curtain and say, "this is what's really going on when the Messiah is suffering, when God's people are suffering… it's not [about] comfort… it's not suffering that's strange.

Suffering is the way that if God's people are gonna follow in the footsteps of Jesus, then it's to be a servant, it's to be last. It's to… give your life… for others… and that doesn't mean that God isn't in control or that the kingdom isn't here or that it's not coming fully."

But we can see that God is at work… that God is at work now and in the future in these very things. And I think this is so important because… it prevents us from seeing… this kind of apocalyptic vision as an escape.

…we're not supposed to.. predict the time [of Jesus' return]… Jesus said he couldn't predict the time… [I'm not to] …get all these cans of soup and hide in my bunker. No… we're supposed to continue in this suffering faithful witness… that Jesus showed us in his followers… it's not escape… that is a solution.

Mark's vision [gives us a lens to focus on what God is doing]. I think neither Jesus nor the New Testament ever suggests that… government or the state is the solution to our personal anxieties or our church anxieties. The kingdom doesn't come by winning elections or securing influence. It comes by taking up the cross.

…I think Christians should be involved in politics. …I think that's important and in movements of justice and however you would see that.

But… the way of Jesus isn't about conquering the world.

It's about bearing witness in the world, even when it's costly. And I think that's what an apocalyptic imagination supports and helps us to see that when it's difficult, when we have no thanks when we're suffering, this is the mustard seed… that is being planted, that Jesus has already planted, that Jesus is working through…

https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/episode-309-elizabeth-shively-the-gospel-of-mark-explained/

The Bible and Bread: Interpreting Scripture

Week 6 Fall 2025

Mark 9:42-50

Temptations to Sin

We light this candle as a sign of
God's presence with us.

God of light and love,
give us, we pray,
the grace and gifts that are your will for us today.

Help us to hear and understand your holy word;
to be aware of our own reactions and emotions;
to be sensitive to one another's stories,
and receptive to one another's insights.

May our study of your word lead us into ever deeper
gratitude for all your gifts,
awareness of the communion of saints,
and relationship with your Word, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Context for Mark 9: 42-50

- Jesus and his disciples were in Capernaum. Just before their arrival, the disciples were arguing about which disciple was the greatest. Jesus then taught the twelve, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” ‘Then took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,’ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:33-37)
- The disciples have not learned the lesson just taught them, as they continue in a discussion about an exorcist, who was not one of the twelve, casting out demons in the name of Jesus. They tried to stop the exorcist because he was not one of the twelve. The disciples are concerned that people follow *them*. Jesus commends the people who do good in *Jesus’* name. (Mark 9:38-41)

Mark 9:42-50 Contemporary English Version *CEV* (**see also** Matthew 18.6-9; Luke 17.1,2)

42 It will be terrible for people who cause even one of my little followers to sin. Those people would be better off
thrown into the ocean with a heavy stone tied around their necks. 43-44 So if your hand causes you to sin, cut it
off! You would be better off to go into life paralyzed than to have two hands and be thrown into the fires of hell
that never go out.[a] 45-46 If your foot causes you to sin, chop it off. You would be better off to go into life lame than
to have two feet and be thrown into hell.[b] 47 If your eye causes you to sin, get rid of it. You would be better off to
go into God's kingdom with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell. 48 The worms there never
die, and the fire never stops burning.
49 Everyone must be salted with fire.[c]
50 Salt is good. But if it no longer tastes like salt, how can it be made salty again? Have salt among you and live at
peace with each other.[d]

Footnotes

a.9.43,44 *never go out:* Some manuscripts add, "The worms there never die, and the fire never stops burning."
b.9.45,46 *thrown into hell:* Some manuscripts add, "The worms there never die, and the fire never stops burning."
c.9.49 *salted with fire:* Some manuscripts add "and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt." The verse may mean that Christ's followers must suffer because of their faith.
d.9.50 *Have salt among you and live at peace with each other:* This may mean that when Christ's followers have to suffer because of their faith, they must still try to live at peace with each other.

Rhetoric is the art of using words to evoke responses in your listeners and persuading them by using figures of speech.

i.e. hyperbole.

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

The valley of Ben Hinnom was a rubbish heap south of ancient Jerusalem that was constantly on fire. It was also a site for child sacrifice in Old Testament times — hence one of Josiah's reforms in 2 Kings 23:10 was to stop people from doing this. [10 And he defiled Topheth, which *is* in the Valley of the [7]Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech.]

In the Greek, this valley gets called "Gehenna" and this is the word Jesus uses when he says it's better to lose a hand or an eye than for our whole bodies to be sent there. "Gehenna" is often translated into English as "hell."

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

In verse 48 Jesus is quoting Isaiah 66:24, which is itself prophetic poetry. It is rarely wise to take a very scientific or literal approach to either poetry or prophecy, because that's not how they work as genres. They are open to interpretation in lots of different ways and I suspect we never truly understand their meaning until the events they describe are upon us.

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

In fact whenever **Isaiah 66** was read in a synagogue, Jews would read verse 24, which is the last verse of that chapter and indeed the entire book, and then go back and read verse 23, "so as to close with words of consolation." For context, the last few verses of Isaiah 66 are as follows:

22 "As surely as my new heavens and earth will remain,
so will you always be my people,
with a name that will never disappear,"
says the Lord.
23 "All humanity will come to worship me
from week to week
and from month to month.
24 And as they go out, they will see
the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me.
For the worms that devour them will never die,
and the fire that burns them will never go out.
All who pass by
will view them with utter horror." (NLT)

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

But the reader would go back and read again:

23 “All humanity will come to worship me
from week to week
and from month to month.

So, maybe when we quote Jesus’s words, we should also remember to end with consolation.

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

We really shouldn't underestimate the consequences of remaining attached to our sin and the things that cause us to sin. Whether that's because of what we might lose, or what we might *lose out on*, I'm not sure. But the stakes are high — I think that's the only reason why Jesus would use this kind of language.
That means the *message* of such hyperbole is to tell us that sin is serious, but this rhetoric is not trying to tell us about a solution. After all, cutting off parts of our bodies ***does not*** separate us from our sin or prevent us from sinning.

And of all people, Jesus knew that.

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

Oh, one last thing before I close: the undying worm and never-quenching fire at the end of Isaiah contrasts with another image in verse 14 of the same chapter. There, Isaiah says the righteous will spring up from the earth like grass.

When you take these two verses as a pair, it seems then that the time will come when evil itself will die *and stay dead*. There will be no dark rising or zombie sin to haunt us or take from our peace.
Instead, **all that is good** will spring up with new life — like fresh grass, as Isaiah puts it. It's a life out of death, a resurrection life, and an everlasting hope.

That's why we call the gospel "good news".

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

Most of us in the modern world stumble over the image of “hell.” For so long we have been taught literal ideas about some awful place people go after they die. This tends to cloud the everyday interpretation of the term “hell.” A full metaphorical translation of the Gospel of Mark for our time requires us to raise this question: “What state of being that we all experience might be pointed to with this word ‘hell’?” “Despair” is a fruitful answer to that question, but what is despair? Despair is finding yourself trapped in a life that you hate, and from which you wish only to escape, but from which there is no escape. With that understanding of “hell” in mind, let us listen again to the tough sayings in these verses. If we do not honor those who trust the Eternal Mystery of the All, then we are living in despair ourselves, and we are leading others into despair. Despair is the worst of all possible outcomes for a human life. Losing a hand, a foot, or an eye would be preferable to being in despair. So if you or I ever need to make a choice between being one-eyed and being in despair, this passage advises us to choose the former. How are you been tempted to allow your trust in the Eternal Mystery of it All to be sidetracked? How do you feel challenged by the strong images of this passage?

~ Gene W. Marshall, *The Creator of Christianity: A commentary on the Gospel of Mark* | Realistic Living | Bonham, TX | 2018