

## The Gospel of Mark: Introduction I

### I. Study Introduction: What to Expect

#### 1. Study Format

- a. Pray
- b. Teaching portion, passage from Mark read and interpreted (@40 mins.)
- c. Discussion questions (@15 mins.)
- d. Pray for Needs (@5 mins.)

#### 2. Maximizing Study Potential

- a. Prayerfully read the entire Gospel through
- b. Prayerfully read ahead before the study
- c. Use commentaries, harmonies, Bible dictionaries, maps, and other tools in home study.

#### 3. Study Perspective

- a. The Adult Bible Study is an extension of the teaching ministry of CPC

<sup>11</sup>And he gave the apostles, the prophets [cf. 2:20], the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." (Eph. 4:11-16, ESV)

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|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| 1. Equipping for ministry     | 4. Mature           | 7. Loving |
| 2. Building up the body       | 5. Christlikeness   |           |
| 3. Unity of faith & knowledge | 6. Orthodox (truth) |           |

#### b. Reformed Theology and the Scriptural System of Doctrine

Q.3. *What is the word of God?*

A. The holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience." (Westminster Larger Catechism)

#### c. A Proper View of the Doctrine of Inspiration and Interpretation

1. Statement from the **Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy**, Article VIII:

"We affirm that God in His Work of Inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities." <sup>(1)</sup>

2. Statements to the same effect by orthodox, time-tested Reformed theologians.

**James Henley Thornwell** – "God employed the minds of the Apostles, with all their faculties and powers, distinctively as *minds*, and not as machines, to communicate His own will in His own words to mankind. Through their thoughts, memories, reasonings, studies and inquiries He infused His truth into their hearts, put His words into their lips and impressed His own declarations on the written page." <sup>(2)</sup>

**Louis Berkhof** - "The doctrine of verbal inspiration does not assume that God dictated the words of the Bible, but that He guided the writers of the Biblical books in the choice of their words and expressions so as to keep them from errors, without in any way disregarding their vocabulary or suppressing their individuality of style and expression." <sup>(3)</sup>

3. Applying the truths expressed above to Biblical interpretation.

In the Bible, the individual literary styles and personal idiosyncrasies of the authors were used by the Holy Spirit in preaching and writing as the word of God was proclaimed and recorded. Awareness of this fact is often important in the responsible interpretation of the Scriptures. For example:

Mark 14:47	Luke 22:50
<sup>47</sup> But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [ <i>ōtarion</i> ].	<sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear [ <i>ous</i> ].

In the comparison above, we see that the evangelists use different Greek words for “ear”. Luke uses the more proper word “*ous*” for the outer ear, in fitting with his refined Greek style. However, Mark uses “*ōtarion*”, a diminutive <sup>(4)</sup>; it is a form of *ous* “suggesting smallness” <sup>(5)</sup>. So, did this servant have small ears? NT scholar Vincent Taylor tells us why his ears were probably normal:

“Special interest belongs to Mark’s use of diminutives” [There follows an impressive list of Greek words used by Mark, demonstrating that frequent use of diminutives is one of his stylistic traits]. Taylor continues: “We may agree that Mark’s use of [*ōtarion*] is not intended to suggest that the high priest’s servant’s ear was a particularly small one, and that Mark uses it because he is fond of that kind of word. The usage is colloquial and the words are not necessarily diminutive in sense.” <sup>(6)</sup>

So, on the basis of an examination of Mark’s stylistic traits, a determination can be made that may affect the interpretation of the passage. This attention to the humanness of Scripture does not in any way detract from the truth that it is the very word of God.

#### d. Appreciation of Biblical Scholarship

Biblical scholarship that is rooted in Christian faith is the ally, not the enemy, of spiritual growth and devotion to God. The Scriptures present us with many issues involving language, culture, history, ethics, internal consistency, etc. that often do not have easy answers. But these issues must be addressed if we are to fully comprehend the message of God’s revelation and proclaim it to a broken world. Quotations from leading scholars will often be used in such discussions because of the considerable weight their vast knowledge and experience carries, especially in technical and highly specialized matters.

#### e. The Gospel of Mark in Canonical Form.

##### 1. Why did God give four Gospels?

“What our Lord Jesus said, did, and suffered is found in four documents rather than one. This fact has called forth much criticism and doubt about the Gospels’ inspiration ... There is, however, a clear intention behind the Gospels’ four-fold form. *The intention involves the legal principle instituted by God: ‘...on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed’* (Deut. 19:15b NASB). God, who knows that we depend on the testimony of those who themselves saw and heard Jesus, made sure that the joyous message necessary for our salvation was transmitted to us not singly but multiply. *The independent witnesses confirm one another in complementary fashion.*” <sup>(7)</sup>

##### 2. Why study individual Gospels rather than combining them in a harmony?

“The gospels are Christology in narrative form, or less technically, the story of Jesus. This is why the methods of literary criticism are so vital for gospel studies. We need to learn how they were written, what they contain and how their narratives function. Such methods will help us listen attentively to the four stories, and to consider each portrait carefully in its own right” <sup>(8)</sup>

[Compare Matt. 2:1-12 and Luke 2:4-20 (on shepherds, cf. 1 Sam. 17:15; Ez. 34:22-24); Mark 15:22-39 and John 19:17-30]

Matthew has particular literary and theological purposes in his story of the wise men, such as kingship, worship, and powerful Gentiles coming to Jesus; similarly, Luke’s humble scene with the shepherds at the back of the inn sets his theme of Jesus bearing the burdens of the lowly. If we bring the two groups together into a stable (not mentioned in any gospel!), the themes will clash and neither will be properly appreciated. Similarly, Mark depicts the desolation of Jesus on the cross with his single cry, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mk. 15:34); John, however, stresses his cry of triumph, ‘It is accomplished’ (John 19:30). Both represent the culmination of their respective gospel’s portraits and theologies. We cannot enter into the horror of the first, nor feel the power of the second, if they are narrated together...” <sup>(9)</sup>

#### Notes

1. An online PDF of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is available at [http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_1.pdf](http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf). More on the history of the statement can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago\\_Statement\\_on\\_Biblical\\_Inerrancy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Statement_on_Biblical_Inerrancy).
2. Quoted in **Smith, Morton H.** *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology*, pp. 131-132.
3. **Berkhof, Louis.** *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, p. 45.
4. **Kittel, Gerhard**, and Friedrich, Gerhard, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume V, pp. 558-559.
5. **DeMoss, Matthew S.** *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek*, p. 47.
6. **Taylor, Vincent.** *The Gospel According to St. Mark, Second Edition*, pp. 44-45.
7. **Linnemann, Eta.** *Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*, p. 195.
8. **Burridge, Richard A.** *Four Gospels, One Jesus*, p. 8.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 165.