

January Bible Reading

Gospel of Mark – New Testament

Overview

Mark is the earliest written of the four Gospels of Jesus (estimated between 65-70 AD). It is formatted as a kind of ancient biography. It, along with another unknown source, strongly influenced the writing of both Matthew and Luke. The author wrote it originally in Greek.

Suggestions for Reading Mark

Consider the shorter timeline for Christ's life in Mark. Notice the consequential event that isn't mentioned (hint – we just celebrated it last month). Pay attention to how direct the actions and dialogue are in this Gospel. Compared to Matthew and Luke, this version of these stories contains fewer elaboration. Pay attention to how the authorities respond to Jesus throughout the book. How does Jesus respond to the authorities? Mark keeps a pretty clear picture of why Jesus was controversial and had to be killed, and his conflicts with the authorities are a central part of the narrative.

Different Narrative Types in the Gospels

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus' life is shared through a few different styles of writing. These can change from chapter to chapter, but some chapters also have multiple narratives in them. As you read Mark, look for the following types as you read:

Pronouncement Stories

These are various short stories in which Jesus is confronted with a very specific question, situation or test, that leads to a very clear response or action on his part. An example for Pronouncements is in Mark 2:13-17, where Jesus is tested by the Pharisees, who challenge him on one question, to which he responds.

What they teach us- These stories help us build a picture of God's kingdom, a better understanding of Christ's morals and why he was sent to Earth. These are the most

direct instructions we read from Jesus Christ in the Bible, and the Gospels are filled with these short stories.

Parables

Parables are also scattered throughout the Gospels. They are short, figurative illustrations that help Christ's followers understand things beyond our literal picture of the world. Pay attention to Christ's lesson in Mark 4:10-20 about why he preaches in parables.

What they teach us - Many issues in the world are vast, complex and cannot be solved or understood by simple answers or explanations. This is especially true of our human understanding of God, the Holy Spirit and the life of Jesus Christ. For this reason, Jesus used parables, not to give us an exact answer to these complex issues, but to help us find better way to understand what we cannot see or grasp with our eyes and hands.

Wonder Stories

Often called Christ's "miracles". The authors describe amazing acts by Jesus that reveal God's power in unusual and fantastic ways. These include his healings, exorcisms, giving of unexpected provisions, rescuing people in harms way, or epiphany stories (where angels appear or something divine happens directly from God in Heaven).

What they teach us - The wonder stories are often the hardest to believe in our physical world today. Some people read them as metaphors for how Christ heals, others see them as literal healings and a sign that God does perform miracles. I encourage you to consider both possibilities. God does heal, just not always the way we expect or want. Learning about Christ's wonders help us point to our real experiences of Christ in the world, even if they don't happen just as they are written about by the Gospel writers.

The Larger Narratives

These stories are the bigger stories of Jesus' life. The birth story, the Easter story, his Sermon on the Mount, and so on. These are woven throughout each Gospel and provide a bigger picture of Christ's life and ministry. They often include the other types of narratives listed above. In the Easter story of Mark (chapters 11-16) for instance, we see Jesus perform healings and wonders in Jerusalem. He offers

pronouncements in arguments with Jewish leaders. He also teaches a few parables during this time in Jerusalem right before his death on the cross.

What they teach us – These stories help us see Christ’s life and actions in the very real places with the very real people whom Jesus interacted with during his life. As you read the different gospels, pay attention to which larger narratives are in some books and not others. For instance, there is no Christmas story in Mark and John, and two different Christmas stories in Matthew and Luke. Why? What is different (or the same) about the version of Christ’s life that each author is trying to tell? The more you study the different narratives, the more you see a fuller picture of who Jesus was and why he is our Lord and Savior.

Weekly Reading Plan

Week 1 – *Read Mark 1 through Chapter 6:29*

This early section of Christ’s ministry begins and ends with John the Baptist, who prophesied about Jesus Christ. As you take notes, outline the key events that happen in this section. For instance, in chapter 1, Jesus is baptized, he calls the disciples into ministry, he exorcises a demon, pronounces Good news to the people, and heals multiple people. Consider why these events are important as you read each one. Then, as you read his pronouncements and parables, write down one key sentence that tells the lesson of each one. What is this statement or lesson trying to teach? Is it for individual followers, or the world at large? Is it something I can do something about, or is it up to God to do? How does this action, statement or wonder inform my faith?

Week 2 – *Read Mark 6:30 through Chapter 10*

This middle section of Mark is filled with pronouncements, parables and wonders. Continue to look for the key lesson that Jesus is challenging us to learn. But in this section, also look for the overall tension in the story. Jesus predicts his own death three times here, and there is a constant conflict between Christ’s actions and both the Jewish and Roman authorities. Where do you see this conflict build? What are we to learn from the ways Jesus challenged the ruling authorities in his time? How is this part of the Gospel message “Good News” for Christians?

Week 3 – *Read Mark 11 through Chapter 16*

The Easter narrative in Mark features a shorter “Last Supper” and shorter Crucifixion story than other Gospels, but it has a longer, more detailed trial before the leaders who put him to death. Take notes of what he tells the disciples at this Last Supper story, the most important details of his hearing and trial, and what happens on the cross and with his resurrection. If you have a study Bible, make sure to read about the controversial endings of Mark, both the shorter and longer versions.

Final Questions to consider – What were the main reasons for Christ’s life and ministry in Mark? What are the key things you learned about Jesus and God through this Gospel? What surprised you because it wasn’t in this Gospel narrative? What key issues or stories do you want to know more about after reading this book?