

A Guide for Reading Mark

The following questions are meant to guide your reflections as you read Mark's gospel. Please read through the entire section first. This is meant to give you an overview and a sense of the flow of the narrative. Then go back and read again with these questions as a guide. This is intended as a "close" reading of the text. This Sunday we will finish an overview of Mark 1- 8:30 and focus on Mark 8:31-10:52. Next Sunday we will focus on Mark 11:1 – 16:8 (20).

Reading Mark 1:1-8:30

1. The first half of Mark's account of Jesus' life concludes with Peter's bold confession in 8:27-37, a confession based on what he has seen and heard up to this point as Jesus has demonstrated his authority and power again and again in chapters 1-8. In what specific ways has Jesus done this? For example, in 1: 21-28 he demonstrates his power over the demonic and in 2:1-12 he has demonstrated his power over disease and his authority to forgive sins. Remember: while each story is unique, these stories have 3 basic elements:
 - 1) Problem
 - 2) Jesus addresses the problem
 - 3) Response of the onlookers
2. 2:1-3:6 - Jesus engages in a series of controversy stories with certain of the religious leaders. While each story is unique, they share a similar structure:
 - 1) Presenting problem
 - 2) Jesus and/or his disciples act
 - 3) A charge is leveled against him/them
 - 4) Jesus responds
 - 5) Reaction of onlookers

See if you can identify these basic elements in the 5 stories. Is there a common theme which is reflected in each story?

3. 4:1- 39 - Mark has gathered a collection of Jesus' parables in chapter 4. What was the main subject of these parables? How important parables in Jesus' teaching ministry?
4. How would you characterize the disciple's response to Jesus in these first 8 chapters? What about the response of the crowds?

READING MARK 8:30 – 16:8

1. Mark 8:30 – 10:52 - Starting in 8:22 and going through 10:52, Mark creates a giant inclusion (sandwich) in which he uses repetition and juxtaposition (stories placed back-to-back for dramatic contrast) to highlight both the identity of Jesus and the identity of the followers of Jesus. As you read these chapters, see if these become apparent to you. If so, what is Mark trying to teach us by using them? You might want to use the chart found in Study Guide 2 as a framework.

2. How much of Mark's gospel is given to the last week of Jesus' life? What does this tell us about its importance?
3. 11:1-11 - Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is usually referred to as a "triumphal" entry. How "triumphal" is it?
4. 11:12- 21 - How does Mark use *inclusio* (a Markan sandwich) to interpret what we usually call the "cleansing" of the Temple?
5. 12:1-37 - Just as Jesus' Galilean ministry began with 5 controversy stories, so his Jerusalem ministry began with 5 controversy stories. Who are the questioners and what is the subject matter of each one? What impression are you left with at the end of these stories?
6. 13:1-37 – Often called "the little Apocalypse" because Jesus is teaching about future events, Read Jesus' words in 13: 1-4 carefully. To which event(s) is he referring? Is there a dominant theme which runs throughout the chapter?
7. 14:1-11 – An *inclusio*? If so, what does it suggest?
8. 14:22-25 – What is the message of the last supper?
9. 14:26-50 – Who promised undying faithfulness to Jesus? Who kept that promise?
10. 14:53-72 – Who is on trial here? What are Peter's (and, thus, the disciple's) last words?
11. 15:1-16 – Where is the irony in these stories?
12. 15:25-32 - According to Mark, what are the last temptations of Jesus?
13. 15: 33-38 – What are Jesus' last words? Where else in Scripture are these words found? What might be the significance of this?
14. 15:39 - Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ ended the first half of the gospel. Whose confession ends the last half of the narrative? Why is this significant?
15. The earliest Greek manuscripts of Mark end with 16:8. If this is, in fact, the ending, how does Mark's ending differ from the other gospels?