

The Gospel of Mark

*“Behold my
servant, whom I
uphold; mine elect,
in whom my soul
delighteth; I have
put my spirit upon
him: he shall bring
forth judgment to
the Gentiles.”
—Isaiah 42:1*

EACH OF THE FOUR GOS-

pel writers described Jesus from quite different perspectives. Matthew wrote for Jewish readers, presenting Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah and king. Luke presented Jesus as a perfect man, one who loved even the despised classes of humanity. John described Jesus as the

Son of God, the Heavenly Father’s personal representative on earth.

The Prophet Isaiah in our opening text provides an appropriate setting for Mark’s presentation of Jesus—“Behold my servant.” This is quite a different viewpoint than that taken by the other three writers. Mark’s Gospel is often considered the best for young people because it is the shortest of the four, and because it is a book of action. Many more miracles are here described than in the other Gospels. Mark recorded few of Jesus’ discourses, and only four of

his parables. Rather, he laid emphasis on the fact that Jesus was an active servant of God. In the Old Testament prophecies there are various scriptures which use the word “Branch” to describe Jesus in different ways. Zechariah provides the one that characterizes Mark’s emphasis on Jesus as a servant. The prophet records, “Behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.”—Zech. 3:8

How many views of a building would we want to see before describing it? Certainly more than one. We would prefer to see all its sides. The four Gospels are like four views of Jesus’ life. They have similarities, but they also have differences. Their composite accounts result in a word-picture of Jesus that is lifelike and multi-dimensional.

WHO WAS MARK?

Mark was not one of the twelve Apostles. From the eight scriptural references to Mark, or Marcus, we learn several things about him, which we will consider as we continue. We believe that both names, Mark and Marcus, refer to the same person—that being the one who wrote the Gospel of Mark. Both names come from a single Greek word in the New Testament, which is translated five times as “Mark” and three times as “Marcus.”

In addition to the Roman name, Mark, he also was called John, which is a Jewish name. (Acts 12:25) This was not unusual at that time, since Israel was under the control of the Romans. We notice the same thing in the Apostle Paul’s case. Paul is a Roman name, while Saul was his Jewish name.—Acts 13:9

After Peter was thrown into prison in Jerusalem by Herod, he was miraculously released by an angel.

He went immediately to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where a prayer meeting was taking place. (Acts 12:12) This was probably Mark's first encounter with any of the Apostles, and he may have learned much from Peter. Later, when writing his first epistle, Peter showed his great love for Mark, calling him his "son." (I Pet. 5:13) Peter did not imply that he was Mark's father by blood, but that he may have been instrumental in bringing him to the Lord through his personal ministry.

Some Bible commentators claim that Mark received the information described in his Gospel from Peter. He would have had a great influence on Mark's mind, because he could speak from first-hand knowledge of Jesus. Mark, no doubt, also had contact with many others who attended meetings in his mother's home, and who had been with Jesus and learned directly from him. They could also have given firsthand accounts of Jesus' life, ministry, and death, and all the many events concerning which Mark later wrote in his Gospel.

In addition to his relationship with Peter, Mark, along with Barnabas, accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey. However, before the trip was over, he left them and returned to Jerusalem. (Acts 13:13) Mark's abrupt departure before the end of their journey caused a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas about taking him with them a second time. Paul was upset because Mark had not continued with them, no doubt resulting in a more difficult journey. Because they could not agree over this issue, Paul and Barnabas parted company. Barnabas took Mark and went to minister in Cyprus,

while Paul journeyed to Asia Minor, taking Silas.—Acts 15:36-41

Barnabas was related to Mark, who was either his cousin or nephew. Colossians 4:10 says Mark was “sister’s son to Barnabas,” which would signify nephew. However, numerous other translations say he was Barnabas’ cousin. Because they were kinsmen, Barnabas may have taken a more charitable view of Mark’s actions, thus creating the contention with Paul. Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul later changed his mind about Mark, stating that he was a great help to him.—II Tim. 4:11.

MARK’S GOSPEL

It seems that Mark wrote primarily for Gentile readership. Several characteristics of his Gospel lend support to this thought. Mark included no genealogies in his account. These would have been of no particular interest to Gentiles. In addition, Old Testament references which Mark cited are less than half those recorded by Matthew, and are generally limited to those that Jesus himself quoted, or that others quoted when speaking to him. Mark may have also assumed that most of his readers spoke Greek, and did not know Aramaic, the language spoken at that time by the Jews. On several occasions he defined the Aramaic words which Jesus used. Two examples are: “He ... said unto her, *Talitha cumi*: which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise,” and “If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is Corban*, that is to say, a gift.” (Mark 5:41; 7:11) The words “*Talitha cumi*” and “*Corban*” in these passages are transliterations of the Aramaic spoken by Jesus, which Mark thought

it necessary to define in Greek for the benefit of his readers.

As aforementioned, Mark shows Jesus as an active, humble servant. Jesus was, in fact, the perfect servant, and is the model all his footstep followers must copy. There are no preliminaries in Mark's Gospel. Jesus, as God's servant, went about his ministry quickly and effectively. Some of the words which Mark uses frequently denote this idea of swift action. In one such passage, Mark says concerning Jesus, "Straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened. ... And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness."—Mark 1:10,12

Here Mark used Greek words translated "straightway" and "immediately." He repeated these words over forty additional times in his Gospel, using them more than the three other Gospel writers combined. Because Mark described a man of action, his account is the most complete concerning the miracles of Jesus. Of all the miracles performed by Jesus described in the four Gospels, two-thirds of them can be found recorded in the Book of Mark. Six of them are found only in his Gospel.

There is one important word which the other Gospel writers use over 240 times, but which appears in Mark's Gospel account only twenty times. It is the Greek word *kurios*, most often translated "Lord." This is one of the titles given to Jesus, so we might inquire as to why Mark chose to mostly avoid this designation. Here again, it is possibly because Mark wanted to emphasize Jesus' special role as God's servant during his earthly ministry, rather than his authority and power, which is accentuated by the word "Lord."

UNIQUE PASSAGES

One of Jesus' miracles which is unique to Mark's Gospel concerns the healing of a man who not only was deaf, but also had a serious speech impediment. Mark records that he was brought to Jesus, who "took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up into heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened." (Mark 7:32-35) In addition to this being a miracle that is only found in Mark's Gospel, it is another instance where he records an Aramaic word which Jesus spoke, "Ephphatha," and then explains its meaning for the reader.

Of the four parables included in Mark, one is found only in his Gospel account. "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."—Mark 4:26-29

In the parable of the sower recorded in Matthew 13:3-9, the Gospel "seed" is received into different kinds of soil. This represents the heart condition into which the message enters, and which determines the end result of the original sowing of the seed. However, in Mark's unique account, the power of the seed itself is emphasized. In this parable, Jesus showed that the Gospel message contains the capacity to provide nourishment by which growth and fruitage can occur, and that eventually results

in an abundant harvest. The lessons of both parables—the importance of the heart condition, and the power of the Gospel message—are vitally significant.

The last twelve verses of the Book of Mark are also quite unique. (Mark 16:9-20) This is because, as many Bible scholars have concluded, they are likely spurious. Indeed, none of these verses is found in several of the oldest New Testament manuscripts. It is thought that perhaps the original ending of Mark's Gospel was either lost or incomplete, and that later copyists took it upon themselves to add the verses which we now have in the *King James Version*. Although numerous Bible translations include these verses, they are often in brackets, indicating that they were added later, and not part of the original text.

SON OF MAN

There are a number of answers provided in the Book of Mark to the question, "Whose son was Jesus?" In Mark 6:3, when Jesus preached to his neighbors in the synagogue, they were astonished and said, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" In Mark 10:47, a blind beggar, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." In the very first verse of his Gospel, Mark said, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Indeed, the man Jesus was all these—the son of Mary by birth, the son of David by lineage, and the son of God by conception.

The designation Mark gave most often, however, was "Son of Man." His first use of this title is provided in Jesus' own words concerning himself, "That

ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.” (Mark 2:10) Whereas the phrase, “Son of God,” appears only three times in Mark, “Son of Man” occurs fifteen times. Matthew and Luke likewise use both of these expressions in about the same proportion, and John uses each about the same number of times.

IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS TITLES

In total, the title “Son of God” occurs twenty-eight times in the four Gospels. By contrast, “Son of man” is used eighty-five times, more than three times as often. Sometimes Jesus almost insisted on the use of this title. When asked by the Jews’ High Priest if he were the “Son of God,” both Matthew and Mark record Jesus’ response in which he referred to himself as “the Son of man.” (Matt. 26:63,64; Mark 14:61,62) Why did Jesus emphasize the use of this title, and how should we understand the import of his role as being both the Son of man, as well as the Son of God?

To understand the importance of these designations, let us first look at the title, “Son of David.” Matthew’s Gospel begins, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” (Matt. 1:1) Matthew used the title, Son of David, nine times, laying emphasis upon it by his use of it in the words cited above. Matthew did this because he wanted his readers, many of whom were Jews, to see Jesus as the heir of David, and as the fulfillment of the prophecy God gave to David through Nathan. This prophecy reads, in part, “When thy [David’s] days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee,

which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. ... And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”—II Sam. 7:12,16

Matthew’s Gospel showed Jesus as the rightful descendent of David’s royal house. Therefore, by saying, Son of David, Matthew was essentially pointing out that Jesus was the “seed” referred to in Nathan’s prophecy—hence, the inheritor of what was David’s. David had a dominion, over which he was king. At the time of Jesus’ First Advent, the Jews were living under Roman occupation and certainly knew that David’s kingdom, Israel, had been lost. However, they looked for his heir who would reestablish that dominion.

MAN’S DOMINION

When God created the first man, Adam, he gave him dominion over the earth, as indicated by the following passages. “God said, ... have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Gen. 1:28) “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”—Ps. 8:4-6

Because of disobedience, Adam and his progeny lost their right to earth’s dominion. Who could rightfully claim it? Who would be Adam’s rightful inheritor? The “Son of man,” who was also a son of

Adam through his mother Mary, could rightfully claim this title. In corroboration of this, the Apostle Paul later quotes the above verses from Psalm 8, but adds that “now we see not yet all things” under man’s dominion. “But we see Jesus,” Paul continues, “who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”—Heb. 2:8,9

Jesus, as the Son of God, was the “heir of all things.” (Heb. 1:2) As the Son of man, he was the heir to the dominion of earth originally entrusted to the first man, but forfeited by him. Jesus was the great kinsman of mankind who possessed the ransoming power to redeem them from sin and death. His miracles manifested his divine origins. Yet Jesus stressed his kinship with humanity. By his life of faithfulness, he fulfilled the prophetic words of Daniel: “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, ... And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom.”—Dan. 7:13,14

By his faithfulness, even unto death, as the Son of man, Jesus has obtained the right to earth’s dominion. By means of his coming kingdom of righteousness, and as the kingly Son of David, he will restore all the willing and obedient, not just of Israel, but of all mankind, to human perfection. Then he will return to man the dominion over earth which was lost so long ago because of sin. Recalling again Paul’s words, “we see not yet all things” under man’s dominion, but it is God’s intention, and that of his Son, to give back to man dominion over the earth.—Matt. 25:34; Heb. 2:8; Rev. 21:3-7

JESUS MADE FLESH

The Apostle John stressed the importance of acknowledging that, while on earth, Jesus was truly human. He said, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” (I John 4:2,3) Jesus came “in the flesh” to provide a ransom, which denotes a corresponding price, for Father Adam. A key element of that correspondence was that Jesus must be a human being, just as Adam was. Paul refers to Jesus in this way, calling him “the last Adam.” (I Cor. 15:45) Thus, Jesus’ words, recorded by both Matthew and Mark, were fulfilled: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”—Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45

In John’s Gospel we read, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14) The “Word” [Greek: *Logos*] refers to Jesus in his prehuman existence as a spirit being. When he came to earth, he did not retain his spirit nature and merely materialize in a human body, as angels had done before him. He was actually “made flesh.” This was accomplished by his having a human mother, Mary, and by God miraculously planting a life-giving human “seed” in her womb through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 1:20-23) Thus, we see that Jesus was born as a perfect human being because God was his Father. By maintaining that perfection, it was possible for Jesus to inherit Adam’s dominion, without inheriting the condemnation that passed upon Adam’s posterity.

Despite such clear statements by the Gospel writers, many Christians continue to believe that, while

on earth, Jesus was really divine—part God and part man. As we have seen, the Scriptures state otherwise. Jesus was not divine at his First Advent, but was “made flesh,” truly the “Son of man.” Since his resurrection, he is the divine, glorified Lord. Yet, he still retains his designation as Son of man, and the rightful dominion to which he is entitled. We note Stephen’s words concerning the resurrected Lord: “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”—Acts 7:56

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The Gospel of Mark is one of four views of Jesus and his ministry. In Mark’s presentation we see Jesus as the perfect servant of God. We should especially consider this aspect of his life as a model for our own. Let us, as he did, do all our tasks quickly, without hesitation, and with a great desire to serve others.

The title, Son of man, refers to Jesus as the progeny of Adam, one who is worthy to inherit the dominion lost by the first man. In like manner he is the Son of David, and inherits the throne and dominion of his father David. This will be for the purpose of blessing all mankind through his righteous reign, and restoring man’s dominion over the earth.

To us, Jesus’ footstep followers, he is the Son of God. If faithful in following his footsteps, we will be with him in heaven as members of his body and “joint-heirs” in all things that have become his. (Rom. 8:16,17) May the example given to us in Mark’s Gospel energize us to greater faithfulness and zeal in the service of our Heavenly Father. ■