

Mark is such an exciting, fast paced little book that some New Testament scholars think of it as a novel.¹ It is clearly not simply a biography of the Lord Jesus.² Mark is traditionally called a Gospel. However Mark is careful to title his work 'The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God' (1:1). Consequently Mark is not an exhaustive treatment of the Good News that Jesus is the Son of God.

Mark is not exhaustive, but he is orderly. He hasn't simply thrown together a few thrilling stories about Jesus. Rikki Watts has surveyed 61 different analyses of Mark's Gospel.³ I want to propose another! I was greatly helped in seeing this by Peter Bolt's work on Mark.⁴ Whether he disagrees with this outline I have no idea, but I found his book very stimulating.

If Mark's book is the beginning of the Gospel, then this article is the beginning of an outline. I hope that it will stimulate better minds than mine to build upon my thoughts and fill in the many gaps and discover greater and richer depths in the Gospel. However, my wish is that those coming to preach on Mark can have a clear outline to work with as they teach it to their congregations.

Overall Structure (The 5 Inclusio)

Mark has 5 sections of differing length. These are clearly identified by the use of inclusio.

1. 1:1 - 6:29 The Way prepared for the Lord
The first section is bracketed by the only two sections about John the Baptist in the whole Gospel. Just in case we missed that inclusion it is placed next to Jesus calling or sending his disciples. Just in case we missed that, this paragraph comes next to Jesus either doing many mighty deeds, or not doing many mighty deeds. So the structure looks like this:

1. John the Baptist prepares the way for the Lord (1:1-15)

2 Jesus calls his disciples (1:16-20)

3 Jesus does many mighty deeds (1:21-2:12)

3a Jesus does no mighty deeds (6:1-6a)

2a Jesus sends out his disciples (6:6b-13)

1a John the Baptist is taken out of the way (6:14-29)

2. 6:30 - 8:21 Jesus is for the whole world

The second section is bracketed by the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. The first is very Jewish in its feel, the second is more global. Jesus moves from a ministry limited to the Jewish people into a ministry for the whole world.

1. Jesus feeds the 5000 (6:30-45)

2. Jesus feeds the 4000 (8:1-21)

3. 8:22 - 10:52 Jesus opens the eyes of the blind

This third section is bracketed by Jesus opening the eyes of a blind man. First the man needs a second touch because he can't see that clearly (a bit like the disciples at that time). The end story about Bartimaeus is exciting, not only because Bartimaeus can see clearly but because he follows Jesus along the way. This is very much the theme of this central section of Mark. This central section has the three Passion predictions (8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34) and the whole central section centres on the Transfiguration (9:2-14) which is the supreme revelation of the glory of Jesus in this Gospel.

1. Jesus heals the blind man (8:22-26)

2. Jesus heals the blind man (10:46-52)

4. 11:1 - 13:37 Jesus ends Temple-centred religion

The fourth section deals with the Temple in Jerusalem. This is the hub of the Jewish religion and is condemned by Jesus Christ. First he condemns it by his prophetic actions. At the end of this section he prophesies its destruction.

1. Jesus condemns the Temple (11:1-26)

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2. Jesus prophesies the destruction of the Temple (13:1-37)

5. 14:1 - 16:8 Jesus is the Anointed One

The fifth section deals with the rejection, execution and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is the hub of the Christian religion. First we have Jesus anointed for his burial, and this section and the whole Gospel ends with the women going to the grave to anoint Jesus' body and discovering that he was not there, he had risen, just as he said.

1. Jesus anointed for his burial (14:1-11)
2. Jesus not anointed at his burial site (16:1-8).

This seems to be a very clear and helpful outline which jumps from the page. I believe once you see it you can't forget it. It helps solve the problem of whether Mark's Gospel ends at 16:8. It also seems to disprove Tom Wright's conviction that both the start and end of Mark's Gospel are lost.⁵ Indeed this outline is so clear that it is obvious to me that Mark deliberately began and ended his Gospel just as we have it. This teaches us the beginning of the Gospel that Jesus Christ is the Lord presented by John the Baptist, who feeds all people, opens the eyes of the blind, replaces the temple worship and is the risen and anointed one.

1. 1:1-6:29 The Way prepared for the Lord
2. 6:30-8:21 Jesus is for the whole world
3. 8:22-10:52 Jesus opens the eyes of the blind
4. 11:1-13:37 Jesus ends Temple-centred religion
5. 14:1-16:8 Jesus is the Anointed One

Internal structure of the individual sections

Section 1. (1:1-6:29)

The Way prepared for the Lord

After the long inclusio (1:1-2:12) we have four sub-sections. Each seems to have a similar make-up.

First (2:13-3:6) **The end of the Mosaic Law**

This section begins "Jesus went out beside the lake." Notice the structure: one story, a second story and then a pair of two stories.

1. Calling of Levi(te) (2:13-17)
2. Question about fasting (2:18-22)
3. and 4. Two healings on the Sabbath (2:23-3:6)

Second (3:7-3:35) **The 'followers' of Jesus Christ**

This section begins "Jesus withdrew...to the lake" Notice the structure again: one story, a second story and then a sandwich of two stories.

1. Crowds follow Jesus to the lake (3:7-12)
2. Twelve apostles come to Jesus on the mountain (3:13-19)
3. and 4. Hostile response from family and Scribes in the house (3:20-35)

Third (4:1-34) **Jesus teaching on spiritual life**

This section begins "They went across the lake" Notice the structure: one story, a second story and then a pair of two stories. (Same as first sub-section).

1. Parable of the Sower (4:1-20)
2. The Lamp and Measure (4:21-25)
3. and 4. Two parables about seeds (4:26-34)

Fourth (4:35-5:43) **Jesus demonstrates his power**

This section begins "...Let us go over to the other side"

Notice the structure again: one story, a second story and then a sandwich of two stories. (Same as second sub-section).

1. Power over the storm (4:35-41)
2. Power over evil spirits (5:1-20)
3. and 4. Power over sickness and death (5:21-43)

Section 2. (6:30 - 8:21)

Jesus is for the whole world

This shorter section has a very similar structure to the previous sub-sections.

The inclusio of the Two Feedings is very instructive.

The Feeding of the 5000 is very Jewish, both in the baskets used and the symbolic numbers.

The Feeding of the 4000 is very global in the same respect.

We see Jesus moving from a ministry to the Jews into a ministry for the whole world.

This movement is fleshed out in the stories between these two miraculous feedings.

These stories also follow the structure of two stories and a pair of stories.

1. Jesus the I AM walks on the water (6:45-56)
2. Jesus has authority over the Law of Moses (7:1-23)
3. and 4. Jesus rescues Gentiles (7:24-37)

Section 3. (8:22-10:52)

Jesus opens the eyes of the blind

This is the central section of the whole Gospel, and its structure is very different.

It is well known to be the section about following Jesus 'in the way'.

It also has the three Passion Predictions. As we would expect, these control the three cycles in this section.

After the opening of the eyes of the blind man at Bethsaida we have the first cycle (8:27-9:1) which begins in the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

1. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah (8:27-30)
2. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection (8:31)
3. Peter responds wrongly and is rebuked (8:32-33)
4. Jesus challenges his disciples to respond correctly (8:34-9:1)

The second cycle begins by Jesus leading 3 disciples up a high mountain, but ends in the house in Capernaum.

1. Two stories that reveal Jesus' supernatural authority (9:2-29)
 - a. Jesus is God's Son, to be listened to (9:2-13)
 - b. Jesus descends to defeat the demon possessed boy and raise him up (9:14-29)

2. Jesus again predicts his death and resurrection (9:30-32)

3. The Twelve respond wrongly and are rebuked (9:33-41)

4. Jesus challenges his disciples to respond correctly (9:42-50)

The third cycle begins in the region of Judea and across the Jordan, but ends up on the way to Jerusalem.

1. Three stories about the ethics of Jesus' Kingdom (10:1-31)
 - a. Towards disposable wives (10:1-12)
 - b. Towards insignificant children (10:13-16)
 - c. Towards self-sufficiency (10:17-31)
2. Jesus again predicts his death and resurrection (10:32-34)
3. James and John respond wrongly and are rebuked (10:35-40)
4. Jesus challenges his disciples to respond correctly (10:41-45)

Section 4. (11:1-13:37)

Jesus ends Temple-centred religion

The Temple was the heart and foundation of the Jewish religion in Jesus' day. Just as Jesus rejected the Sabbath restrictions in Section 1, and the food laws in Section 2, now he rejects the Temple and the Jewish authorities. In the five controversies in this fourth section, Jesus is in conflict with: the Sanhedrin (i.e. the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders (11:27), some Pharisees and Herodians (12:13), the Sadducees (12:18), one of the teachers of the law (12:28) and fifthly and finally Jesus asks his hearers about the teaching of the teachers of the law (12:35).

The inclusio has two extra stories joined to them, highlighting the judgement on the Temple.

1. Jesus condemns the Temple (11:1-26)
 - a. By faith this (Temple) mountain will be cast

into the sea (11:22-26)

b. This poor widow puts more into the temple treasury... (12:41-44)

2. Jesus prophesies the destruction of the Temple (13:1-37)

Between the inclusion of Jesus cleansing the Temple (which Tom Wright clearly shows is a symbolic action depicting the condemnation of the Temple [JVG]) (11:1-26) and Jesus' eschatological discourse explaining the destruction of the Temple (13:1-37) we have five controversies between Jesus and the religious authorities.

1. Jesus' authority (11:27-12:12, with a quote from Psalm 118)

2. Give to Caesar...give to God (12: 3-17)

3. The resurrection, know the Scriptures and the power of God (12:18-27)

2. Love God...love your neighbour (12: 28-34)

1. Jesus' authority (12:35-40, with a quote from Psalm 110)

Section 5. (14:1-16:8)

Jesus is the Anointed One

This final section sees the Passion Predictions fulfilled as the Son of Man is rejected and gives his life as a ransom for many. The drama moves to its climax by Jesus being rejected by disciples, Jews and Romans. Jesus accomplishes the work of redemption totally alone. He had Peter, James and John with him as he wrestled in prayer in Gethsemane. However, his disciples are conspicuously absent in Chapter 15. Jesus is flogged (15:15), mocked (15:16-20), crucified (15:21-32), dead (15:33-41) and buried (15:42-47). Some women were watching from a distance (15:40) but no disciples were anywhere to be seen! Yet he not only had predicted this in Section 3, but he had been anointed beforehand to prepare for his burial (14:8). The Gospel reaches its goal when the women go to anoint his body in chapter 16 and find that he is not there.

He is going ahead of his disciples to Galilee and they will see him there. He doesn't need to be anointed! He is the Risen Messiah.

1. Jesus is betrayed by Judas (14:10-26)

a. Judas went to betray Jesus to the chief priests (14:10-11)

b. The Lord's Supper prepared (14:12-16)

a1. One of you will betray me..., this is the blood of the covenant... (14:17-26)

2. Jesus is denied by Peter (14:27-72)

a. Peter says he won't deny Jesus (14:27-31)

b. Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities (14:32-65)

a1. Peter denies Jesus, and the cock crows (14:66-72)

3. Jesus is handed over by Pilate (15:1-47)

a. Jesus handed over to be crucified (15:1-15)

b. Jesus execution by the Roman authorities (15:16-41)

a1. Jesus handed over to be buried (15:42-47)

Conclusion

So the Gospel of Mark does have a very clear structure. It is important we understand the structure so that we know what Mark is teaching us. I have found this insight into Mark thrilling and I hope others will take this further to fill in many gaps and help us to understand this 'beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God'

References

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