

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 9, Mark Background and Themes

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson presenting his New Testament History and Literature, lecture 9, Mark: Background and Themes.

All right, let's get started. What we'll do today is move on to Gospel number two, the Second Gospel, which we know is the Gospel of Mark.

So, we'll move through it quite a bit more quickly than we did through Matthew. As I said, as we move through the New Testament, a number of times we will slow down and come down for a closer look. At other times we'll have a perspective from above and move over and through documents rather quickly.

Mark is one of those documents that we'll move through rather quickly, but still, I want to focus on what is distinctive about Mark, how is the Gospel put together, what's it doing, and what it says about Jesus, how the Gospel of Mark presents Jesus, how does he want us to understand him.

One word of the announcement though, the first, you'll notice that next week is week five, and so there is an exam coming up on the background material and the Gospels. You can look for that either next Friday or it may not be until Monday.

We'll know for sure. I'll be able to give you a better idea by Monday of next week. So you can look for exam number one coming up a week from today or the following Monday, which I can't remember what specific day that is.

That means also that there is an extra credit review session slash discussion session. I said the one way you can earn extra or the only way to earn extra credit in this class is that there will be four review slash discussion sessions that will basically coincide with the four exams. There are opportunities for those of you, I just want to make this clear, for those of you with the ASC Academic Support Center, if you're in connection with them, there will be other study sessions for review sessions, but those do not count, those are separate from this class.

Those do not count for extra credit. The only sessions that count for extra credit will be the four sessions that I will designate, and I'll tell you more about that on Monday, but there will be one of those next week as well. An extra credit review, again, depending on what you want to do with it, can be used for review for the exam, that's usually what happens, or to discuss anything related to the classroom material or New Testament, but usually it ends up being a review session for the exam, and that's fine, but that will be the thing that is available for extra credit.

There are four of them. You'll get extra credit for how many ever you show up at, so if you only get one, you'll get extra credit for that. Again, I remind you, that extra credit does not show up in the exam.

It'll show up at the end of the semester in your final grade, so I'll be announcing more about that on Monday as well, but there will be an extra credit review session next week, and I'll give you more information about that. All right, let's open with prayer, and then we'll look at the Gospel of Mark. Father, thank you for the weekend, and I pray that we'll find time to rejuvenate and, at the same time, perhaps catch up on some reading and whatever else we have to do.

Lord, I pray now that you'll help us to focus our attention for this class period on the Book of Mark, and to be able to hear it as perhaps it would have been heard and read and understood in its first-century context, but to be able to bridge the gap to the 21st century and to hear it as your word to us today. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

All right, just a very brief review. We just got done looking at the Gospel of Matthew, and we looked a little bit at Matthew's distinct portrayal of Jesus. As I said, it perhaps may have been helpful in some ways if the church would have just had one grand Gospel of Jesus, about Jesus, and kind of combined all four Gospels to give us all the information in one place.

But interestingly, the church allowed four very separate and different Gospels to stand, because they all have something unique to say about who Jesus is. And when you look at Matthew's portrayal of Jesus, what would you say is unique about the way Matthew portrays Jesus? If you saw a question like this on an exam or something like that, what would you answer? What is unique about the way Matthew presents Jesus so far? What did Matthew seem to emphasize? How did he portray Jesus as what or who? As a teacher. Remember the five blocks of discourse? Matthew wants to portray Jesus as a teacher.

What else? Very good, that's a very important one. As the Messiah, Son of David. But Matthew went on to emphasize that Jesus is not only the Son of David or Messiah for Jews, but also for Gentiles as well.

That's a very key theme in Matthew. Along with Jesus as a teacher, Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah, in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. But he's Messiah and Son of David not just for Jews, but for Gentiles as well.

Anything else? How else did Matthew portray Jesus? As a new Moses. In the same way, Moses led and delivered his people out of Egypt and rescued them, in the same

way, Jesus comes as a new Moses, as one greater than Moses to rescue and deliver his people. And I think there's one other title we looked at or a distinctive feature.

He's a teacher, he's a Messiah, Son of David for Jews and Gentiles, he's a new Moses, one who comes and delivers people. He's the one who fulfills the Old Testament. Jesus is the climax of the entirety of the New Testament.

All the New Testament stories, themes, and motifs all find their climax and fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. And then I think we said Jesus is also portrayed as the Son of God, the one who stands in a unique relationship with the Father. So those are the themes that Matthew particularly emphasizes as he paints a portrait of Jesus Christ.

Now, what we'll do today is, in addition to looking at the main message and purpose of Mark and the unique features of Mark, we want to be alert to how Mark portrays Jesus. What does Mark choose to emphasize about Jesus that may not necessarily be present in Matthew, although there are some overlaps as well in the way that Mark and Matthew treat Jesus? But starting with Mark, the first question asked about Gospel number two, or the second gospel, is who is the author? Well, you might say, well, that's rather easy. It's Mark because the Bible says it, the gospel according to Mark.

But remember we said that the attribution of authorship to the four gospels really came with the later church. When Mark originally wrote his gospel, he did not start the gospel according to Mark. Then at the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he didn't write the gospel according to Mark.

That was put there by the later church. However, it's meant to reflect, I think, what is a reliable tradition and reliable understanding and indication of who the author of it was, of the gospel was. The primary source of our understanding, or one of the main sources of our understanding, is a statement by an individual named Papias.

Papias, an individual who very early on, not long after the formation of the New Testament, wrote that Mark was the interpreter of Peter, and so that Mark's gospel is meant at some level to reflect Peter's preaching and teaching. So, Mark was an associate of Peter. He's also mentioned in some of Paul's letters, apparently an associate of Paul as well.

So, Mark was an associate of Peter, and perhaps Peter's kind of his interpreter. He's kind of summarizing at some level and emphasizing what it was that Peter taught and preached. Now, why was the gospel of Mark written? Now I debated whether I should start with this.

It would probably be best to save it to the end after we've looked at the distinct features of Mark, but it might help us to see the distinct features of Mark if we had an understanding already of the purpose of Mark. Interestingly, too, there are a number of church fathers and early church leaders, and again, church fathers are those church leaders that lived from the second to approximately the fourth century A.D. So roughly, you know, up until two, three hundred years after the writing of the New Testament. But a number of church fathers seem to associate the book of Mark, the gospel of Mark, with Rome, with the city of Rome.

So that most likely, Mark is probably addressing a church or churches in the first century. Probably in most cities, there would have not been one church. There would have been smaller house churches, especially in a city the size of Rome.

Whether they got together on occasion or not is possible, I'm not sure. But most likely, Mark is probably addressing a group of Christians, a church, or house churches in the city of Rome who are struggling. If you remember, Nero, not too long after the gospel of Mark was written, or about the same time, this is when Nero wreaked havoc.

Nero is the emperor who wreaked havoc on Christians and treated them rather cruelly. So, Christians had a rather hard go of it in the city of Rome. And Mark is probably addressing Christians who are struggling with living out their faith in the hostile environment of Rome.

Whether he was addressing Christians who were actually going to be persecuted under Nero, or after or before, is uncertain. But perhaps Mark is addressing Christians or a church living in Rome who are struggling to live out their faith in the hostile environment in Rome. And now Mark is going to write basically to encourage them, to show them that they're struggling.

Basically, what he's going to do is say the fact that they're suffering and struggling is nothing less than at the heart of the gospel. The fact that they are suffering and struggling is following the exact same path that Jesus Christ went as well. So, Mark's gospel is very pastoral.

That is, again, Mark isn't just writing, here's a life of Christ, just in case you're interested. Mark is trying to portray Christ and Christ's life in a way that will address his readers who are struggling with their faith and with following Christ in this hostile environment in the city of Rome. And now Mark writes to encourage them by showing them, demonstrating that that is how Christ's life went.

It was one of suffering. And so, his readers should expect nothing less. In fact, the gospel of Mark, the way it's put together, now my computer just froze up.

The way that Mark is put together, you'll notice in your notes, is it can be divided into three parts. The first 13 verses of Mark are kind of the introduction. They introduce you to the main characters and kind of introduce you to what the book is about.

But the rest of the gospel, starting with verse 14 into chapter 8 and about verse 30, the entirety of that section of Mark is basically devoted to the ministry of Christ. It just gives you an account of the things that Christ did. And basically, the one word that kind of characterizes Christ's ministry in these chapters is that Christ is triumphant.

I was at a lecture the other day for a candidate for the biblical studies department, and he showed a number of slides of ancient paintings and portraits of the gospel of Mark. And the gospel of Mark was almost always associated with a lion, the animal. Often in the first early centuries of the church, the four gospels were often associated with different animals.

John was an eagle, and Mark was associated with a lion. That reflects the first eight chapters of Mark where Jesus is portrayed as triumphant. And there's a strong emphasis in this section on Christ's deity.

We'll see that in just a moment. So, Jesus performs miracles, heals people, Jesus forgives someone's sins, and someone says, no one but God can forgive sin. So, Jesus is portrayed as triumphant, which this lecture I was at suggests that that's why the lion is often associated with the gospel of Mark.

However, starting in chapter 8 verse 31, the gospel takes a drastic turn. In that starting with chapter 8 verse 31 to the end of the gospel, the emphasis becomes Jesus' suffering and his eventual death. Now what is unique and interesting about this outline? Just looking at it on your notes, the division of the gospel, what do you note that's kind of interesting about it? What kind of stands out to you in the way Mark is structured? More or less, both of the middle two sections, the second section, and the third section, are about equal in length.

That's right. Except for the introduction, the two main sections, Jesus' ministry where he's triumphant, and the rest of it are of equal length. That is another way of saying that about half of Mark's gospel is devoted to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

So much so that one scholar said that Mark was basically a passion narrative with an extended introduction, trying to highlight the fact that Mark emphasizes the suffering and death of Jesus Christ in disproportion to the amount the other gospels do. So almost half of Mark's gospel is devoted to the death and the suffering of Jesus Christ. Starting with chapter 8, verse 31, Jesus begins his march toward Jerusalem, and it's all couched in his suffering and predictions of his suffering, the fact that he would die, and then narrating finally Jesus' death in the latter chapters of Mark.

So nearly half of the gospel is devoted to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Why do you think that might be? Given what we said about the purpose, why do you think Mark did that? Again, you can start to see that gospel writers are not just narrating history. Yes, I think they're historical, but they're putting together the information in a way that will communicate their theological perspective on Christ.

Given the purpose we talked about, why might Mark devote half of the gospel to the passion, suffering, and death of Christ? To demonstrate for Christians who are struggling and perhaps suffering at the hands of Rome to some degree for their faith, Mark would be demonstrating that that's part and parcel of what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Jesus himself suffered. In fact, the two halves of the gospel are both necessary.

Mark narrates them both so that we might even say Jesus' triumph came through suffering. And so, Mark's readers would triumph as well, but they must go the path of suffering. So again, even the way Mark has structured his gospel by devoting half of it to the passion and suffering and death of Christ, he's trying to say something to his readers about how they should look at their suffering as well.

Another key theme, one of the key themes in the gospel of Mark is that Mark also, although it's not the only theme or the main theme, but a key one is Mark presents Jesus as bringing about and inaugurating a new exodus. And where he gets that is this. Back in the Old Testament prophets, especially the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah, all throughout his book, presents God's salvation of Israel.

And remember, Israel is in exile for their sins and for disobedience. The prophet Isaiah tells the Israelites that God will intervene to deliver them, save them, bring them back, and restore them as his people. Interestingly, more than any other prophet, the prophet Isaiah portrays that deliverance and rescue as a new exodus, like the old one back in the book of Exodus.

In the same way that God rescued his people under Moses, in the same way, he rescued them from bondage in Egypt. Remember, the Israelites were under foreign bondage and oppression in Egypt. In the same way, God delivered them and brought them to the land, God would do that in another, a new and greater exodus again in the future.

Now, what Mark wants you to understand is Jesus is inaugurating that new exodus from the book of Isaiah. That new exodus and salvation and deliverance that Isaiah promised God would bring, now Jesus is finally bringing that about. And so, Mark, we saw that was present in Matthew as well.

Matthew did present Jesus as a new Moses and delivering his people from exile, but Mark does that as well. Mark emphasizes also that Jesus is fulfilling this prophetic expectation from Isaiah of a new exodus, where God would rescue his people and bring about a new creation, bringing about their salvation and redemption. And now Jesus Christ was fulfilling and accomplishing that.

One of the key verses in Mark that you need to be aware of, whether it is the main verse of Mark, that's why I call it a key verse and not necessarily the key verse, but it seems to capture how Mark wants to present Jesus, and in fact may kind of encapsulate and summarize Mark's primary view of Jesus, is found in chapter 10 in the suffering section, chapter 10 and verse 45. So, Mark 10 and verse 45, Mark summarizes and says, For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. In fact, this verse may reflect, again now you have to go back to the Old Testament again, again in the prophet Isaiah also talks about not only a new exodus, but this suffering servant motif from Exodus 53.

You remember that text, all we like sheep have gone astray. That's all in the context of this suffering servant who would suffer on behalf of Israel. Now Jesus is being portrayed as that.

So, this verse 10:45, The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life up in death as a ransom for the many, may summarize at least one of Mark's key emphases about Jesus Christ, that he is the suffering servant. He is the one who comes to suffer for his people, and that fits very well as we saw Mark's purpose, to address Christians suffering and struggling to live out their faith in the hostile environment of Rome. And now Jesus is portrayed as that suffering servant from Isaiah who comes to give his life as a ransom for many.

So, remember that Mark 10:45 is a key verse for understanding Mark's portrayal of Jesus Christ. So that's a little bit about kind of how the gospel is put together. But I want to then focus more specifically like we did on Matthew.

What are some of the key themes of Mark? Again, what does he emphasize besides the New Exodus from Isaiah we saw, Jesus' suffering, or an emphasis on his death, his suffering? What else does Mark emphasize that you don't find emphasized in the other gospels or not to the same extent? Again, we saw that Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses. He presents him as a teacher.

He presents him as the son of David, the Messiah for Jews and Gentiles, as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and Old Covenant scriptures. How does Mark present Jesus? The first thing is, along with this theme of suffering, it would be incorrect to only focus on his suffering alone because Mark does devote half of his gospel to Jesus' ministry where Jesus is portrayed as triumphant. And victorious.

But the first thing to say about Mark is that, more than any other gospel, Mark seems to maintain and emphasize a balance between Jesus' humanity and his deity. Mark wants to portray Jesus as both divine, yet at the same time, a human being. And again, that fits perfectly Mark's goal, to show Jesus is both triumphant as God, but he's also a human being who suffers for his people.

And that fits his message, to demonstrate to the readers that the route to triumph, the readers of triumph, but they must go the path of suffering first of all. Again, addressing Christians suffering and struggling with their faith in the hostile environment of Rome. So, Mark portrays Jesus as a balance between his humanity and his deity.

Again, there's plenty of emphasis on Jesus' deity. For example, in chapter... One of the clearest indications of this is very early on in the gospel. In chapter 2 and verse 5. Chapter 2 and verse 5. This is one of the miracles that Jesus performs early on in the gospel.

This is where Jesus is teaching in a house, and these individuals have someone who is a paralytic, who's crippled, and they carry him in on a mat. It's so crowded that they can't get him in the house, so they go up on the roof and lower him down. And Jesus addresses him and says... This is chapter 2 and verse 5. Jesus addresses this individual and says, When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, the paralyzed man's son, Your sins are forgiven.

And then it goes on and says, Some of the scribes... Remember the scribes we talked about? The experts were those who were responsible for recording and studying the law, the Old Testament. The scribes are sitting there questioning in their hearts, Why does this man speak in this way? Referring to Jesus. It is blasphemy.

Who can forgive sins but God alone? Well, they got that part right. So in forgiving sins, Jesus basically is taking upon himself a prerogative that belongs only to God. And the scribes correctly understood that in forgiving sins, he claims to be God.

So, Mark has this balance then between Jesus' deity as the one who, like God, can only forgive sins. But then he'll turn around and say, But the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. So that balance between Jesus' humanity and his deity.

Again, this fits perfectly what Mark is trying to do in addressing readers who are suffering and struggling to live out their faith in the city of Rome. There may be a couple of other things I need to emphasize. One of those is Mark may also... Mark may also, though I don't think it's the main thing he's doing, but he may also be reacting to this idea in the first-century world of what was often known as a divine man.

That is a conception of Jesus as some kind of supernatural miracle worker. And so perhaps Mark also wants to tone that down by showing that, No, Jesus is not just a supernatural miracle worker, some divine man. He's also a suffering human being as well.

Furthermore, another thing I need to emphasize is, Mark often portrays Jesus as claiming to be the Son of Man. Now, the question is, what did he mean by that? In fact, throughout all the Gospels, in a sense, we'll broaden out and talk a little bit about all the Gospels, but Mark, in numerous places, refers to Jesus as the Son of Man or has Jesus calling himself the Son of Man. What does he mean by that? And usually what we've done, and there's a long tradition of associating the Son of Man and Son of God, so that Son of God refers to Jesus' deity, the fact that he's God, he stands in a unique relationship with God, and Son of Man is a reference to Jesus' humanity.

How many of you have heard it that way? I've always been taught that way. There are even a couple of hymns we sing that indicate that. Again, the Son of Man means Jesus was a human being.

Son of God refers to the fact that he was God. That's only partially true. Son of Man, most likely, that title Son of Man comes, for the most part, comes out of the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, and particularly Daniel chapter 7. And listen to what Daniel says.

He says, first of all, Daniel has a vision, and he sees a vision of four beasts, these four hideous-looking beasts. The fifth thing he sees, after he sees these four beasts, he sees something else, and here's what it is. He says, And I watched, and thrones were set in place, and an ancient one, or the Ancient of Days, clearly God, took his throne.

His clothing was as white as snow, his hair and his head like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed from his presence, etc., etc.

The court sat in judgment, and books were opened. And I watched then, because of the noise of the arrogant words of the horn, which was from one of those beasts, and I watched, and the beast was put to death. And he says, And then I watched, and I saw one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

And he came to the ancient one and was presented before him. To him, to the son of man, was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages would serve him. His dominion is an everlasting one, that shall never pass away.

And his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. Now I ask you, does that sound like a human being to you? This son of man who comes in the clouds of heaven, and an eternal everlasting kingdom. I mean, he can just go up to the throne of the Ancient of Days, and receive an eternal everlasting kingdom.

Does that sound like a mere human being to you? I would suggest that the Son of Man is just as much a title of Jesus' deity, as it was his humanity. Sometimes Jesus could turn it around and say, Yes, this Son of Man from Daniel 7, this exalted heavenly being from Daniel 7, sometimes he's portrayed as suffering in the Gospel of Mark. So, it was a word, a phrase, son of man was a title that fit Jesus' purposes very well.

He could use it to refer to the fact that he was, in fact, this son of man, this divine heavenly being who would receive an eternal kingdom from Daniel 7. But then he could turn around and say, but the son of man is going to suffer and die. So it's a phrase he could use often for his own purposes. But the point is, don't think that the Son of God means deity, the Son of Man means humanity.

It's not quite that easy. Son of man from Daniel 7 is just as much a title of Jesus' deity. Son of man from Daniel 7 refers to that heavenly being who will receive an eternal kingdom.

That's certainly more than just a title of his humanity. All right. Another interesting feature of Mark, the first one then is a balance between Jesus' humanity and deity, which, as we've seen, fits Mark's purpose very well, to encourage suffering, struggling Christians.

Another interesting emphasis in Mark, that, again, it's not exclusive to Mark, but it's certainly emphasized, is what has often been called the messianic secret, or the secret messiah. And what I mean by that is this. When you read through Mark numerous times, you find somebody, Jesus will do something, and someone will say, you are the Christ.

Or Jesus even will ask someone, whom do you say that I am? They'll say, you are the Christ. And he'll say, now don't go and tell anyone. Well, why does Jesus do that? I mean, that's not a very good evangelistic strategy, that they get it right.

Yes, you're the messiah. And then he says, well, don't go tell anyone. I thought this news was to be spread to all the nations.

And now Jesus goes around and tells people not to tell anyone who he is. Scholars call that the messianic secret or I say the secret messiah. Jesus is basically trying to keep it hush-hush, and he doesn't want it spread.

Why do you think this is the case? Why would Jesus tell people not to tell everyone who he was? Okay, so part of it would be because the full understanding of who Jesus was would not come, his full messiahship would not come until after his resurrection, which would demonstrate the true nature of his messiahship. So, part of it was he hadn't entered fully into his reign as messiah until his death and resurrection. There's probably one other reason as well.

I think that's one of them. So probably to avoid misunderstanding, you're right. To go back to some of the history, and political history we looked at, most Jews' conception of the messiah would be one who was going to come and wipe out the Romans.

Here's our king who's going to rule with an iron scepter. I mean, didn't Isaiah chapter 9 say that? Unto us a son is born, a child is given, he will sit on his throne and rule forever. And so here is that messiah who will rule over Israel's enemies, meaning he's going to wipe out the Romans.

But Jesus does not offer that kind of a kingdom. Jesus does not yet come as that kind of a king. He comes first to suffer and die for the sins of the people.

And so, one of the reasons also would have been not only because, I think you're exactly right, Jesus' messiahship would not be fully understood until after his resurrection, but to avoid misunderstanding. Again, if you go spreading the word around that here's a messiah, people might come for the wrong reason, thinking here's our deliverer who will unseat the Romans from their rule. So, for that reason, Jesus frequently would tell people to remain silent, probably so as not to be misunderstood as to what kind of a messiah he was.

Because again, he comes first and foremost to suffer and die for the sins of the people. That would be the already. Remember our already but not yet? The not yet is when he comes with the iron scepter to rule and set up his kingdom and defeat his enemies.

But the already, the first time Jesus comes to offer himself as the Messiah, he comes to suffer and die for the people. Another important theme, much like Matthew in Mark, is an emphasis on disciples and discipleship. So, there's an emphasis on this group of followers that Jesus puts together, who he will train and prepare to carry on his ministry.

However, there's an interesting twist in Mark. When you compare Mark and Matthew, Mark seems to portray the disciples in a little bit more negative light. That is, the disciples in Mark are, over and over again, portrayed as just not getting it.

They're obtuse, they misunderstand, they fail, they don't have faith, they just don't quite get it. The disciples are portrayed that way over and over again in Mark's

gospel, as over against Matthew, where in Matthew they still have problems getting it sometimes. But when you compare the two, it's not that Matthew portrays them in a better light, it's just that Mark seems to portray them in a lesser light than, for example, Matthew does.

Again, he has them misunderstanding, he has them just not getting it, and not having much faith. Again, one could ask the question, why would Mark do that? Why would Mark portray the disciples and emphasize their failure to understand, and their failure to get it, their weakness, and their lack of faith? Why would Mark do that? Again, let's go back and think about the purpose, why Mark's writing, the background, and who Mark's writing to. In light of that, why might Mark portray the disciples in a slightly more negative light? Again, they just don't get it, they don't understand, they fail to understand, they don't believe.

Yeah? Sure. Sure, yeah. If the disciples who are closest to Jesus stumbled and struggled, then certainly that is meant to encourage Mark's readers who likewise are struggling and may think that they're failures in their faith, and to show them, no, that even Jesus' disciples struggled as well.

So, Mark's portrayal, even his portrayal of the disciples, is probably meant to reflect the struggles that Mark's readers are going through as well. Another important theme in Mark is the emphasis on good news or gospel. The very first verse opens with this, the beginning of the gospel, or the good news, depending on what translation you have.

Mark is the only of the four gospels to actually call his book good news, or a gospel. Now that may not necessarily be a reference to the kind of literature, but more the content. But Mark is the first gospel or the first of the four, only the four gospels to call his book good news, or a gospel.

Furthermore, Mark includes the word gospel, a form of the word gospel, or good news, seven times. Whereas I think Matthew might have, I think he has it four times, and I can't remember, Luke might have it once or twice, but clearly, especially given the fact that Mark is so much shorter than the other gospels, Mark includes that word seven times, which suggests there's something important about it. Now, what is important about that word? Again, we've kind of taken that and made a rather technical term about it.

The gospel means the message about Jesus Christ dying on the cross for my sins, and I need to tell everyone so they'll believe in Jesus' name, and have eternal life, and forgiveness of sins. And that's certainly true. But what does Mark mean by that term? Where did he get it? Again, there are two important backgrounds.

And you have to understand, this goes back again to our survey of the political and historical climate leading up to the New Testament. Even writers that would have been thoroughly Jewish, such as Matthew, even writers that were thoroughly Jewish in their thinking and orientation, would not have escaped the influence of Roman rule, and Greek language as well, and Greek culture. Even they would have been affected by it to some extent.

And sometimes, I'm convinced, an author in the New Testament will often use terminology that actually has a point of contact with both the Greco-Roman world and readers, and would also appeal to the Jewish world and Jewish readers. And the word gospel is a good example of that. So, first of all, the word gospel, where Mark got it, the word gospel, or good news, is not just a Christian word that Mark made up, or Paul, or someone else.

That word already occurs in the Old Testament, and it goes back to the prophet, which one did you guess? Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah, or you say Isaiah. I always have to explain myself.

I went to school and did my postgraduate work in Scotland, and that's how they pronounced Isaiah. And it just stuck with me, so I still say it that way. But I'm sure that's the correct way if that's how they say it in Scotland.

It has to be right. But Isaiah. Remember, we've already said he talks about a new Exodus, where God, like he did in the original Exodus, taking the people out of Egypt.

He also portrays Jesus as inaugurating a new Exodus. He talks about a new creation, God restoring his people, entering into a new covenant. That is the good news, the gospel, that the book of Isaiah talks about.

So what Mark is doing, by using the word gospel or good news, again, this isn't just a new term. He's again showing that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise of restoration and salvation. So, this is a term that goes back to the Old Testament.

Again, by using good news, he's doing something similar to what Matthew did, showing that Jesus is the fulfillment, this good news of deliverance in God's kingdom, ruling over all things, a new creation, a new covenant with his people. That good news from Isaiah is now being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. So, I'm convinced the first readers of Mark, when they heard, here's the beginning of the gospel, they would have gone back to Isaiah and said, okay, now we understand what that is.

Now the promise of deliverance, the restoration of God's people, God's rule over his people, and the entire earth is now being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. However, again, we said that oftentimes the New Testament authors would use vocabulary that had resonances in more than one world, not only the Jewish world

and literature but also the Greco-Roman world. So, for example, the word good news or gospel was also a word used in association with the emperor.

For example, the birth of the emperor would be proclaimed as good news or the gospel, using that same exact word. Or other events surrounding what the emperor did or something in connection with the emperor would be good news or the gospel. So, it's also possible that, again, readers, if these are Christians living in Rome when they hear the good news, this may be somewhat of a subversive claim, that the gospel now, the truly good news, is not associated with Caesar, but now someone who now asserts that, and that is the person of Jesus Christ.

The true good news centers around not what Caesar does, but centers around what Jesus Christ is now going to do for and has done for his people. So that word for Mark is an important one, but it also, not only in kind of summarizing what his book is about, but also from the standpoint that it probably resonates with two different backgrounds, both a Jewish from Isaiah the prophet, but also a Greco-Roman world, the good news associated with the emperor or something to do with the emperor. The last thing to look at with Mark is, before we do, I want to talk a little bit about how Mark ends, but any questions so far as far as what Mark emphasizes? You kind of start to get a picture of what Mark's doing, how he's put his gospel together, what he's trying to emphasize, and especially the themes of triumph and suffering, and how he's accomplished that through what he emphasizes.

All right, I want to talk briefly about how Mark ends, and if you open your Bible, no matter what translation, virtually no matter what translation you have, and I would like to be able to skip this, but because no matter what translation you have, it's so overt, and you're confronted with it as soon as you get to the end of Mark, that you wonder what is going on. Now, if you have a Bible and you open it to Mark chapter 16, the very end, you'll note that the last few verses, almost the last chapter, are put in brackets in your Bible. And then almost all of them have a footnote under those brackets.

Like, mine begins, this is verse 9 of Mark chapter 16, mine begins, Now, after he arose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out demons. She went out and told those who had been with him while they were mourning and weeping, but when they heard that he was alive and that he had been seen by her, they would not believe it. After this, he appeared in another form to two of them, etc., etc.

So, you have this reference to Jesus appearing to different people, starting with Mary Magdalene. Then it ends in verses 19 and 20, So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken into heaven, and he sat down at the right hand of God. And then they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by signs that accompanied it.

And that's the end of the gospel. However, in that section that I just read to you in, I think, just about every English translation, is put in brackets, and then it has a little footnote that says, Some of the best and oldest manuscripts do not have this ending. Now, what are we to make of that? Where did Mark end? Did Mark end at verse... In other words, if we take out this section in brackets, here's how Mark ends.

So, they, referring to the women, the women that go to the tomb after Jesus dies, he's placed in the tomb, then all it says is the women go to the tomb on the next day, Sunday, and it's empty. And then it says, so they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. End of story.

Now, what kind of way is that to end the gospel? So, the question is, this ending that you have in brackets, again, all your Bibles have that, there must be some kind of brackets or parentheses, and then a footnote somewhere that says, This ending is not found in some of the oldest and best manuscripts. What are we to do? Where did Mark end? Did he end at verse 8? But that's a rather strange way to end the gospel. With women going into the tombs, and then they, because of fear, don't go tell anybody? I mean, is that a way to end the gospel? Or did Mark write these verses 9 through 20? Is that the correct ending? I mean, we have to have an ending to this.

Certainly, you can't end with these women running out of fear and not telling anyone. You have to have closure. You have to have Jesus appearing to people, and you have to have the message spread that Jesus is risen, and then Jesus ascending to heaven, and you have to have the gospel going out and spreading like you do in Matthew, the Great Commission.

But think about it this way. Is it possible that this ending was written by a well-meaning scribe who thought that very thing? How can Mark end with verse 8? That's not a proper way to conclude a gospel. It ends kind of in defeat with these women because of fear.

They don't tell anyone. They run for fear, and they don't spread the good news of Jesus' resurrection. What way is that to end the gospel? So, most likely, a well-meaning scribe, as Mark was being copied and transmitted for later generations, a well-meaning scribe probably looked at Mark and said, that's not a proper way to end this gospel.

I'm going to give it a proper conclusion. And so, he wrote 9 through 20 that includes Mary telling people, Jesus appearing to people, and the message spreading, and Jesus ascending to heaven. Well, that raises an interesting issue.

Then how do we account for the way Mark ended his gospel? Why would he end that way? Some have suggested, well, actually Mark did write a conclusion, but it got lost somewhere, whether the dog ate it, or somebody ripped it off, or whatever happened. Something happened to Mark's ending. It actually had an ending, but it got lost after verse 8. That's possible, but there's no evidence.

There's simply no evidence that it happened. The only evidence we have is the gospel apparently ends in verse 8. So, we can ask, why might Mark end his gospel like that? Why doesn't he end it like Matthew did? With Jesus appearing to the disciples and saying, go and make disciples of all nations, and I will be with you to the end of the age. Or Luke's reference to Jesus ascending to heaven and appearing to different people after His resurrection.

Mark has none of that. Instead, Mark ends with failure. Mark ends with the failure of these women to go out because they're afraid, they don't go out and do anything.

Why would Mark end that? I can't imagine that Mark thought that Jesus didn't appear to anyone. I can't imagine that Mark didn't know what happened, especially if he's associated with Peter, and was Peter's interpreter. I can't believe that Mark did not know that Jesus appeared to people, and the message got out, and Jesus ascended, and He told His disciples to spread the gospels to all nations.

Certainly, Mark knew something about that. But why do you think he ends the gospel the way he does? Why does he end so abruptly with the failure of these women to go, it's not the fact they're women, why does he end with the failure of his followers to go out, because of fear, they're afraid to go out and say anything. So, it ends, they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

End of story. Maybe he was tired of writing, and he just stopped there. Forgot to conclude it.

Why do you think he would make that point, about portraying this picture of Christians who are afraid? Again, think in terms of the overall purpose of Mark. Why would he emphasize that? Christians that are afraid do not spread the gospel because they are fearful to do so. Emphasize their failure to do that.

Again, think in terms of what's going on in Mark. What did we say was the overall purpose? Who is Mark writing to? And how might this fit that? Yeah, exactly. Isn't that how most likely the readers of Mark, isn't that the situation they're in? If they are struggling and feel that they are failures, then this is simply a way of, again, addressing his readership.

In the same way, even in the events surrounding Jesus' resurrection, his followers still failed and didn't get it. So, it's another way of encouraging the struggling community that Mark is addressing. However, I would suggest it's not only failure.

If you back up to verses 6 and 7, as the women approach the tomb, they find this figure, this brilliant, shining, angelic-type figure in the tomb, and the figure says to them, Do not be alarmed. It's interesting what they didn't do. Do not be alarmed.

You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who is crucified. He has been raised. He is not here.

Look, there's the place where he laid. But go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.

So, interestingly, there's still an emphasis on Jesus' presence and his promise. As if Mark wants to balance the failure of his disciples with the promise and presence of Jesus. That despite the failure of the disciples, God's promise will still prevail.

His promises will prevail and Jesus still promises his presence. It's as if he's still waiting for them in Galilee in the Gospel. So, it does end in failure, perhaps because, again, this reflects the situation of Mark's readers.

They may feel like failures, that they're struggling with their faith, and struggling to live their lives in Rome. And now Jesus, Mark, portrays the disciples even at his resurrection in the same way, but at the same time balances that with the promise of his presence, and the fact that God's promises would indeed be fulfilled. Good.

Any questions about Mark? Yeah. Yeah, you're right. There's another.

You're right. Some of your Bibles may have a shorter ending too, that consists of only a verse or two. Same thing.

Some manuscripts of Mark don't have the long one. They have a shorter one. It too is probably an attempt to give Mark a proper conclusion.

But, I'm suggesting that Mark may have deliberately ended at verse 8, because of the reason he's writing.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson presenting his New Testament History and Literature, lecture 9, Mark: Background and Themes.