

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 9, Mark: Background and Themes Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 9, Mark: Background and Themes, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture focuses on the Gospel of Mark, exploring its background, distinctive features, and portrayal of Jesus. The lecture will explore the author, purpose, and intended audience, suggesting Mark wrote to encourage struggling Christians in Rome, emphasizing the importance of suffering and following Jesus' path. **The structure of Mark's Gospel is examined, highlighting the balance between Jesus' triumphant ministry and his suffering death.** Key themes, such as Jesus as the suffering servant, the messianic secret, the portrayal of disciples, and the emphasis on the good news (gospel) are explored, using textual examples. **Mathewson also discusses the controversial ending of Mark, considering whether the original conclusion was lost or if the abrupt ending serves a specific purpose related to Mark's message.** The lecture is part of a larger New Testament Literature course, with an upcoming exam and extra credit review session.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



**Mathewson_NTLit_S
ession09.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 9, Mark: Background and Themes

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Mathewson's lecture on the Gospel of Mark:

Briefing Document: Gospel of Mark - Background and Themes

Main Themes:

- **Distinctive Portrayal of Jesus:** Mark presents a unique perspective on Jesus compared to the other Gospels, especially Matthew. The lecture emphasizes understanding *how* Mark portrays Jesus, what aspects are emphasized, and how Mark wants readers to understand him.
- **Authorship and Context:**
 - Attribution to Mark came later, but reflects a reliable tradition. Papias identified Mark as the interpreter of Peter, suggesting the Gospel reflects Peter's preaching and teaching. Mark was also associated with Paul.
 - The Gospel was likely written to a struggling church or house churches in Rome during a period of persecution (possibly under Nero).
- **Purpose: Encouragement Through Suffering:**
 - Mark's primary purpose is pastoral: to encourage Christians in Rome struggling with their faith in a hostile environment. The core message is that suffering and struggle are central to following Jesus. As Mathewson states, *"The fact that they are 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."*
 - The Gospel aims to demonstrate that Jesus' life was one of suffering, and therefore, his followers should expect nothing less.
- **Structure of Mark's Gospel:**
 - **Introduction (verses 1-13):** Introduces the main characters and the overall theme.
 - **Jesus' Triumphant Ministry (verses 14 to chapter 8 verse 30):** Focuses on Jesus' miracles, healings, and authority. This section emphasizes Christ's deity. Associated with the symbol of a lion. *"Christ is triumphant...There's a strong emphasis in this section on Christ's deity."*

- **Jesus' Suffering and Death (chapter 8 verse 31 to the end):** Devoted to Jesus' passion, suffering, and death.
- **Key Themes of Mark's Gospel:**
 - **Suffering and Death:** Almost half the Gospel is dedicated to Jesus' suffering and death, demonstrating that suffering is part of following Christ. Mathewson notes, *"Mark was basically a passion narrative with an extended introduction."*
 - **New Exodus:** Mark presents Jesus as inaugurating the New Exodus promised by the prophet Isaiah, offering salvation and deliverance. Mathewson says, *"What Mark wants you to understand is Jesus is inaugurating that new exodus from the book of Isaiah."*
 - **Balance of Humanity and Deity:** Mark emphasizes a balance between Jesus' divine nature and his human experience. This is central to his purpose of encouraging suffering Christians. Mathewson states, *"more than any other gospel, Mark seems to maintain and emphasize a balance between Jesus' humanity and his deity."*
 - **The Son of Man:** Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, referencing the Old Testament book of Daniel in the Old Testament, and particularly Daniel chapter 7.
 - **Messianic Secret:** Jesus often tells people not to reveal his identity as the Messiah, possibly to avoid misunderstandings about the nature of his kingship and the timing of his full revelation, or because *"his full messiahship would not come until after his resurrection."*
 - **Discipleship (with a twist):** Mark portrays the disciples in a more negative light compared to Matthew. They are often shown as failing to understand, lacking faith, and being generally obtuse. This could be to encourage Mark's readers who are also struggling. Mathewson argues *"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..."*
 - **Good News/Gospel:** Mark uses the word "gospel" frequently (seven times), connecting it to the Old Testament (Isaiah's promise of restoration) and potentially subverting the Roman use of "gospel" associated with the emperor. The use of "gospel" suggests that *"Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise of restoration and salvation."*

- **Key Verse:** Mark 10:45: *"For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."* This verse encapsulates Mark's portrayal of Jesus as the suffering servant, who fits Mark's purpose to address Christians struggling with their faith.
- **The Ending of Mark's Gospel:**
 - The traditional longer ending (Mark 16:9-20) is likely a later addition by a scribe to provide a more satisfactory conclusion.
 - Mark's original ending (Mark 16:8) is abrupt, with the women fleeing the empty tomb in fear and saying nothing. This may reflect the fear and failure of Mark's original audience in Rome, but is balanced with the angelic figure's promise that Jesus will meet the disciples in Galilee (verse 7).

Key Ideas and Facts:

- Mark's Gospel is structured to emphasize the balance between Jesus' triumphant ministry and his suffering death.
- Mark's Gospel was most likely written to Roman Christians in the first century, possibly during a time of persecution.
- Mark's portrayal of the disciples is notably more critical than in other Gospels.
- The concept of the "messianic secret" is a significant theme in Mark.
- The ending of Mark is debated, with the longer ending likely being a later addition.

This briefing document provides a concise overview of the main themes and ideas presented in Dr. Mathewson's lecture on the Gospel of Mark. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the Gospel's historical context and the author's purpose in shaping the narrative in a particular way.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 9, Mark: Background and Themes

Mark: Background and Themes - A Study Guide

I. Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Papias, what was Mark's relationship to Peter, and how did this influence his Gospel?
2. What was the likely socio-political context of Mark's original audience in Rome, and how did this context shape the message of the Gospel?
3. Briefly describe the three-part structure of Mark's Gospel and the key theme associated with each part.
4. How does Mark portray Jesus as the inaugurator of a "New Exodus," and what Old Testament prophet is central to this theme?
5. Explain the significance of Mark 10:45, and how it summarizes Mark's portrayal of Jesus.
6. How does Mark maintain a balance between Jesus' humanity and deity? Give one specific example from the text.
7. What is the "Messianic Secret" in Mark, and what are two possible reasons why Jesus might have wanted to keep his identity hidden?
8. How does Mark portray the disciples differently from Matthew, and what might be the purpose of this portrayal?
9. Why is the word "gospel" so significant in Mark's Gospel, and what are its two key backgrounds?
10. Explain the textual problem with the ending of Mark. What is included in the "longer ending," and why do many scholars believe it was not part of the original Gospel?

II. Quiz Answer Key

1. Papias stated that Mark was Peter's interpreter. This suggests that Mark's Gospel is, in part, a reflection of Peter's preaching and teaching about Jesus.

2. Mark's original audience in Rome likely faced persecution and hardship under emperors like Nero. This context shaped the Gospel's message to encourage them by showing that suffering is central to following Jesus.
3. The Gospel is divided into an introduction (1-13), Jesus' triumphant ministry (1:14-8:30), and Jesus' suffering and death (8:31-end). The themes are introduction to the main characters and what the book is about, Jesus as triumphant, and Jesus' suffering.
4. Mark portrays Jesus as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of a New Exodus by bringing salvation and deliverance to God's people. This is seen as Jesus rescuing and redeeming his people, similar to how Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.
5. Mark 10:45 states that the Son of Man came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. It summarizes Mark's emphasis on Jesus as the suffering servant who willingly sacrifices himself for the sake of others.
6. Mark emphasizes Jesus' deity by showing his ability to forgive sins (2:5), which the scribes correctly recognize as a divine prerogative. Yet, he balances this with Jesus' humanity, such as in Mark 10:45, The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.
7. The "Messianic Secret" refers to Jesus' repeated commands for people not to reveal his identity. One reason was to avoid political misunderstandings of his Messiahship, and the other is because his Messianic ministry was not complete until after his resurrection.
8. Mark portrays the disciples as often misunderstanding, failing, and lacking faith more so than Matthew does. This may have been to encourage Mark's readers who are struggling with their own faith, showing them that even Jesus' closest followers experienced similar struggles.
9. The word "gospel" is significant because Mark is the only Gospel to use it to describe his book. Its two key backgrounds are Isaiah's prophecies of deliverance and restoration and its use in the Greco-Roman world to describe events connected to the emperor.
10. The ending of Mark (16:9-20) is not found in some of the oldest and best manuscripts. The "longer ending" includes accounts of Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene and other disciples, and his ascension into heaven, so scholars believe it was added later by a scribe to provide a more conventional conclusion.

III. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the socio-political context in which Mark's Gospel was likely written, and analyze how this context influenced the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus and its message to its audience.
2. Explore the theme of suffering in Mark's Gospel. How does Mark present Jesus as a suffering figure, and what does this say to Mark's original audience and to contemporary readers about the nature of discipleship?
3. Analyze Mark's portrayal of the disciples. How do they compare to the disciples in Matthew, and what theological or pastoral purpose might Mark have had in depicting them in this way?
4. Examine the significance of the "Messianic Secret" in Mark's Gospel. What are the different interpretations of this theme, and how does it contribute to Mark's overall message about Jesus?
5. Discuss the ending of Mark's Gospel. What are the various theories about the abrupt ending at 16:8, and how might this open ending contribute to the Gospel's overall message and impact on its readers?

IV. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Church Fathers:** Early Christian leaders and writers from the second to fourth centuries A.D. who are considered important authorities on Christian doctrine.
- **Deity:** The state or quality of being God.
- **Discipleship:** The state of being a follower of Jesus Christ, characterized by learning from him, imitating his life, and obeying his teachings.
- **Exile:** The state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons. The exile of Israel refers to their captivity in Babylon.
- **Gospel:** "Good news." In Mark, it refers to the message of salvation and deliverance fulfilled in Jesus Christ, rooted in Old Testament prophecy (especially Isaiah) and contrasted with the "good news" associated with the Roman emperor.
- **Humanity:** The quality of being human.
- **Messiah:** The promised deliverer of the Jewish people, prophesied in the Old Testament. Christians believe Jesus to be the Messiah.

- **Messianic Secret:** A recurring motif in Mark's Gospel where Jesus commands those who recognize him as the Messiah to remain silent about his identity.
- **New Exodus:** A theological concept, particularly prominent in Isaiah, referring to a future act of deliverance by God that would surpass even the Exodus from Egypt in its scope and significance.
- **Passion Narrative:** An account of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.
- **Papias:** An early Christian writer (c. 60-130 AD) who is a key source of information about the authorship and origins of the Gospels.
- **Rome:** The capital city of the Roman Empire, a dominant political and cultural force in the first century A.D., and the likely location of Mark's original audience.
- **Scribes:** Experts in the Jewish law who were responsible for interpreting and teaching it. They often opposed Jesus' teachings.
- **Son of David:** A title used to refer to Jesus, emphasizing his lineage as a descendant of King David and his fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.
- **Son of God:** A title used to refer to Jesus, emphasizing his unique relationship with God the Father and his divine nature.
- **Son of Man:** A title used by Jesus to refer to himself, drawing from the Old Testament book of Daniel and carrying connotations of both humanity and divine authority.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 9, Mark: Background and Themes, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About the Gospel of Mark

1. Who is the author of the Gospel of Mark, and what is the basis for this attribution?

The author is traditionally attributed to Mark, an associate of the Apostle Peter. This understanding is primarily based on the writings of Papias, an early church leader, who stated that Mark was Peter's interpreter and that the Gospel of Mark reflects Peter's preaching and teaching. Mark is also mentioned as an associate of Paul in some of Paul's letters.

2. What is the likely original audience and purpose of Mark's Gospel?

The Gospel of Mark was most likely written to address a church or house churches in Rome during a time of struggle for Christians living in a hostile environment, potentially during or after the reign of Nero when Christians faced severe persecution. Mark's purpose was to encourage these Christians by demonstrating that suffering is at the heart of following Jesus and that they should expect it as part of their faith.

3. How is the Gospel of Mark structured, and what is significant about its structure?

Mark's Gospel can be divided into three main parts:

- An introduction (Mark 1:1-13).
- The ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:14-8:30), where Jesus is portrayed as triumphant.
- Jesus' suffering and death (Mark 8:31-end), a section of approximately equal length to the previous one.

The fact that nearly half of the Gospel is devoted to Jesus' suffering and death highlights Mark's emphasis on suffering as a central aspect of Christian discipleship, aligning with the experiences of his intended audience.

4. What is Mark's portrayal of Jesus, and what themes does he emphasize?

Mark emphasizes a balance between Jesus' humanity and deity. He portrays Jesus as both divine, capable of forgiving sins, and human, a suffering servant who gives his life as a ransom. This dual portrayal is intended to encourage readers facing hardship to understand that triumph can come through suffering. Mark also presents Jesus as

inaugurating a new exodus, fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah and bringing about salvation and redemption.

5. What is the significance of Mark 10:45 ("For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.")?

Mark 10:45 is considered a key verse for understanding Mark's portrayal of Jesus. It encapsulates the idea that Jesus came as a suffering servant, giving his life as a ransom for many. This aligns with Mark's purpose of addressing Christians struggling with their faith in a hostile environment, portraying Jesus as the suffering servant from Isaiah.

6. What is the "Messianic Secret" in Mark's Gospel, and why does Jesus often tell people to keep his identity secret?

The "Messianic Secret" refers to Jesus' frequent commands for people not to reveal his identity as the Messiah. One reason for this is that a full understanding of Jesus' messiahship wouldn't be revealed until after his resurrection. Additionally, Jesus wanted to avoid misunderstanding, as many Jews expected the Messiah to be a conquering king who would overthrow Roman rule, a notion that contrasted with Jesus' mission to suffer and die for the sins of the people.

7. How does Mark portray the disciples in comparison to other Gospels, and what might be the reason for this portrayal?

Mark tends to portray the disciples in a more negative light than other Gospels. He often depicts them as misunderstanding Jesus, lacking faith, and failing to grasp his teachings. This portrayal likely serves to encourage Mark's readers who are struggling with their faith, by showing them that even Jesus' closest followers experienced doubt and failure.

8. How does Mark's Gospel end, and what are the implications of this ending?

Mark's Gospel ends abruptly at chapter 16 verse 8, with the women who visited Jesus' tomb fleeing in fear and saying nothing to anyone. While some manuscripts include a longer ending (verses 9-20), these are generally regarded as later additions by well-meaning scribes who sought to provide a more conventional conclusion. The abrupt ending could reflect the situation of Mark's readers, who were struggling with their faith and experiencing fear in a hostile environment. However, the angelic figure's message in verses 6 and 7 balances the ending by still emphasizing Jesus' promise and presence.