

INTRODUCTION TO 41ST BIBLEBOOK

THE GOSPEL OF MARK (A.D. 44-46)

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A. THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

The second Gospel is called 'Mark', the name of the fellow-worker of the apostles Peter and Paul. In order to verify the claim of Christian history that Mark was the writer of this Gospel, we have to shortly study the history of the apostles Peter and Paul.

1. The history of Mark when he was a young man.

In Mark 14:51-52 the evangelist (Gospel writer) Mark tells about an incident about a young man who was probably himself. Although the following cannot be proved, it is quite possible that it happened. It was the Thursday night before the crucifixion. Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover festival in the Upper Room. It is possible that this room was part of the house owned by Mark's mother, Mary, and thus the home where Mark lived. It is also possible that Mark himself was the man carrying a jar of water, leading the disciples to the place of the Upper Room¹. This means that it is possible that Mark had himself seen and heard some of the things he writes about in his Gospel. As it was late in the night, the young man, Mark, was probably asleep. When Jesus and his disciples left the Upper Room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane, the young man awoke, threw a linen garment around his body and rushed out to follow Jesus and his disciples. When the temple guards² arrested Jesus, all his disciples deserted him and fled. The temple guards grabbed the young man, but he escaped, leaving his cloak in their hands! Jesus was crucified and resurrected in April A.D. 30.

2. The history of Mark in association with the apostle Peter.

At Pentecost in May A.D. 30, there were Jews from Rome³. Some of them must have been among the three thousand converts after the preaching of the apostle Peter. The events described in Acts 1-12 occur during A.D. 30-44. It is quite possible that during these years, the apostle Peter made one or more visits to Rome in order to establish the Jewish Christians there. Peter was in Jerusalem in A.D. 36 to meet the newly converted Paul⁴. In about A.D. 40, before the reign of Claudius and Herod, who received the control of Judea from him, Peter visited Caesarea. From A.D. 41 onwards the attitude of the Jews in Jerusalem changed for the worse against the apostles.

In A.D. 44 Peter was again in Jerusalem when he was imprisoned by Herod. It was also during this period that we read again about Mark. Just before king Herod died in A.D. 44, Peter was arrested and imprisoned. In Acts 12 we read how the church gathered in the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where they prayed earnestly to God for him. We read how an angel rescued him from prison, how he went to the house where they prayed and then left for another place. Because many were gathered in their house, Mark was probably acquainted with the other apostles and several of the early other followers of Jesus.

According to the testimony of the early church fathers, Mark worked together with Peter in Rome. This probably happened in the period after A.D. 44 when the apostle Peter left Jerusalem for another place. The church father Eusebius wrote in A.D. 300, "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter." The church father Clement of Alexandria, wrote in A.D. 190, "The occasion for writing the Gospel of Mark was the following: Peter had publicly preached the word in Rome ... Mark had followed him for a long time and remembered what he had spoken. Many people, who were present, urged Mark to write down what Peter had said. He did this and distributed the Gospel among those who had asked him for it. When Peter learned about this, he neither strongly forbade it nor promoted it." And the church father Papias, who was a disciple of the apostle John, wrote in A.D. 115, "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately ... whatever he remembered of what was said and done by the Lord. ... Mark gave careful attention to leave out nothing of what he had heard and also to falsify nothing."

There is absolutely no justification to deny the unanimous testimony of the ancient historians that Mark wrote this Gospel and that it was mainly based on the preaching and teaching of the apostle Peter in Rome. Mark probably wrote his Gospel during A.D. 44-46 in Rome for the Romans.

¹ Mark 14:13-15

² John 18:3

³ Acts 2:10-11

⁴ Acts 9:26-28; Galatians 1:18

3. The history of Mark in association with the apostle Paul.

Colossians 4:10 says that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. In Acts 12:25 we read that during the time of the great famine in Judea in A.D. 46, Barnabas and Paul came down from Antioch in Syria to bring the relief fund to Jerusalem. When they returned to Antioch, they took Mark with them.

In Acts 13 we read that the church of Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul on a missionary journey in A.D. 47-48. This was the so-called First Missionary Journey of Paul. They took Mark along as their ‘helper’, that is, Mark probably served them as their business manager, arranging their journey, making provision for food and lodging, sending messages, but probably above all serving them as a teacher. If he had already written his Gospel, then he would especially have been a good teacher for the new Christians! However, for some unknown reason, Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. He could have disagreed with the change of leadership from his cousin Barnabas to Paul, but the real reason was more probably all the hardships they had to face on the journey, hardships which Paul summarises in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Later in A.D. 50 Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking Mark on the next missionary journey. Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul chose a new fellow-worker, Silas, and went with the blessing of the church on his Second Missionary Journey⁵.

4. The history of Mark in association with Peter and Paul in Rome.

Between the years A.D. 50-60 we know nothing about the whereabouts of Mark. However, during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome from A.D. 60-62, we read in Colossians 4:10-11 that Mark was again with Paul and that he was a great comfort for Paul. From all Paul’s Letters from his prison in Rome, we gather that Peter was not in Rome during Paul’s imprisonment. However, after Paul was released and travelled to the various churches he had planted everywhere, the apostle Peter was again in Rome and Mark was with him.

In 1 Peter 5:13, written in A.D. 63, Peter sends the greetings from the Christians in Rome and from Mark to the Christians in Asia Minor. The fact that Peter calls Mark ‘his son’ shows that Peter had been a spiritual father and supervisor of Mark for a long time. So it seems that between A.D. 61-64 Mark carried on his ministry in Rome.

After the apostle Peter was martyred in Rome, probably under Nero’s persecution in A.D. 64, Mark once more became Paul’s helper. It is possible that Mark in co-operation with Timothy made a tour of the churches in Asia Minor. Nevertheless, when Paul was imprisoned for a second time in Rome, probably in the winter of A.D. 64-65, he wrote in 2 Timothy 4:11, “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”

B. THE PLACE OF WRITING THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

The unanimous statements of the early church fathers state that Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome and for the Romans. It is a fact that he wrote his Gospel for a non-Jewish public, because he translates Aramaic words, like “Boanerges” (3:17), “talitha koum” (5:41), “corban” (7:11), “ephatha” (7:34) and “Abba” (14:36) into Greek. He also explains Jewish customs, like the ceremonial washing of hands (7:3-4), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (14:12) and Preparation Day (15:42).

Mark even explains some Greek terms in the Latin language of Rome. In Mark 12:42 he explains that the two “lepta” or copper coins amounted to one Roman “quadrans” or a fraction of a penny. In Mark 15:8 he explains that the “aule” or palace was the “praetorium” or governor’s official residence.

Mark in chapter 15:21 is the only Gospel which tells us that “Simon of Cyrene” is “the father of Alexander and Rufus”, two people who according to Romans 16:13 were evidently well-known in Rome.

The way in which Mark pictures Christ, would be of interest to the Romans, who in their lust for power and exercise of authority have conquered the world. Mark pictures Jesus as an active, energetic, swiftly moving and conquering King, the Victor over the destructive forces of nature, over disease, over demons, and even over death. Mark pictures a King who by far excels any earthly conqueror. His kingdom is far more extensive, his armour is far more effective, and his rule is far more enduring than anything originating here below. Moreover, his victories are far more honourable, because he causes the conquered to share in the glory of the conquest! The King whom Mark pictures, is the Saviour-King!

C. THE DATE OF WRITING THE GOSPEL OF MARK.⁶

The statement of a church father places the writing during A.D. 41-54. The church father Eusebius (A.D. 260-340) states that it was during the reign of Claudius during A.D. 41-54 that God in his beneficent care guided ... Peter to Rome. The hearers of Peter requested Peter’s follower, Mark, to write a record of the teaching, which Peter transmitted to them orally. Thus, they (Peter and Mark) became responsible for the production of the Gospel of Mark.

A papyrus fragment found near Qumran places the writing before A.D. 50. The small papyrus scrap found in a cave in the desert in Palestine contains a part of Mark 6:52,53. This fragment is dated A.D. 50.

⁵ Acts 15:36-41

⁶ It is important to remember that there are several different theories about the dating of the events in the New Testament. The dates used in our studies, although tentative, are based on the best scholarship in the world.

If this scrap belonged to a copy of the Gospel of Mark, then the Gospel was written more towards the beginning of the reign of Claudius. As we saw from the book of Acts, it is quite possible that the apostle Peter and Mark were in Rome during A.D. 44-46.

We can safely conclude that the Gospel of Mark was written during A.D. 40-65. There is much evidence that it was written about A.D. 44-46 in Rome for the Romans.

D. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MARK.

1. The Gospel of Mark is the shortest Gospel.

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest Gospel. While Luke contains 1147 verses, Matthew 1068 verses, Mark only has 661 verses. While Luke has 27 parables and Matthew has 19 parables, Mark only has 4 parables. Of the 6 great sermons in Matthew, Mark has only one, that is, the sermon about the Last Things⁷.

2. The Gospel of Mark is the Gospel of action.

The Gospel of Mark contains many miracles.

Each of Mark's first eleven chapters contains at least one miracle account. The healing of the deaf and mute man described in Mark 7:31-37 is only found in the Gospel of Mark. Mark describes how Jesus heals this man. He first put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. Finally, he looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said, "Ephatha", which means, "Be opened!" At once the man's ears were opened and he could hear, and his tongue was loosened and he could speak clearly. The people who saw this, were overwhelmed with amazement and exclaimed, "Jesus has done everything well!"

And the healing of the blind man at Bethesda described in Mark 8:22-26 is also only found in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus took this blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. After Jesus had spit on the man's eyes and had put his hands on him, he asked him if he could see anything. The man answered that the people looked like trees walking around. Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes and then his eyes were opened and he could see everything clearly.

In comparison with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the Gospel of Mark describes things in a very lively way. For example, when Jesus began to preach the gospel of the kingdom, in Matthew he only says "repent" (4:17), but in Mark he adds "and believe the gospel"! (1:15).

When Jesus called James and John to follow him, Matthew says "They left the boat and their father", but Mark says that they did not leave their father helplessly alone, but "left their father in the boat with the hired men" (1:20).

In healing Peter's mother-in-law, Matthew says that Jesus "touched" her hand, but Mark says "he took her hand and helped her up" (1:31).

With regard to the sick and demon-possessed, Matthew says that "many" came (8:16), but Mark says "the whole town gathered at the door" (1:33).

With regard to prayer, Luke says "at daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place" (4:42), but Mark says "very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (1:35).

While Luke says that the people were looking for Jesus (4:43), in Mark the disciples say to Jesus, "Everyone is looking for you!" (1:36).

3. The Gospel of Mark is the most orderly Gospel.

Luke compared to Mark.

Luke places the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth in the beginning of the Galilean ministry. But the description itself in Luke 4:23 presupposes that Jesus had already been doing considerable work in Galilee. This proves that Luke is not very interested in chronological order. Mark and Matthew do not relate this incident until they have almost reached the middle of their respective books.

Similarly, in the middle section of Luke's Gospel various time references are quite indefinite, like "one day" (11:1), "meanwhile" (12:1) and "on a Sabbath" (13:10). From this too it is clear that, although the Gospel of Luke is certainly "orderly" as he says in his introduction (1:3), the arrangement of the material is chronological only in a very general sense.

Finally when Luke describes the pointing out of the betrayer *after* the institution of the Lord's Supper⁸, while in Matthew, Mark and John it is *during* the meal, then it is clear that Luke does not arrange his material in precise "before and after" order. Luke arranges his material according to themes and his *thematically* arranged narrative is just as much inspired by the Holy Spirit as the far more *chronological* narrative of Mark.

Matthew compared to Mark.

⁷ Mark 13

⁸ Luke 22:14-23

Matthew does not arrange the miracles of Christ in chapter 8 and 9 in the order of their occurrence.

Mark shows that the cursing of the fig tree took place on Monday (11:12-14) and its lesson was told on Tuesday (11:20-25) of the Passion Week (the last week before the crucifixion). Thus Mark draws attention to the chronological order, but Matthew does not. Matthew wants to tell the entire event and its lesson all at once (21:18-22).

Mark is most chronological.

Most sections from Mark 10:13 to the end are paralleled both in Matthew and in Luke. But what is especially significant is the fact that in general when the order in Luke departs from Mark, Matthew has the same order as Mark, and when the order in Matthew departs from Mark, Luke has the same order as Mark.

While Matthew summarises all Christ's sermons in six large sections, Mark refers to each of them in the order in which they were delivered. This proves that Mark is the most chronologically ordered Gospel.

Even Mark does not intend to write a chronological history.

Mark does not intend to write a *biography* in chronological order. For example, Mark has no account about the birth of Jesus; a few of Mark's sections also begin with indefinite time indicators; and Mark does not cover the Early or Later Judean Ministries of Jesus.

4. The Gospel of Mark describes the growing relationship between Jesus and his disciples.

Mark is not interested in Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees, which occupies a lot of attention in Matthew.

Mark describes more vividly the dynamics of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. He describes the unbelief of the disciples and then their growing faith in Jesus.

E. THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

Mark wrote the Gospel according to the apostle Peter's preaching. How did Peter and Mark view Jesus?

1. Peter and Mark present Jesus as thoroughly human.

For example, Jesus eats and drinks, becomes hungry and falls asleep from fatigue, touches people and is touched, becomes grieved and indignant, has a mother, brother and sisters, has a human body and human spirit and even dies.

2. Peter and Mark present Jesus as thoroughly divine.

In Mark chapter 1, Jesus is called the Son of God and he is called the LORD, which is *JaHWeH* in Isaiah 40:3! He baptises with the Holy Spirit (1:8) and he is served by angels (1:13). In chapter 2, he has divine authority to forgive sins (2:5-7) and he knows everything that is in the hearts of people (2:8). He is the Lord of the Sabbath (2:28) and later he is also called the Lord of king David (12:37). In chapter 3, he appoints whom he wants and gives them authority to do miracles (3:13-14). He does many miracles: he heals all kinds of diseases, casts out demons, restores the blind and the deaf, cures a leper and raises the dead. He controls the winds, walks on water, causes a tree to wither and multiplies food to feed thousands. In chapters 8,9 and 10, he predicts in detail his own future, namely that he will die and be resurrected within three days. In chapter 13, he predicts that his disciples will be persecuted, that Jerusalem and the temple will soon be destroyed and that the world will experience earthquakes, famines and wars. He teaches that the gospel will be preached to all nations in the world before the end comes (chapter 13). Up to the present time, all these prophecies of Jesus have been literally fulfilled! In chapter 16, he rises from the dead and thus conquers death! He also predicts that at his second coming to the earth, he will come in the glory of God the Father together with many angels (8:38) and with great power. Then he will send his angels to gather his elect (13:26-27).

3. Peter and Mark present Jesus as the object of faith.

Because Jesus is the Son of God, therefore, in Mark 1:15 he demands people everywhere to repent and believe the gospel. In Mark 9:37 he says that whoever welcomes him, welcomes God the Father, who sent him. In Mark 10, he challenges the rich young ruler to enter the kingdom of God and be saved (10:24-26). In Mark 8, he challenges people to deny their own interests, to follow him and to be willing to suffer with him (8:34).

F. THE CONTENTS OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

1. The Gospel of Mark compared to the Gospel of Matthew.

The account in the Gospel of Mark is frequently more detailed than that in the Gospel of Matthew. Although the Gospel of Mark has 661 verses, its contents are paralleled and compressed into about 500 of the 1068 verses in the Gospel of Matthew.

The whole Gospel of Mark is contained in the Gospel of Matthew. Only 55 verses in the Gospel of Mark are not found in the Gospel of Matthew. Of these 55 verses, 24 verses are found in the Gospel of Luke. Thus *only about 31 verses in the Gospel of Mark are unique!* The Gospel of Mark is the oldest Gospel. Matthew and Luke probably made use of the Gospel of Mark to write their Gospels.

The division of the Gospel of Mark is generally the same as that of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

2. The most important material which is unique in the Gospel of Mark.

The 31 verses in the Gospel of Mark that are not found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, contain the following:

- Mark 2:27. The statement that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.
- Mark 4:26-29. The parable of the growing seed.
- Mark 7:32-37. The healing of the deaf and mute man.
- Mark 8:22-26. The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida.
- Mark 13:33-37. The exhortation to watchfulness.
- Mark 14:51. The story of the young man who ran away naked.

3. The ending of the Gospel of Mark.

Some people might point out to you that the most ancient and most reliable Greek manuscripts as well as other ancient translations in Latin and Syriac do not have the ending of the Gospel of Mark, that is, Mark 16:9-20. And according to the church fathers, the Gospel of Mark ended with chapter 16:8. How should we Christians view Mark 16:9-20?

The facts show that Mark 16:9-20 was not part of the original Gospel of Mark.

The oldest and most reliable manuscripts in Greek, Latin and Syriac show that the Gospel of Mark ended with chapter 16:8. The contents show that it did not belong to the original Gospel. For example, in Mark 16:7, the angel says that Jesus would meet the disciples in Galilee. But what follows tells that Jesus appeared to different people in different places. Galilee is not even mentioned. In Mark 15:47, Mary Magdalene is mentioned, but in Mark 16:9 she is introduced as if she had not been mentioned at all.

Mark 16:9-20 is an interesting summary of the other Gospels.

Mark did not intend to end his Gospel at Mark 16:8, because it ends very abrupt. We do not know whether Mark ever finished his Gospel and if not, why not? And if he did, what happened to his concluding lines? A later writer added Mark 16:9-20 as an ending to the Gospel. The ending of the Gospel of Mark is an interesting summary of some of the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, of his ascension and of his continued work through the apostles.

- Mark 16:9-11 is a summary of the Gospel of John, especially of John 20:11-18, the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene.
- Mark 16:12-13 is a summary of the Gospel of Luke, especially of Luke 24:13-35, the appearance of Jesus to two people going to Emmaus.
- Mark 16:14-18 is a summary of the Gospel of Matthew, especially of Matthew 28:16-20, the appearance of Jesus to the Eleven on a mountain in Galilee.
- Mark 16:19-20 is a summary of the book of Acts, especially Acts 1:9-11, the ascension of Jesus and his continued work through the disciples.

Mark 16:9-20 is binding for faith and practice *only to the extent* in which its teachings are definitely supported by Scripture in general.

Because the picking up of poisonous snakes and the drinking of deadly poison is not supported by any other passages in the Bible, they should not be considered as Scripture, but rather as *apocryphal material*, that is, material of doubtful authenticity; invented to resemble the words of Scripture.

[The lack of faith and faith spoken of in this passage is particularly that of the disciples of Christ, who had been with him during his earthly sojourn⁹. The miracles are particularly signs that authenticate the apostles of Christ¹⁰ and not necessarily all Christians.]

G. THE THEME AND DIVISION OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

Theme. "Jesus is the conquering King and servant King."

The Gospel of Mark may be divided into five parts.

They are exactly the same as the parts in the Gospel of Matthew. Only, the contents are less than the Gospel of Matthew.

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|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Mark 1:1-13. | The inauguration of Jesus. |
| 2. Mark 1:14 to 7:23. | The Great Galilean Ministry of Jesus. |
| 3. Mark 7:24 to 9:50. | The Retirement Ministry of Jesus. |
| 4. Mark 10. | The Perean Ministry of Jesus. |
| 5. Mark 11 to 16. | The death and resurrection of Jesus. |

⁹ Mark 16:11,13,14,17

¹⁰ Matthew 10:1,8; Luke 10:18-20; 2 Corinthians 12:12

H. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

1. The Gospel of Mark teaches that Jesus is the conquering King.

Jesus is the swiftly moving King.

Mark uses the word 'immediately'¹¹ more than forty times. This describes the irresistible forward movement of Jesus. He is continually on the move. Mark also frequently uses the word 'and'¹². It seems as if there is no break between one event and the next. Jesus works without stopping. He does not slacken at all. Mark pictures Jesus Christ as *the active, energetic, swiftly moving, warring and conquering King!*

Jesus is the Saviour-King.

Mark pictures Jesus as the Victor over the destructive forces of nature, over sicknesses, over demons and even over death. This message is of special interest to the Romans, a people, who in their lust for power and exercise of power had conquered the world. To them Mark pictures *a King who excels any earthly conqueror. The kingdom of Jesus Christ, the King, is far more extensive than the Roman Empire. The weapons of Jesus Christ, the King, are far more effective than the earthly weapons of the Roman army. The rule of Jesus Christ, the King, is far more enduring than anything that originates on earth. The victories of Jesus Christ, the King, are far more honourable than the victories of the Roman armies, because Jesus causes the people he has conquered to share in the glory of his victory. Jesus Christ is the King who conquers sin in the heart and life man, who conquers the temptations of the world, who conquers the evil influences and practices of Satan and his evil spirits, and who conquers even death! Jesus saves people from all this. Mark pictures Jesus as the Saviour-King.*

Jesus is the divine-King.

When a Roman army general went out to war, he sent an officer ahead of him to command people to repair the roads on which the army will walk and to prepare for their coming. Likewise, In Mark 1:3 we read that the function of John the Baptist is to be 'the herald' or 'forerunner' of Jesus Christ, the King. The prophet Isaiah prophesies that the King who is coming is nobody less than 'JaHWeH', 'the LORD' himself. Besides his divine nature, God took on the human nature in Jesus Christ and entered his own creation and human history. Mark pictures Jesus as the *divine-King!*

Jesus Christ, the King demands submission.

In Mark 1:15, Jesus Christ, the King, himself demands of all people to turn to him. He proclaims the good news of God and says, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" The Gospel of Mark calls people to turn in humble faith to the conquering Saviour-King.

2. The Gospel of Mark teaches that Jesus is the Servant-King.

Jesus, the Servant-King takes time to get prepared.

The Gospel of Mark does not describe the genealogy or the birth or the childhood of Jesus. It takes much time for a plant to send its roots into the dark soil before it can bring forth leaves, flowers and fruit. Likewise with Jesus. The first thirty years of his life he spent in obscurity in Nazareth, before he appears for his three years of public ministry. The Servant-King sets an example for his followers: it is very important to take time to get ready for our life's work. And we should not get annoyed if Jesus Christ uses a lot of time to prepare us for life.

Jesus, the Servant-King receives the Holy Spirit in preparation.

Jesus went to John the Baptist to be baptised, not because he was a sinner himself, but because he thereby committed himself to bear the sins of the world. The prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53:6 prophesied, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all". And John the Baptist proclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"¹³. At his baptism Jesus began his service of laying down his life for his sheep¹⁴.

Also at his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. Jesus Christ has both a divine and a human nature. His human nature was both capable and in need of strengthening. His human nature needed the anointing of the Holy Spirit in order to qualify him for his service as Prophet, Priest, and King! The *dove* is a symbol for purity, gentleness, peacefulness and graciousness. Thus, Jesus Christ, indwelt in his human nature by the Holy Spirit, was not only pure and holy, but also gentle and peaceful. Again the Servant-King sets an example for his followers: He receives the Holy Spirit, who prepares his life for every task in God's kingdom and by giving it character and equipment.

Jesus, the Servant-King is prepared by testing.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to train him for his service. Temptations are the circumstances that develop character and perseverance. There is nothing wrong with being tempted, but it is wrong to give in to temptation. The Bible gives two promises regarding temptations and sufferings: In 1 Corinthians 10:13 the Bible says, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

¹¹ Greek: euthus

¹² Greek: kai

¹³ John 1:29

¹⁴ John 10:11

And Romans 5:3-5 says that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope. And hope does not disappoint, because God pours his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, the Servant-King works for the good of people.

The Gospel of Mark describes many of the good works of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark describes no less than *twenty miracles* and *each of the first eleven chapters contains a miracle*. Besides performing miracles, some of his other good works were praying for people, teaching the truth and training disciples.

Jesus, the Servant-King teaches that a real leader is a servant.

In Mark 10:35-45 we read about the mother of James and John, asking Jesus that her two sons may sit at his left and right side in his kingdom. The other disciples heard this and became indignant with James and John. Then Jesus said that the leaders in the world lord it over people and their officials exercise authority over them. But among Christians it should not be so! He says, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." Then he says about himself, "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." Jesus teaches that a real leader is a servant and that Christian leadership is servant leadership. He teaches that he, the Conquering King, is a Servant-King!

3. The Gospel of Mark teaches what is important for our spiritual growth.

The parable of the Sower in Mark 4:1-20 emphasises the human responsibility with regard to spiritual growth.

The *seed* represents God's Word. The four kinds of *soil* represent four different kinds of hearts: an unresponsive heart, an impulsive heart, a pre-occupied heart and a well-prepared heart. The noble and good soil represents a responsive, serious and well-prepared heart. Whenever we hear the word of God, we have four responsibilities: In contrast to the first soil, we must *hear* the word of God, listen carefully to it and try *to understand* it, so that God's Word may save and change us. In contrast to the second soil, we must *consider the cost* of believing and obeying these words, because we want to persevere being a believer, even when we face difficulties or persecution. In contrast to the third soil, we must *keep our heart clean and free* from worries, money and sinful pleasures. The word of God can only work in a responsive, serious and well-prepared heart, causing us to grow to maturity and to bear lots of fruit for God. The condition of our hearts on any day will determine the effect of God's word on our lives that day! The attitude with which we hear, read and study the Bible determines if we will grow, change and bear fruit or not. The key verse is Mark 4:13 which says that if you understand this parable, you will be able to understand all parables!

The parable of the seed growing in secret in Mark 4:26-29 emphasises God's sovereignty with regard to spiritual growth.

Mark 4:26-27 explains that growth is a mystery to man. God is the sovereign Author of spiritual growth: only he begins it and only he continues it until the harvest. Our responsibility is to cover the seed, pull up weeds, loosen the soil, add fertiliser and channel water to our soil. But we cannot cause the seed to sprout and grow. We must trust God's sovereign work in our hearts and lives.

Mark 4:28 explains the potential power of the seed. Our responsibility is to preach God's Word everywhere. Nevertheless, apart from our human help, God's Word knows what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Little by little, God's Word travels from one person to another, from one nation to another and increasingly causes its power and influence to be felt in every sphere of life.

Mark 4:29 explains that the harvest-time will be the final victory. The victory of God's kingdom is sure. The harvest is all the time approaching. At the moment decided in God's plan, the kingdom of God will be revealed in all its splendour.