

A second application is practice. In this Gospel, Jesus provides a thorough outline of how Christians are required to live as his disciples. The application is to live in keeping with what Jesus taught and how he lived. In this regard, we need to note how much ethical teaching this particular Gospel contains, with a frequent emphasis on how costly it can be to follow Jesus.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

The most important book ever written. Ernest Renan

The most immediately striking characteristic of Matthew's Gospel is what may be loosely termed its "Jewishness." The formula-quotations clearly emphasize . . . that Jesus is the goal of the Old Testament revelation of God. David Hill

It is probable that Matthew's Gospel was primarily addressed to teachers . . . [and] was a manual for such people. . . . The Gospel as a whole was a manual to put into the hands of church leaders to help them in their work. Michael Green

It is a remarkable fact that, among the variations in the order in which the Gospels appear in early lists and texts, the one constant factor is that Matthew always comes first. . . . The early Christians were conscious, in a way few Christians are today, that their faith had its roots in Judaism. R. T. France

[The author] is an earnest and dedicated Christian, and the writing of the Gospel is for him an act of obedience to the risen Christ, who is his Lord. He seeks to honour and serve Christ. Floyd V. Filson

In Mathew all is stylized. People are either good or bad, wise or foolish, obedient or disobedient, merciful or merciless. Michael D. Goulder

Almost all the elements that a modern reader would demand of a biography are lacking. Matthew has two principal interests: the fulfillment of God's purposes in and through Jesus, and how this fulfillment will find expression in the community which Jesus founded. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann

THE GOSPEL OF MARK A Documentary Life of Jesus

FORMAT. 16 chapters, 678 verses

IMPLIED PURPOSE. To record a selection of what Jesus did and said during his public years, with a view toward conveying the truth about who Jesus is and the spiritual significance of his life, death, and resurrection

AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE. The author himself is an objective reporter, but his selection of material is sufficient to show that he is a believer in Jesus and that he wants his readers to follow Jesus as well. It is possible to detect an incipient apologetic and evangelistic agenda.

IMPLIED AUDIENCE. Scholars have presented evidence that Mark wrote for a Jewish audience, a Greek audience, and a Roman audience, so we should draw the obvious conclusion that Mark wrote for all people, realizing that the need to know Jesus is universal.

WHAT UNIFIES THE BOOK. The presence of Jesus in both word and action; the conflict motif; miracles; the travel motif; the "world" of the story, having recurrent features that become familiar to us as we live with the Gospel; our awareness of a growing crisis that will result in Jesus' death

SPECIAL FEATURES. Fast narrative pace, accentuated by Mark's fondness for the word *immediately*; vividness of descriptive details; portrayal of the disciples as slow to understand and believe; frequent inclusion of how people responded to Jesus (at least twenty-three instances) and similar recording of how Jesus responded to events; a preference for Greek verbs that portray an action in process

CHALLENGE FACING THE READER OR TEACHER OF THIS BOOK. Being the simplest of the four Gospels, this bare-bones account of Jesus'

life is the easiest to read. The main challenge is organizational and consists of the need to discern a unity and pattern to the mosaic of individual units.

HOW TO MEET THE CHALLENGE. Detailed topical outlines may let you down when you look closely at what is actually in the text. Your best option is to view the organization as corresponding to what we know as the genre of a documentary life, which combines “clips” of what someone did and said, where that person went, and how others responded, within a loose chronological framework.

FACT SHEET

The Gospel of Mark is a historical narrative which sets forth a representative picture of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not primarily a biography. . . . It gives in close succession, probably in general chronological order, a series of episodes in Christ's career with some detail concerning the last week that He spent on earth. . . . It is brief, pictorial, clear-cut, and forceful. Like a snapshot album devoted to one person, it gives a series of characteristic poses of Jesus without attempting close continuity between them. Nevertheless Mark affords a satisfactory understanding of His person and work when the total impression of these individual episodes is put together.

MERRILL C. TENNEY
New Testament Survey

<p>16 Resurrection</p> <p>14-15 Passion Story</p> <p>13 Olivet Discourse</p> <p>11-12 Toward the Crucifixion</p>	<p>Jesus Presses His Claims in Such a Way as to Lead to His Crucifixion</p>	<p>Concentrated Action in Jerusalem</p>	<p>Jesus as Sacrifice</p>
<p>10 Final Glimpse of Jesus' Ministry</p> <p>8:22-9:50 Jesus with the Disciples</p> <p>6:1-8:21 Specimens of Jesus' Life</p> <p>4-5 Parables and Miracle Stories</p> <p>2-3 Conflict Stories</p> <p>1 Initiation of Jesus' Ministry</p>	<p>Jesus Reveals Himself in His Public Ministry</p>	<p>Diffused Travel Story That Moves about Galilee</p>	<p>Jesus as Itinerant Teacher and Miracle Worker</p>

Each of the four Gospels presents material and perspectives that differ from the others. Even the same events sometimes seem to be divergent. Which one is the accurate account? Many apparent discrepancies will fall into place if we keep two things in mind: (1) Jesus was an itinerant teacher and miracle worker. Just as a political campaigner today gives varied versions of his talks to different audiences and has similar encounters at many public appearances, so Jesus would have had slightly different versions of similar events. (2) The instant replay of a televised sports event gives us a model for the similar-yet-varied accounts that we find in the Gospels. By the time we have seen the same play from different angles

(including even a reverse-angle version), with commentary superimposed, we have exactly what we find in the Gospels—slightly different but equally truthful versions of the same event.

The Form of the Book

On the surface the Gospel of Mark is the most narrative of the four Gospels. After all, it is the most action-oriented and the most streamlined Gospel. And it is surely true that the usual narrative ingredients are the right terms for interacting with the Gospel of Mark, with plot, setting, and characters the essential elements. But when we start to read Mark's account, we find that it is too piecemeal in organization to read like a conventional story. Some scholars offer the mosaic or the collage as the right model by which to assimilate the material.

A more helpful analogy is that of the one-hour television documentary on a famous person's life. What things make up such a documentary? We can expect to find a loosely chronological arrangement of the material, but within that form the arrangement is partly topical. We are given a series of relatively brief units—clips of famous events, snatches

of speeches or interviews, and commentary by the narrator and people familiar with the subject of the documentary. There will be crowd scenes and small-group scenes, public scenes and more private scenes. Of course, Mark does not have use of television clips and instead relies on reported narrative. The material, though, is approximately what we find in a documentary life on television. A helpful thing to keep in mind is

DISTINCTIVES OF MARK'S GOSPEL

- It is the shortest Gospel.
- Proportionately, it has the most miracles.
- Proportionately, it has fewer parables than Matthew or Luke.
- It uses the Greek word meaning "immediately" or "at once" forty-two times, more than the rest of the New Testament combined.
- In keeping with Mark's preference for action, he records only one long discourse by Jesus.

that a documentary life includes two types of material: (1) typical or representative events, to give the flavor of what happened repeatedly; and (2) crucial, turning-point events that happened once. Documentaries show by their allotment of space what the producers think to be most important, and in this regard we need to note that half of Mark's documentary is devoted to the last week of Jesus' life, with emphasis on his willingly choosing to die on the cross.

Key Places and Characters

There can be little doubt that geography plays a major role in Mark's Gospel, but the symbolism is not quite as clear cut as many commentators claim. Jesus' life as a traveling preacher and miracle worker takes place largely in the towns and countryside of Galilee. The usual claim is that Galilee symbolizes Jesus' success in preaching the gospel. There are, indeed, triumphs of belief, but as you read this material, you are unlikely to think of it as mainly a success story. The Passion story is set in Jerusalem, which without doubt symbolizes rejection and hostility.

The protagonist of the action is Jesus. The central plot conflict is between Jesus and those who reject or oppose him—chiefly the religious establishment but sometimes people from the community and even the obtuse disciples. If the scribes and Pharisees are the villains of the story, the disciples are the loyal confidants of the hero (except during the events surrounding the Crucifixion). The crowds are the final major character. Of course, in a story such as this, "minor" individual characters are important and will repay all the close attention you give them.

Unifying Elements

- The continuous presence of Jesus as the central character
- The travel-story genre, with the usual ingredients of journeying, of changing locations (towns and the natural countryside being the staples), and of encounters with people along the way
- The conflict motif

DID YOU KNOW?

- Most scholars believe that Mark's Gospel was the first to be written and was the "core Gospel" that formed the basis for the longer Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which contain many similarities to the content, order, and wording of Mark.
- Mark was not one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, but his Gospel is the most circumstantial (filled with specific vivid details) of the four. A plausible tradition dating from the second century claims that Mark's chief source of information was Peter.

- Our awareness of progressive danger that will lead to arrest and crucifixion
- The motif of people's responses to what Jesus does and says

Key Doctrines

The Incarnation. Mark shows Christ to be God in human form. You can profitably sift the book for evidence of this and then ponder the implications.

Salvation and Faith. The aim of Jesus' actions and teaching was largely to show people how to be saved and then live as believers.

Ethics. Jesus is first, last, and always the great moral example. To live a morally good life is to live as Jesus did.

Eschatology. Chapter 13 is devoted to teaching about the end times, and numerous interspersed comments by Jesus fill out the picture.

Tips for Reading or Teaching the Gospel of Mark

Knowing that Mark's Gospel is action-oriented, open yourself up to the effect of immediacy that Mark uses as his approach. Mark's Gospel is much celebrated for its vividness of detail; relive the action as vividly as possible.

Do not allow the outlines based on geography or phases in Jesus' ministry to confuse you. Instead, let the "documentary life" genre—with its mosaic of individual episodes, speeches, and encounters—guide your progress through the book.

With individual Gospel units, it is always appropriate to ask what the unit tells you about Jesus and his mission.

quick overview of the gospel of mark

- 1:1–10:52 Jesus' life as a traveling teacher and miracle worker
- 11:1–16:20 The last week of Jesus' life, ending with his crucifixion and resurrection

The Flow of the Book

The organization of the Gospel of Mark is very fluid until it reaches the Passion story. There is no consensus among commentaries and handbooks as to how to outline the book. Some outlines divide the ministry of

Jesus into geographical movements, and others into phases of Jesus' disclosure of who he is, but these are of very little help in actually reading the Gospel because the same kaleidoscope of ingredients carries over from one locale or phase of ministry to the next. The following outline is based on kinds of material that we actually encounter in the text, and it largely follows the contours of the chapter divisions.

Initiation into the Ministry of Jesus (Chapter 1). There is a double initiation going on here—Jesus' initiation into his ministry and our initiation into the Gospel of Mark. You can note what you learn about Jesus and his ministry in the series of vignettes that the chapter presents.

Stories of Conflict (Chapters 2–3). Whereas the opening kaleidoscope of stories gives us glimpses of Jesus' success and popularity, these two chapters mainly give us conflict stories in which someone criticizes Jesus for what he has said or done. Questions to ponder as you read include the following: Why do Jesus' opponents object to what he has said or done in a given episode? What do we learn about Jesus in the episode?

Parables and Miracle Stories (Chapters 4–5). This unit consists of four parables and four miracle stories. To master these chapters, you need to apply what you know about parables and miracle stories. (See pages 447 and 437.)

On the Road with Jesus (6:1–8:21). These chapters give us snapshots of Jesus' life during his years as an itinerant teacher and miracle worker. The very randomness of organization captures the sense of what a day in the life of Jesus was like. You can therefore begin by noting the range of material Mark included—rejection of Jesus, the hostility of the religious establishment, the miracles Jesus performed, and belief in Jesus. Then approach each unit in terms of the specific subgenre to which it belongs, such as discourse, miracle story, conflict story, and the like. At every point it is important to ask what the episode reveals about Jesus.

Jesus with His Disciples (8:22–9:50). Read this unit looking for signposts that the action is occurring largely between Jesus and his disciples, thus lending a teaching-learning format to the material. Then put yourself in

KEY VERSE

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45, ESV). Here are both the moral and the theological keys to the book: Believers are called to serve others, and Jesus' death is the atonement for human sin.

The Gospel as a New Testament Form

The primary feature of the Gospels is that they inform us about the person and work of Christ, with most of the space given to the three years of his public ministry. The title *Gospel* means “good news” and was taken from the Greek word used to designate the message of salvation in Christ.

The primary form is narrative, or story. It is true that the teaching and discourses of Jesus get as much space as narrative events, but the overall story is the framework within which Jesus’ teaching occurs.

The plot of the Gospel narratives is episodic rather than a single continuous action, and the fragmented nature of the material is further highlighted by the characteristic brevity of the units. A host of specific narrative genres (types) appear in the Gospels (see the article on page 437 for an anatomy of the Gospel subtypes). Several patterns unify the Gospels, including the following:

- In the center of everything is the person and work of Jesus.
- In concentric rings around Jesus we find, in order of increasing prominence, (1) the group of followers known as disciples, (2) the religious establishment (often called the Pharisees or the scribes and Pharisees), and (3) ordinary people, sometimes a crowd of onlookers, sometimes specific individuals.
- While the arrangement of material is partly topical (for example, parables of Jesus collected into an extended unit), the organization is loosely chronological, and all of the Gospels devote most of their space to the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Gospels combine three primary ingredients:

- Jesus’ teaching and preaching: what Jesus said and taught
- Jesus’ actions: what Jesus did
- The responses of people to Jesus: what others did

Furthermore, Jesus’ conversations, dialogues, and altercations with opponents constitute a hybrid of the three ingredients above: They are a form of teaching, they are “speech acts” that have the effect of an action, and they involve people’s responses to Jesus.

The kaleidoscopic combination of materials reflects the varied nature of Jesus’ life during his years as a traveling teacher and miracle worker. Slight differences among the Gospels’ highly similar material is partly a matter of the individual writers’ selectivity, but it is more likely that as an itinerant, Jesus did similar actions and said similar things many times, much as we find a politician doing during a campaign.

The overall aim of the Gospel writers is persuasion. Their goal in recording and interpreting the events of Jesus’ life and his teaching is not simply biographical and historical. The Gospel writers are believers in Jesus who want their readers to believe in the Savior also.

Subtypes within the Gospels

The Gospels are made up largely of the following subtypes:

- Stories surrounding Jesus’ birth and childhood: Annunciation stories, Nativity stories, infancy narratives
- Vocation or calling stories, in which someone responds to Jesus’ call to follow him or believe in him
- Recognition stories, in which someone recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah, or Savior
- Witness or testimony stories, in which a character testifies about who Jesus is or what he has done
- Conflict or controversy stories, in which Jesus engages in conflict with other characters, usually the religious establishment
- Encounter stories (such as the meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well), in which Jesus confronts a character
- Pronouncement stories, in which an event is paired with a memorable saying or proverb uttered by Jesus, so that both event and saying are remembered together. An example is Mark 2:15-17, where the story of the Pharisees’ criticism of Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners concludes with Jesus’ proverb “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.”
- Miracle stories, which have as many as five ingredients: A need is established; Jesus’ help is sought; the person in need or his/her acquaintances express faith or obedience; Jesus performs a miracle; characters respond to the miracle and/or Jesus.
- Parables: stories told by Jesus to teach truth
- Discourses or sermons uttered by Jesus
- Sayings or proverbs stated by Jesus
- Passion stories: stories of events that happened at the end of Jesus’ life. Specific types of stories under this general heading include arrival in Jerusalem; Passover/upper room stories; scenes of suffering, arrest, trial; Crucifixion; Resurrection; and post-Resurrection appearances.

Each subtype has its own set of conventions or expectations. If we identify a unit in the Gospels correctly, we can interact with it accurately and do justice to its specificity. Many units combine features of two or more subtypes, but one subtype always dominates.

the position of the disciples and reflect on what you would have learned as you went through this succession of events with Jesus. Many accounts of the book's structure stress Peter's confession near the beginning of this unit (8:27-30) and the Transfiguration that comes just a little after that (9:2-8) as pivotal in the book, but if you look closely at the material in chapters 9–10, you will be hard pressed to see any difference from the preceding material. The real change of direction comes when Jesus marches into Jerusalem as a prelude to the Passion story (chapter 11 and following).

KEY VERSE

"[Jesus] asked them, 'But who do you say I am?' Peter replied, 'You are the Messiah'" (8:29). Peter's great confession highlights the identity motif that is a main theme in the book; here Jesus' identity is climactically proclaimed.

Final Glimpses of Jesus' Life during the Public Years (Chapter 10). This chapter is a good recap of Jesus' life during his public ministry. You can first note its variety: Jesus deals with the hostile Pharisees, blesses little children, interacts with a rich young ruler about the peril of riches, foretells his crucifixion and resurrection, deals with his immature disciples' ambition, and heals a blind man. Then you can reflect on how this range sums up Jesus' ministry during his years on the road.

Events Leading toward the Crucifixion (Chapters 11–12). The types of events and discourses that we

find here could have happened at any point in Jesus' public ministry, so you can profitably be conscious of echoes of what has preceded in Mark's Gospel (see "On the Road with Jesus," above). But the placing of the Triumphant Entry right at the beginning of this unit signals that these same familiar activities took place during the final days of Jesus' life. You can therefore ponder how this context affects the way in which you experience and understand the passages.

The Olivet Discourse (Chapter 13). This chapter could be placed with the foregoing ones, but it is a summary of Jesus' eschatological teaching and deserves to be analyzed by itself for what it tells us about the last days. A good analytic framework is to scrutinize the chapter as Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples.

The Last Days of Jesus' Life: Mark's Passion Story (Chapters 14–15). Every detail in the story of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial is important. You need to reflect on each detail and its spiritual meaning

with an awareness that Mark (like the other Gospel writers) records the events and the words that were spoken without intermingling theological interpretation. But we come to these events and sayings with the benefit of the Epistles' analysis of the theological meaning of the crucifixion and death of Jesus, so we should read the Gospel accounts in light of that familiar theological commentary. It would be impoverishing, though, to let that knowledge obscure our reliving the events as they happened to the participants who were present at them.

The Resurrection of Jesus (Chapter 16). A good premise for interacting with Mark's somewhat understated story of the Resurrection and Ascension is to think of ways in which this chapter serves as the climax and conclusion to Mark's Gospel. Some ancient manuscripts end the book with verse 8 while others include verses 9 through 20.

The Main Themes

1. We have abundant eyewitness information about who Jesus is and what he has done.
2. The Jesus in whom people are called to believe is known to us by his actions, his teaching (including his parables), and his interactions with people he encountered.
3. Jesus is fully human as well as fully divine.
4. Following Christ requires that we undertake a spiritual journey of obedience and self-denial.
5. Living as Jesus lived will inevitably land a person in conflict with people who reject him.

Contribution of the Book to the Bible's Story of Salvation in Christ

The contribution of this book to the story of Christ lies in its Christology—its teaching about the person and work of Christ. Of special note are the messianic titles *Son of Man* and *Son of God*, which appear, respectively, nearly twenty times and half a dozen times. The title *Messiah*, or *Christ*, appears at least eight times. Jesus himself makes key claims about who he is and what his death will accomplish, including the statement that "the Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). Finally, Mark's Gospel has a distinctive emphasis on Jesus as servant.

Applying the Book

Application begins with understanding: who Jesus is, what he did and taught, his atoning death, and his resurrection. Then you need to live out the implications of that understanding. Two obvious areas of such appli-

ation are belief in Jesus as Savior and living out his moral example and commands.

PERSPECTIVES

ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Like the other gospels, Mark is not a biography but a topical narrative. Mark juxtaposes Christ's teachings and works to show how they authenticate each other. Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa

The main purpose of [Saint] Mark was to emphasise the Humanity of Jesus Christ. . . . He showed Himself sensible of the common infirmities of humanity, hunger, weariness, fatigue, and faintness.
Herbert M. Luckock

We have to thank Mark's Gospel for this vivid first-hand impression of Jesus the Man, his looks and gestures, his wonder, grief, and indignation, sitting in the boat teaching, asleep on a pillow in the ship's stern, walking round the Temple taking in the scene, watching the gifts dropping into the Temple box, taking up children in his arms. Percy C. Sands

The Gospel of Mark possesses the quality of action to a higher degree than any of the others. Edgar J. Goodspeed

It is . . . appropriate to label Mark a witness document. . . . It is intended to be neither a formal historical treatise nor a biography of Jesus, but proclamation. . . . The reason that almost half of Mark's sixteen chapters describe the final period of Jesus' ministry is that it is in his suffering, death and resurrection that the revelation of God in Christ is most clearly seen. William L. Lane

[On Mark as "the Gospel for the Romans:"] To [the Roman,] Christ must be presented from the Roman point of view answering to the idea of divine power, action, law and universal dominion. Jesus must appear to him as the man of power, the worker, the conqueror. And this is what is done by the Gospel of Mark, which is the Gospel of power, of action, of conquest over nature, spirits, disease and death. *The New Analytical Bible*

Jewish Religious Groups in the Time of Christ

The Gospels show Jesus interacting with the major religious movements of his day. Here is what each group believed:

Today the term *Pharisee* sounds pejorative because Jesus often criticized the Pharisees for their hypocrisy—and rightly so. At the time, however, Pharisees had an excellent reputation for theological orthodoxy and spiritual purity. Pharisaism originated as a serious religious movement in the second century before Christ. In addition to the law of Moses (or Torah), the Pharisees accepted oral tradition as a binding authority for daily conduct. Many of their traditions gave practical guidance for outwardly adhering to the Old Testament law, but these traditions became a law unto themselves, and they often missed the heart of true love and obedience for God. The Pharisees believed in physical resurrection and the life to come.

Like the Pharisees, the *Sadducees* emerged sometime in the second century before Christ. Unlike the Pharisees, they denied the authority of oral tradition and adopted a more literal interpretation of the Mosaic law. As we learn from the Gospels, the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead, eternal life, and the supernatural reality of angels and demons.

Another group that emerged during the time of Christ was the *Zealots*, who were more political in orientation. Their ultimate goal was the overthrow of the Roman government. The Zealots were fiercely loyal to the Jewish people, language, and traditions. They opposed paying tribute to Caesar on the grounds that they owed their allegiance to God alone. They prophesied great things for the future and worked for the day when Israel would be delivered from Roman domination.

The Gospels also mention several other groups frequently: The *Levites* (members of the tribe of Levi) looked after the Temple in Jerusalem and provided practical assistance in worship. The *priests* were Levites—more specifically, descendants of Aaron—who led public worship and offered sacrifices for the people of God. The *scribes* were skilled in transcribing, interpreting, and teaching God's law. As you read the New Testament, bear in mind that the terms *priest* and *scribe* refer to a man's calling and livelihood whereas the terms *Pharisee* and *Sadducee* refer to theological sects. Generally speaking, though, many priests were Sadducees and most of the scribes were Pharisees.

The *Sanhedrin*, the council of seventy elders in Jerusalem, provided social and spiritual leadership for the Jews. Like the seventy elders who served under Moses, the Sanhedrin sat in judgment over the people of God. The head of the Sanhedrin was usually the high priest. Most (but not all) of its members were scribes and priests; some were private citizens. Although some members of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees, most were Sadducees.