



5b. Mark 1:1–3:6: Authoritative Galilean Ministry Begins

The traditional symbol for the evangelist Mark was the winged lion, as seen here in stained glass

“Few any longer doubt the pivotal place of the Gospel of Mark not only in the coming forth of the other records of Jesus’ ministry but also in the transmitting of the essential message of Jesus’ messiahship . . . It is the record closest to the ministry, both in time and in tone.” (Brown, *The Gospels* [SS5], 61)

Prologue (1:2–13) The Opening of the Ministry

- John the Baptist in the wilderness (1:2–11, **dramatic episode**)
 - At Christ’s baptism the heavens are “torn apart” (*schizomenos* in 1:10) in **apocalyptic imagery**
 - cf. Is. 64:1; Ezek. 1:1; John 1:51; Acts 7:56; Rev. 4:1 and *passim*
 - The voice of God speaks directly to Jesus, not to John or the others: **“Thou art my beloved Son . . .”**
 - This leads some, ancient and modern, to think of adoptionism (low Christology)
 - Better, a personal witness to Jesus directly from his Father
- 40 days in the wilderness (1:12–13, **transition narrative**)
 - Short here; no discussion of temptation details
 - Matthew and Luke expand it into a **dramatic episode**
 - **Paradisiacal scene** with wild beasts and angels (1:13; cf. Is. 11:6-9, 65:17-25; Hos. 2:18)



Harvey Anderson, "John Baptizing Jesus"

Authoritative Ministry Begins (1:14–45)

- The gospel message (1:14–15, **transition narrative**)
- Jesus calls the first disciples (1:16–20, **call narrative**)
 - “fishers of men” motif; much more developed in Matt and Luke)
- Casts out an unclean spirit (1:21–28, **miracle/healing story**)
 - **Teaches as one with authority** (1:22)
 - Nevertheless Mark lacks many of the “sayings” of Matt and Luke and *does not give many details of Jesus’ teachings*
 - **the first miracle in Mark, casting out a devil, reflects the coming of the true kingdom of God into the world, overthrowing the kingdom of Satan**
- Heals many at Simon’s house (1:29–39, **miracle/healing story**)
 - Takes hand of his mother-in-law and raises her (1:31), typical Marcan healing feature
- Cleanses a leper (1:40–45, **miracle/healing story**)
 - **Jesus is “moved with compassion”** (1:41)

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5b - Mark 1:1–3:6

3

Views of Capernaum



Above: View of Capernaum ruins
 Upper left: Millstone shop
 Lower Right: the so-called “House of Peter”

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4

Form Criticism: Miracle and Healing Stories

- **Form criticism:** the study of looking at the parts of a text and recognizing how different units (often different genres or “forms”) are put together
 - **Mark as a necklace:** text units linked together by narrative like beads on a string
 - Units include different kinds of **narrative**, **discourse**, and **mixed genres**
 - May suggest preexisting stories that the gospel author put together in his text

- **Pattern of Healing Stories**
 - **Introduction** - sick person's condition is described, the healer encounters the sick person
 - **Conflict** - healer investigates what the sick person wants or needs, healer may hesitate or test the sick person's readiness to be healed
 - **Action** - The healing itself can be brought about either verbally, or through simple touch, or through more elaborate means
 - **Confirmation** - The fact that the healing has taken place is either asserted by the narrator or demonstrated through some action performed by the person who has been healed.
 - **Reaction** - **Response is often positive, involving praise given to God;** Sometimes there are negative reactions from some opponents

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5b - Mark 1:1–3:6

5

Five “Controversy” Narratives (2:1–3:6)

Literary Questions: Genre and Structure

- **Controversy Narratives:** short narratives revolving around a conflict with authorities
 - Often connected with a healing or miracle story or a specific teaching
 - Usually controversies occur with Pharisees; other times with Herodians, Sadducees or unnamed opponents
 - These point to **the growing conflict that will culminate in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion**

- Chiastic structure of this section
 - A - healing paralyzed man (“palsy,” 2:1–12)
 - B - eating with sinners (Levi, 2:13–17)
 - C - fasting (2:18–22)
 - B' - eating on Sabbath (2:23–28)
 - A' - healing on the Sabbath (withered hand, 3:1–6)
 - **These miracles and controversies may not have occurred in this order, but Mark has arranged them this way for literary effect**

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6

Dispute over the Healing of the Man with Palsy (2:1–12)

- Embedded in a **healing story**
 - Healing provides bridge with chapter 1
 - Marcan faith: aggressive faith in Jesus' power: friends of the paralyzed man "break up the roof"
- Scribes offended by Christ's forgiveness of sins
 - "... Who can forgive sins but God only?"
 - Why reason ye these thoughts in your hearts? Whether it is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" (2:9)
- Symbolism of healing
 - Power of creation, recreation, **resurrection**
 - Symbolic of spiritual healing (i.e., **redemption**)
 - In other words, **the Atonement!**

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5b - Mark 1:1–3:6

7

Exegetical Discursus: The Healing of the Man with Palsy (2:1–12)

- **Historical**
 - Mark related **the healing of a paralyzed man and the controversy that ensued because Jesus also forgave his sins**
 - A disciple or other witness, such as **Peter**, saw this miracle and repeated it in the early Christian community
 - Mark included it in his gospel, originally **for an audience that only wanted to know about Jesus but was also persecuted because of its belief in Jesus**
- **Literary**
 - This is a **controversy narrative** "embedded" in a **healing story**
 - **Serves as a bridge between Mark's first healing stories (1:14–45) and the group of controversy narratives that follow (2:1–3:6)**
- **Theological**
 - Shows Christ's authority **both to heal the body and the spirit** (through forgiveness)
 - **Reassured Mark's original audience that the opposition that they were facing was experienced by Jesus himself**
 - **Strengthens our faith that Christ can heal and forgive us**

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5b - Mark 1:1–3:6

8

Five “Controversy” Narratives (cont.)

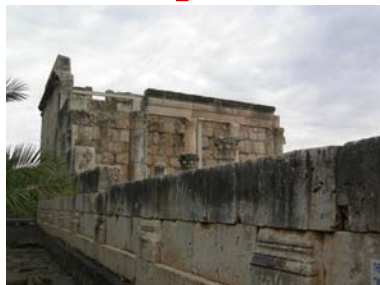
- **Controversial Call of Levi** (2:13–17)
 - The sick need the physician, not the healthy (Cynic proverb)
 - Christ came to call sinners, not the righteous, to repentance (2:17)
- **Questions about Fasting** (2:18–22)
 - Link with John episode in 1:1-11
 - Why is fasting emphasized in the chiasmic structure of this section?
 - In antiquity fasting as often a sign of mourning as well as source of spiritual strength
 - *Does it stress the joy believers should have in Jesus’ presence?*
- **Disagreements about the Sabbath** (2:23–28)
 - Christ counters with a rabbinic counter question (2:25-26)
 - True purpose of the Sabbath (2:27)
 - Christ “Lord of the Sabbath” (2:28)
- **Healing the Withered Hand on the Sabbath** (3:1–6)
 - “When he had looked at them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts . . .” (3:5)
 - Opposition: Pharisees and Herodians (3:6)

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5b - Mark 1:1–3:6

9

The Capernaum Synagogue



Synagogue in Capernaum. Most of the remains (upper, light stones) are of a later, second century sanctuary. Those dating to the time of Jesus are the lower, dark stones.



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5b - Mark 1:1–3:6

10