

Sunday, January 09, 2011—Mark Dispensationally Considered: Introduction to the Gospels

Introduction

- This morning we are going to begin a new series of studies through the book of Mark.
- There are a couple of reasons why I have chosen Mark for our next series:
 - Most of professing Christendom gets their doctrine from these four books. Therefore it is important that they are rightly divided in order to be properly understood.
 - Our critics accuse of us cutting these books out of the Bible (Romans 15:4, 8). It is important to demonstrate their vital role in God's Word.
 - These books tell us the story of our Lord's earthly life and ministry. They are the historical background for Paul's ministry.
- This morning's message will serve as a general introduction to the four gospels.
 - The gospels are not the beginning of the New Testament.
 - Why are there 4? (Not more or less)
 - Gospels as a whole
 - Dispensational setting and context
- Next week we will have a specific introduction to the gospel of Mark.

The Gospels Are Not the Beginning of the New Testament

- The average Christian assumes that Matthew is the beginning of the New Testament. It is commonly assumed that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are New Testament books because they tell us about the life and teachings of Jesus.
- This misconception is based upon Church tradition not sound Bible teaching.
- Hebrews 9:16-18—In order for a testament to be enforced the testator first must be dead. Therefore, the so-called New Testament could not have begun in Matthew 1.
- The proper Scriptural division is not between Old and New Testaments (both of which apply primarily to Israel) but between prophecy and mystery.
- Prophetic Program—Acts 3:18-21—establishment of the Kingdom God promised to the nation of Israel
- Mystery Program—Romans 16:25-26—secret purpose of God to form the Church the Body of Christ and repossess the heavenly places back to himself.

- Romans 15:8—the Gospels teach us about Christ’s prophetic ministry to the nation of Israel.
- In Appendix 96 of the Companion Bible, E.W. Bullinger writes “this shows that they (four Gospels) may be regarded as being the completion of the Old Testament, rather than the beginning of the New. In any case they have nothing to do with the founding of the Church, or with the beginning of Christianity.”
- Mark 1:15—in the gospels long awaited prophecy is being fulfilled regarding Israel’s king and kingdom.

Why Are There Four?

- In modern times many question the reliability of the Gospel accounts. Some question why there are only four instead of just one or more than four. Many books claiming to be gospels dating from the late 1st and early 2nd century claim to be gospels.
- Ezekiel 1:10—describes the four living creatures surrounding the throne of God.
 - Lion—Matthew (Messiah King)—Sovereignty
 - Revelation 5:5
 - Ox—Mark (Jehovah’s Servant)—Humility
 - Man—Luke (Son of Man)—Humanity
 - Eagle—John (Son of God)—Deity
- There are also 4 prophetic passages which speak about the Branch and the various aspects of his ministry:
 - Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15—these verses speak about a king being raised out of David who will fulfill the Davidic Covenant and rule over Israel. Matthew presents Christ as he is before man possessing the highest earthly position, the King.
 - Zechariah 3:8—talks about my servant the Branch. Mark presents Christ as Jehovah’s Servant (Isaiah 42:1). He is presented as He is before God the ideal Servant.
 - Zechariah 6:12—speak about the Man whose name is the Branch. Luke presents Christ as he is before man the ideal man.
 - Isaiah 4:2—presents the branch of the Lord or Jehovah’s Branch. In John, Christ is presented as God himself incarnate in human flesh (Isaiah 40:9). Christ is presented as what he is before God—divine.
- The specific contents of each gospel support this structure.
- Matthew (Christ as King)

- Matthew 1:1-17—set forth the royal genealogy of the King traced through David and Abraham.
- Matthew 2:1-12—Matthew is the only gospel account that includes the visit of the Magi to worship the King of the Jews.
- Mark (Christ as Servant)
 - Mark contains no genealogy because no one cares where a servant came from
 - Mark is a book of action
- Luke (Christ as the Son of Man)
 - Luke 1—includes the announcement of Christ’s birth as well as the most detailed identification of his forerunner John the Baptist.
 - Luke 2—includes the most detailed account of Christ’s birth, circumcision, and early years.
 - Luke 3—contains a genealogy tracing Christ ancestry all the way back to Adam the first man.
- John (Christ as God)
 - John 1—no genealogy is given because God does not have a genealogy. The Word (Christ) was present in the beginning with God and was God.
- The four gospels thus form one complete whole. The four are required to set forth the four aspects of the Life of Christ. No one gospel could set forth the four different aspects of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence it is the Divine purpose to give us, in the four gospels, for aspects of His life on earth.

The So-Called Synoptic Problem

- Through failure to recognize this fourfold Divine presentation of the Lord, the term “Synoptic Gospels” has been given to the first three, because they are supposed to take one and the same point of view, and thus be different from John’s gospel.
- Rather than taking the viewpoint of faith and recognizing that the gospels are of divine origin modern Bible scholars and critics sought to explain the similarities and differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke by concocting elaborate theories regarding their authorship.
 - Some suggest that the writers of the three Synoptic Gospels drew their material from an earlier Gospel which has not been preserved.
 - Others have argued that oral tradition regarding the deed and teachings of Jesus became fixed very early and that the similarities we see in the Synoptic Gospels are due to their dependence upon oral tradition.

- The most popular current theory maintains that Mark was the first Gospel and that Matthew and Luke utilized Mark as well as other sources in composing their own works. Some scholars who affirm Marcan priority hold to a “two-source theory,” in which Matthew and Luke also utilized another source commonly called “Q,” from the German word “*Quelle*, meaning source. This second document is said to account for about 250 verses common to Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark.
- That is great human viewpoint. How about just believing II Timothy 3:16-17?
- Read section from *Explore the Book* by J. Sidlow Baxter
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke
 - The *outer* facts of the Lord’s life
 - The *human* aspects of the Lord’s life
 - The *public* discourses (largely)
 - The *Galilean* ministry (mainly)
- John
 - The *inner* facts of the Lord’s life
 - The *Divine* aspects of the Lord’s life
 - The *private* discourse (largely)
 - The *Judean* ministry (mainly)

Dispensational Setting and Context

- None of them records any information about the dispensation of Grace or the revelation of the mystery committed to the Apostle Paul.
- The gospel accounts are essential to Paul’s message because they give us the historical basis for both the person and work of Christ.
- The important dispensation point to note is that all four of the gospels are concerned primarily with the message of the messianic kingdom.
- The differences between the four gospels are simply a matter of emphasis. It is the same Lord Jesus Christ in all, portrayed in His fourfold character in relationship to the long prophesied millennial kingdom.