

Jesus on the Move

SCOTT HOEZEE

As Bible readers, we may not always remember this, but scholars agree that although the Gospels come first in the New Testament, they were likely written later than the letters of Paul, Peter, and James and the rest. The stories of Jesus were told and preserved orally for a long time before, finally, four people set them into writing. We think that the first gospel to get written down was the Gospel of Mark. Mark is a fast-paced and highly dramatic gospel account; and today on *Groundwork*, we will begin digging into this wonderful book. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this program is now going to be the first in what will be a six-part series on the Gospel of Mark. We don't always do series on a whole gospel, but we are going to tackle that in this particular series. We will not be able to cover everything, but what we want to do is to pick up on some key themes and storytelling techniques that Mark has that emerge across the sixteen chapters of this gospel.

DAVE BAST

That is right; and we are very grateful to be joined in this series by Dr. Gary Burge of Calvin Theological Seminary. Gary, we are just delighted you have expertise in this particular area, and so, thank you for joining us.

GARY BURGE

Great; thanks, Scott and Dave; it is great to be with you guys, and I think this will be a great series. The Gospel of Mark is really an exciting book to read—to study, and I think it will be a fruitful time for us.

DAVE BAST

Well, maybe we could start there. We all have sort of a sense of what the Gospels are and how they were written, but there is overlap, there are differences between the four. What is it that makes Mark different or special?

GARY BURGE

Yes; well, one of the things about Mark's Gospel that scholars have studied throughout the years...and actually, a thorough study of the Gospels has only been going on for about 150 years...but Mark's Gospel is a shorter gospel than any of the other three. What is interesting about Mark's Gospel, though he is shorter, every single narrative...every episode in Mark's Gospel is *longer* than Matthew or Luke*, so he has fewer episodes, but each episode is given in more detail. That is fascinating. That is the first thing. The second thing that is unique about Mark's Gospel is that Mark actually has a pace that is inside of it. Mark's Gospel runs rapidly. All of these episodes inside of Mark's Gospel are stitched together with connecting adverbs: This happened immediately and then this happened next. Most of us think that Mark's Gospel was not written, actually, for us to read. Get this: In the ancient world, very few people had access to

a written copy of say Mark...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

GARY BURGE

Inside of the Church; and actually, very few people could have read the thing as easily as you and I read. So, we think Mark's Gospel probably was a dramatic piece that was given orally; and if you ever are strong enough to memorize all of Mark's Gospel and you can present it on a stage theatrically, you would see the drama that is there.

DAVE BAST

You know, I actually have seen that...

GARY BURGE

Have you?

DAVE BAST

Because I went to a...I remember a performance in the 1970s of a British actor who simply recited the Gospel of Mark, and it was thrilling...it was amazing.

GARY BURGE

Yes; it is actually sort of shocking. John's gospel works in the very same way; but Mark's...you know, the idea is that the drama builds and builds and builds, you know; and the hero of the story, you think he is going to do well, and then suddenly the world turns against him. He is killed, and then you are left with this dramatic ending. So, you know, at the very end of Mark's Gospel, you are wondering: Wait, was he raised? Did he come back to life, like he said he would? So, you have this dramatic conclusion leading people to ask questions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and we said at the top of the program, Gary and Dave, that many scholars...you don't find agreement on almost anything among all scholars...but many scholars go for what they call the priority of Mark. They do kind of think Mark was written first; and one of the reasons we think that is that except for only thirty-one verses, the whole Gospel of Mark is found in Matthew, Luke, or both...

GARY BURGE

Right...that's right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we think Matthew and Luke had access to Mark, and used Mark as some source material. They had further source material, each of them, but we think that they probably used Mark; but as you were saying, Gary, one of the characteristics of Mark is that everything happens immediately—very, very fast—very, very quickly—is the Greek adverb *euthys*, and it happens in Chapter 1 alone. *Euthys* comes up in verses 10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, 42, 43—ten times in twenty-five verses...every other verse something happens right away...immediately; and Mark just launches us right in. In fact, Mark doesn't give us a Christmas story, he doesn't give us any background on Jesus, he kind of just jumps right in.

GARY BURGE

Yes, he does; yes, exactly; and that is sort of the tone of Mark. It sort of gives a dramatic development, but that tone—that pace—actually is concentrated in the first half of Mark's Gospel. In fact, let me talk for a minute about how Mark designs the overall package of the gospel. Most of us think about these gospels as if their authors just had all of these stories laying on the desk, and then they picked them up and knitted them together and that was the story. Really, in fact, we have to think about Mark...and Matthew, Luke, and

John...but Mark as a theologian. So, when these gospel writers designed these stories, they were actually doing something intensely theological. Mark wants to carry you from A to B, and he has a strategy in the development of the story. So, Mark's Gospel has two halves, and the turning point of Mark's Gospel is Peter's confession of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi. So, when you think about Mark, think of 1 through 8...half of 8, actually...and then the second half of 8 all the way to 16. So, therefore, this *euthys*—this *immediately*—this pace...this fast pace...is in the first half of the gospel, and you see Jesus moving through the public, and you see episode after episode where people are testing him, where he is being disclosed to the public, and then at last you come to the conversation with Peter, and then you have a brand new disclosure about Jesus' Messianic mission.

So, Mark has a very carefully drawn out literary plan; and if you see the larger plan, then suddenly all of the bits come together nicely and fit.

DAVE BAST

Well, let's start with the very opening of the Gospel: Chapter 1:1, which goes this way: The beginning of the Good News about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, ²as it is written in Isaiah the Prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you (and then that quote from Isaiah 40 that points to John the Baptist); ⁴and then John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So, what is that deal with the beginning there, Gary? Why does Mark say: The beginning of the Gospel? He doesn't say the beginning of the book of Mark...

GARY BURGE

No...

DAVE BAST

He says: The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus.

GARY BURGE

Right; well, the first thing to do is pick up on the use of the word *gospel*. This word *gospel*...*euangelion*...means a great announcement...some good news. It is used commonly inside of the Roman Empire for any kind of public proclamation; but it is a celebratory proclamation. That is what it always is. Maybe the birthday of the emperor. So, therefore, what the early Christians believed is this: that an era had shifted. In other words, history had turned a corner with the arrival of the Messiah. So, the Good News is that history as we have known it and had it described in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, *that* history now is changing because Messiah has arrived. So, I think what Mark is saying is that I am about to tell you this is the beginning of how we witnessed the change of eras...the change...the epic, which is now the Messianic epic that we now live in. So, I think for me it is not just the beginning of Mark's Gospel, his is the beginning of how all things are different.

DAVE BAST

Almost like the dawning of a new era...

GARY BURGE

Yes, that's right; that's right.

DAVE BAST

We could almost translate that word *dawning*.

GARY BURGE

Yes, exactly. That would be a good way to do it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there are debates about, you know, well, how much of this is the beginning of the Good News? Just the first chapter? The first two chapters? Or maybe the whole book is just the beginning. We will actually return

to that in the last episode in this six-part series; but one thing I think we want to say: That structure of Mark...and as you said, Gary, it is very theological, and we could treat this as very academic, but we are going to say before this program is out that there is a message contained in that fast-paced drama...a message of encouragement; and I think as readers of Mark, even in the Church yet today, I think we will be able to see why this is meant to be encouraging. But in any event, Mark is moving fast. In just eight verses we already have John the Baptist introduced. In the 9th verse already we are going to get to Jesus already; and we will pick that up in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and today our special guest is Dr. Gary Burge of Calvin Theological Seminary, whose specialty is New Testament, specifically the Gospels, and even more specifically, the Gospel of Mark. So, we are especially glad, Gary, that you are able to join us as we work through this gospel.

GARY BURGE

Right; thanks, Dave. It is great to join both of you guys.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Let's get right back now to Mark 1. We saw that it takes Mark all of eight verses to get John the Baptist front and center already; and now we pick it up at Mark 1:9:

At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus (or, it actually says "immediately") as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased." ¹²At once, (or again that is that "immediately") the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

DAVE BAST

So, it is especially interesting, Gary, I think, to compare this part of the Gospel of Mark with Matthew, for example, or Luke, for that matter, because Mark just jumps right into it in just a handful of verses, where Matthew takes up whole chapters, as well as Luke, before they get into this story of Jesus and his temptation in the wilderness.

GARY BURGE

Oh, yes; I mean, you look at Matthew and Luke and you have genealogies in there, you have birth stories in there; so, I mean, it really does. They've got a lot of material they want to cover, but one of Mark's strategies is to write something shorter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Where Matthew and Luke devote whole chapters to Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, Mark gives us five verses and gets the whole story told that way; but, Gary, it is really interesting that Jesus gets baptized, the Spirit descends on him; it looks, you know, wonderful and great. How great to be affirmed by God the Father; except, no sooner is he affirmed as the beloved Son of God, with whom he [God] is well pleased; but then the Spirit...it was a dove...now it seems to transform into kind of like a big hawk with sharp talons and picks Jesus up, and in the literal Greek, it hurls him...*ekballei*...it throws Jesus into the wilderness...

GARY BURGE

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Into this dangerous place. Why did Jesus have to go to the wilderness first? Maybe talk a little bit about what is wilderness in the Bible?

GARY BURGE

Yes; Scott, that is the most colorful image I have ever seen of Jesus being thrown out by hawk talons into the wilderness, but I like it. That is the right idea. This section of Mark's Gospel is just congested with ideas—with images, so much that come out of the Old Testament. So, the first idea is that Jesus is in the Jordan River; and when anyone in the Jewish world of the 1st Century thought about that, they would think: Well, who is Jesus? Actually, his name in Hebrew is Yeshua—Joshua—and so therefore, he is moving from the eastern deserts, across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land; and if you know your Old Testament, of course you are going to say: Well, didn't Joshua do that? Exactly. So therefore, many people have looked at this story to say, well, what you have is Jesus embodying a new history for Israel, and now he is bringing Israel in his own life and following all the way back into the Promised Land so that there will be a new life for Israel inaugurated here at the Jordan.

DAVE BAST

But, first he has to replicate, you might say, Israel's wilderness experience...

GARY BURGE

That is right exactly.

DAVE BAST

At the time and place of testing.

Gary Burge: Exactly; so therefore, what you have is Jesus not only replicating Joshua right there, going through the river, but also by going into the wilderness for forty days that is a deep echo of a motif that you have inside of the Old Testament. The idea is this: Every godly man or woman is going to go through the wilderness if he or she is going to discover what is truly in their hearts. In other words, the wilderness is there for testing—it is there to locate what is central to your faith and your identity.

So therefore, if you look at the story of Abraham, for instance, he...between Israel and Egypt, he is in the wilderness. You look at the story of Jacob and Esau, they are out in the eastern deserts. John the Baptist, of course, is in the desert. Paul the Apostle after his conversion spends years out in the Arabian Desert. The principle there is always sustained. God always draws his people out of the city into the desert. The desert almost becomes a metaphor for how your faith is going to be forged, or how your faith is going to be tested under duress.

So, that is what happens with Israel when they come out of Egypt...the very same thing. Forty years they are in the desert; so here Jesus is in the desert for forty days. So, Jesus is fulfilling, you might say, a motif that is deep into the heart of Israel's understanding of its own self.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, the wilderness, of course...part of the reason it is a place of testing is it's a dangerous place...

GARY BURGE

It is, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a place of death...it is a place of the opposites...

DAVE BAST

Fiery serpents.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; if God in the beginning created a cosmos, when sin came we had chaos...

GARY BURGE

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But where Jesus goes, cosmos follows in his wake; and so, although Jesus is in this dangerous place...there are wild animals there, Mark says...

GARY BURGE

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But all Mark says is he was with them, and angels attended him; and by just that very simple description, Mark is sort of also harking back to all the prophets who said that the day would come when the wilderness would bloom and it would become a verdant place; and shalom would come to the wilderness; the peaceable kingdom that Isaiah talks about. Just by sounding a couple of those little notes, Mark sort of says: You see? Jesus is bringing shalom in his wake.

GARY BURGE

Yes; that is true. The other motif of the wilderness is that God doesn't just send you to the wilderness and abandon you there. Remember the story of the Israelites. They were *led* through the wilderness.

DAVE BAST

Right.

GARY BURGE

So therefore, God accompanies you in the wilderness. The tabernacle traveled with them in the wilderness. So, here you have the very same idea. Jesus is not abandoned...left on his own for forty days...but God is with him throughout.

DAVE BAST

That has become commonplace for the Christian life, hasn't it? I mean, we picked up on these biblical themes and overtones, and the journey through the wilderness. It makes me think of the beginning of Pilgrim's Progress: As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I chanced upon a den; referring to his prison cell, where he wrote that book.

So anyway, Jesus overcomes Satan in the wilderness and he comes back...and we get another *immediately* from Mark:

^{1:14}After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God. ¹⁵“The time has come,” he said, “the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the Good News.”

So, here is the launching of his public ministry.

GARY BURGE

Right, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in short order, typical of Mark, we are going to see some amazing things happening in Jesus' ministry in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2; and we will look at that as we conclude the program in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

GARY BURGE

And I am Gary Burge.

DAVE BAST

And Gary, we just talked about the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, and how he shows up and announces the kingdom of God—the great theme, really, of his teaching and preaching; but here is a little anecdote that we get to early on in Mark, where Mark is describing the reaction to Jesus' teaching in Capernaum in Galilee. ²⁷The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching, and with authority. He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him;" ²⁸and news about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

That theme of Jesus' unusual authority, which so struck his hearers...what is going on with that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; what made Jesus stand out in their minds from the other, usual rabbis or Pharisees or chief priests?

GARY BURGE

Right, exactly; when we think about authority as Westerners, generally we have two ideas in mind. One is, we think about what is called charismatic authority, where the force of my personality is going to win the day. The other is what we talk about as positional authority. I am the president of this company, and therefore, you have got to listen to me. So, I hold that position. You lose the position, you lose your authority; but this third idea...this is an important Jewish concept of authority. Authority is something which is given to you by someone else. So therefore, if you happen to be a rabbi, the question is, well who passed on the ability—the authority to speak on behalf of God concerning, say, the scripture? That is why Paul, for instance, has to explain his own right to teach by referring back to Gamaliel, who taught him. So, there is always someone behind you who is speaking through you, you might say.

In Judaism, the authority that you bear as a Jewish teacher is something that has been handed on to you...

DAVE BAST

Conferred on you...

GARY BURGE

Conferred on you...that was the word I was reaching for. So therefore, when they listen to Jesus, they probably say to themselves: Oh, well; what we are hearing here is a voice that is coming to us, not as a common voice, not necessarily as a positional voice or a charismatic voice...although I think Jesus was an effective teacher...but instead, that he is bearing something that is coming from our God—from our traditions—and that is why he is asked throughout his ministry: Where did this authority come from? Did it come from a rabbi, who authorized you to say these things? And Jesus' answer consistently is that he has come from God. God has ordained him. Now, in Judaism, there is only one other person who has that kind of authority, and it is Moses. Moses goes up on Mount Sinai, and God commissions him to speak authoritatively to the people. Jesus likewise then has been commissioned and ordained, and received this authority to do the very same thing.

DAVE BAST

Greater than Moses, as the Gospels call him.

GARY BURGE

Which is why, throughout the Gospels Jesus and Moses are always compared.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as we close out this program, I think...so, we have been seeing that Mark is dramatic; it is fast-paced; now we see this authority of Jesus...why, you almost would have to be God himself to have that kind of authority...and well, he was; but we can talk a little bit in the end here as to why is this important to us even today—why was it important then? Some scholars think that by the time Mark wrote down his gospel it could be that the Church—the early Church in the late 1st Century—was persecuted, and was maybe feeling discouraged; or maybe they had gotten a little apathetic even; and so, Mark writes this gospel to shake them up...to remind them of who it is they serve...who it is they worship in the Church. This Jesus has the authority of God; this Jesus had power to drive out demons; this Jesus, you know, hit the ground running like a rocket; don't forget; don't be discouraged; don't be apathetic or lethargic; be excited about the Jesus we serve. I think that is one of the things Mark may be doing here, and I think in the Church today, when we feel discouraged...when we forget how powerful our Savior is...Mark can do that for us as well.

GARY BURGE

Yes, and it also reminds us, too, that Jesus has capacity to speak into our lives authoritatively. When you are reading the Gospels and you are hearing Jesus speak to his audiences, you are not just hearing one more Jewish man 2,000 years ago give his opinion about something. Jesus is a vessel, and he is actually then bringing us the voice of God; which really underscores the power and importance of Jesus' word for us in the Gospels.

DAVE BAST

Yes, this idea that he is a second, greater Moses. Moses himself prophesied that such a prophet would arise, didn't he?

Gary Burge: He did; in Deuteronomy 18.

DAVE BAST

And Jesus is certainly indicative that that prophecy was fulfilled. I mean, I love...especially Deuteronomy, the way it interacts with Jesus' life and ministry. We think of him quoting it in the wilderness repeatedly...

GARY BURGE

That is right; yes.

DAVE BAST

And this authority that derives, not from any human teacher, or not from any line of tradition or rabbinic school, but directly from God. Jesus is the one who has come to teach us.

GARY BURGE

One of the interesting things, Dave, about Deuteronomy and say, the Gospels and the temptation story is this: In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses has to explain to the Israelites why God took them through the desert; and so therefore, what you have in Deuteronomy 6 through 10 is Moses' explanation for why the desert; and therefore, one of the keys for succeeding if you are in the wilderness...when Jesus is tested in his own wilderness experience, and he quotes from scripture in order to counter some of Satan's temptations, guess what? He quotes from Deuteronomy 6 through 10. It is what we could call the wilderness handbook, and Jesus knows it well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Mark reveals Jesus on the move; and thanks be to God, we know that by his Spirit this same Jesus is powerfully on the move in the Church today as well; and we give God our thanks for that.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and our guest today, Dr. Gary Burge. We hope you will join us again next time as we examine the recurring thread of stories in Mark that show Jesus being rejected by the very people who should have recognized him.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, to share what *Groundwork* means to you; or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

* Correction: This corrects a misspoken sentence when Dr. Burge mistakenly says “Mark” again, instead of “Matthew and Luke.”

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