



MARK'S GOSPEL – A PLAY IN THREE ACTS?

Prologue (1:1–1:15)

Act I Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (1:16–8:21)

Act II Jesus on the Way (8:22–10:52)

Act III Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem (11:1–15:47)

Epilogue (16:1–8)

(Scholars feel convinced that the final verses of the gospel, Mark 16:9–20 are an addition by another hand.)

Prologue (1:1–1:15)

The prologue proclaims the nature of the whole gospel. Then John the Baptist takes centre stage to announce and introduce the central character, Jesus. Mark sets up his story so that we, the privileged audience who know who Jesus is because we have

- read the prologue,
- listened to John's testimony,
- seen the heavens torn open,
- heard the voice of God proclaim Jesus as Beloved Son,

can test and explore our own responses to him as we watch his story unfold.

Act I: Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (1:16–8:21)

In this act we are immediately plunged into the action. We get a chance to see and hear what Jesus is about by watching him interact with a vast array of characters from all walks of life. We see that, despite the healing and wholeness he brings, conflict and rejection erupt wherever he goes. perhaps because he so explicitly challenges the various manifestations of evil in his world.

Some characters have cameo roles – they play their part and withdraw from the story – while others have more on-going roles. The disciples of Jesus are a particularly significant group. Despite the fact that Jesus chooses them as his own intimate friends, Mark portrays them as consistently failing to understand him and his teachings; in the heart-rending denouement of the 'play' they betray, deny and abandon him utterly. An article entitled [Why is Mark so hard on the disciples?](#) suggests reasons for Mark's especially severe portrait of Jesus' disciples. Don't be put off by the occasional Greek expressions.

Act II: Jesus on the way (8:22–10:52)

In this act we see Jesus teaching and forming the captivated but non-comprehending disciples. An important feature of this section of the gospel is Jesus' three predictions of his passion and death.



Following on from Peter's pivotal recognition of him as the Christ, Jesus tries to instruct his disciples about the role of the Christ and the implications of discipleship. But they do not want to hear:

- [Mark 8:31–35](#) Peter rejects the idea of suffering and death with horror, leading to a strong rebuke from Jesus;
- [Mark 9:30–34](#) The disciples are speechless and change the subject to the much more congenial one of deciding which of them is greatest;
- [Mark 10:32–45](#) His disciples are so non-plussed that they completely ignore his words and Mark has them lapse into childish competitiveness.

An article entitled [Mark the Movie](#) shows how this last of the predictions Mark 10:32–45 is like a microcosm of the whole gospel (or as the writer puts it 'like a trailer for a movie').

Act III: The Ministry in Jerusalem (11:1–15:47)

Jerusalem is in sight and the climactic moments of Jesus' life are approaching. He enters the city to acclamation and praise paralleling the initial responses in Galilee but the pattern of confrontation and conflict with the religious leaders soon erupts again.

He withdraws with his disciples to the Mount of Olives and sitting facing the temple speaks to them of the tribulations that lie ahead for them, for Jerusalem and for the world. This is often referred to as the [eschatological discourse](#). Jesus speaks in figurative language about the last or end times, warning and encouraging his disciples.

With the opening of Chapter 14, the narrative of the passion begins. [Donald Senior's commentary](#) draws attention to the particular way Mark presents the suffering, and death of Jesus. It is an especially [prominent motif](#) in Mark's Gospel which has often been described as 'a passion narrative with a long introduction'. The theme of suffering in this gospel is further explored in [The Gospel of Mark – a Gospel of Suffering](#). As Jesus dies, the Temple veil is torn apart just as the heavens were rent at his baptism in the Jordan.

Epilogue (Mark 16:1–8)

Jesus speaks no more in Mark. The gospel ends on an uncertain note with the women fleeing in fear from the empty tomb where they have encountered a young man who tells them that Jesus is risen and will go before his disciples into Galilee. According to Mark, they say nothing.

Will the story of Jesus be told and who will tell it?

As Fr Frank Moloney puts it "The Church will spring to life not because of the virtue of the disciples, but because of the action of God." The existence of Mark's gospel is one of the proofs that the Church did indeed spring to life despite the failings of Jesus' disciples. The final act of Mark's gospel is being played out still in the life of the Church and in the individual lives of believers despite their continuing flaws and failings.

Catherine Place