



THE BOOK OF MARK

Chapter I

MARK 1:21-45

MATTHEW 4:23-25

LUKE 4:31-44

Mark relates the life of Christ largely in chronological order, rather than topically as Matthew does. His emphasis on miracles makes apparent his purpose to highlight the mighty power of God as evidenced by the many “signs” and “wonders” performed by Jesus. This is Mark’s primary testimony to the divinity of Jesus, as that of Matthew is the fact that He fulfilled the predictions of the prophets of old. Matthew proves Jesus the Messiah on the basis that He is the One to whom the prophets bore witness. Mark proves Him the Messiah by the witness of His divine power. (*SDA BC*)

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. (John 18:20)



A synagogue could be founded by ten adult males. At one time there were 12 synagogues in Tiberias, and, according to tradition, there were supposedly 480 in Jerusalem. Although this number is greatly exaggerated and unreliable, it does suggest a large number of synagogues in Jerusalem. Men and women worshipped at the synagogue (Luke 13:10–11).

The synagogue, literally, the “assembly” or meeting place, was a focal point of Jewish community life, and most communities had a synagogue. One was to be established wherever there were ten adult males, and these ten became its first “rulers.” (*SDA BC*, vol. 5, slight edits)

The Jewish synagogue helped to preserve the religion, culture, and other aspects of life for the Jewish people. The synagogue was never a place of sacrifice like the Temple at Jerusalem. Services were held there each Sabbath, at which the reading and teaching of the Law and the Prophets was the center of attention. During the week the synagogue also often served as a law court (see Mark 13:9), and generally as a school. It was an essential place for scriptural instruction and for prayer. (Ibid.)

But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. (Mark 13:9)

The priests were not directly connected with the administration of the synagogues, for there were no sacrifices, though they were often invited to participate in the services. The affairs of each synagogue and of the community attached to it were under the supervision of a board of elders (see Luke 7:3–5), or rulers (see Mark 5:22). The chief officer, the ruler of the synagogue (see Luke 8:49; 13:14), presided at the services or arranged for others to do so, and appointed suitable men from the congregation to pray, to read the Scriptures, and to exhort the congregation. There was no clergy to do this. There was at least one officer—equivalent to a deacon in the Christian church—who cared for duties, such as taking the rolls of the Law and the Prophets from the ark and replacing them, and inflicting corporal punishment decided upon by the elders. (Ibid.)

Each synagogue was rectangular in shape, with its main entrance at the southern end. The more wealthy congregations decorated their synagogues, such as a scroll of vine leaves with grapes, the seven-branched candlestick, a paschal lamb, the pot of manna, and other objects and scenes from the Old Testament. The main room of the synagogue was provided with a reading desk, a seat for the teacher, and a chest, or ark, that contained the rolls of the Law and the Prophets. There were seats, or benches, at least for the wealthier members of the congregation (see James 2:2, 3), those in the front near the reader's desk being considered the "chief seats" (Matt. 23:6). (Ibid.)

Attendance was required on Sabbaths and feast days,
and this outline is probably close to the order of service
in the synagogue as Jesus and the apostles knew it.

(Ibid.)

Firstly, **recitation in unison of the *shema***—a confession of faith chiefly from such passages as Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num. 15:37–41, before and after which a member of the congregation stood before the ark of the Law to offer, on the Sabbath, a sevenfold prayer (18 parts on other days), each part of which was confirmed by the “Amen!” of the congregation.

Between the sixth and seventh parts of this prayer, priests, if present, ascended the platform of the ark, lifted their hands, and pronounced in unison the Aaronic blessing, from Lev. 9:22—And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them—and Num. 6:23–27. (Ibid.)

Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them. (Numbers 6:23–27)

Then there was the **reading of the appointed section of the Law** (see Acts 13:15). Reverence for the Law required that the scroll be unrolled behind a curtain, out of sight of the congregation. The Law—the five books of Moses—was read through in a three-year cycle, with a definite portion assigned for each Sabbath. Each of those portions was divided into seven parts of at least three verses each. A different member of the congregation was called upon to read each of these subdivisions. Anyone who made the least mistake was immediately replaced by someone else. The reading of the Law was translated verse by verse from Hebrew into Aramaic, the language of the common people (Neh. 8:1–8; Rosh Hashanah, sounding of the shofar, and 10 days later was Yom Kippur), by another person, to avoid the possibility that the translation should be mistaken for the actual text of the Scriptures. (Ibid.)

And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, *Ye men and* brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

(Acts 13:15)

Then a **reading from the Prophets**. The scroll of the Prophets was probably handed to the one appointed to read, and he chose the passage to be read. It was this part of the service in which Jesus participated in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–22), and using a reading from Isa. 61, he declared to the people his mission and its prophetic authorization. This reading from the prophets and the remarks and exhortation by the reader started the closing part of the service. (Ibid.)

Added to this reading of the prophets was an **investigation or a study usually given by the member who had read from the prophets**. Like the readers of the Law, the one who read from the prophets remained standing while he read, but for the sermon he sat down (Luke 4:20, 21). It was customary in Palestine to sit down to preach. The sermon was usually based on the reading from the Prophets, but might also include that from the Law. In these discussions upon the prophetic messages, the speaker's imagination often went far afield, through paraphrase, parable, or legend, in emphasizing what he understood the prophetic message to be. Visitors were often honored by being invited to deliver the discourse. Of this privilege Paul more than once availed himself (Acts 13:14–16; 14:1; 17:1, 10; 18:4; 19:8). (Ibid.)

There were Jewish synagogues in Alexandria, in Antioch of Syria, in Rome, and evidently in virtually every other city of the empire, for Paul found them not only in such major places as Corinth, Ephesus, and Thessalonica, but also at Salamis in Cyprus, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Berea in Greece, and doubtless many other places not named.

It can be readily understood what a potent force the synagogue service exerted upon the Jewish people, with its emphasis upon law, duty, and spiritual hope and aspiration. Emphasis upon Torah, the revealed will of God (see on Deut. 31:9; Ps. 19:7), gave to the Jews an ethical tone that made them outstanding among the peoples of the Roman Empire.

(Ibid.)

Jesus taught in synagogues, customarily attended synagogue gatherings (Luke 4:16), performed healings in synagogues (Mark 1:21–28; Mark 3:1–6; Luke 13:10–17), and discussed and debated the interpretation and practice of Jewish law in synagogues (Mark 3:1–6; Luke 13:14–17; John 6:30–59).

A small agricultural village with a population of just over 100 had a synagogue, and a small, rural farmstead in Galilee also had a synagogue. Larger towns of about 400 people had synagogues, and even larger synagogues in Jerusalem offered accommodations, including a water source, for pilgrims.

Thus, synagogues, in general, were gathering places for teaching, for legal affairs to be settled, for secular meetings, as well as for religious worship. One building did not officiate both as a political building for the community and as a Jewish meeting place. Secularly speaking, there were buildings, like town halls, to conduct the affairs of state, and religiously speaking, there were Jewish synagogues to worship in, to hold schools for the children in when not used for worship services, and to even hold judicial meetings and councils concerning matters of faith. These religious synagogues were public buildings for the most part, but there could also be private Jewish synagogues, as we read in Acts 6:9.

Jesus' words, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together" (John 18:20), show us the synagogues he visited were public places, and the description in Luke 7:5 of Capernaum's synagogue implies that it belonged to the people.

The lengthy back-and-forth discussion between Jesus and the people at the synagogue in Capernaum, recorded in John 6:25–59, and the debate between Jesus and a synagogue official in Luke 13:10–17 over the legality of healing on the Sabbath day demonstrate how the synagogues were used. Jesus answered the official's challenge with a compelling reply, so that his opponents were put to shame and the crowd rejoiced at his deeds, indicating that the public was persuaded by Jesus' response.

And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. (Mark 1:22)

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes. (Matthew 7:28–29)

And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. (Luke 4:32)

And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? (Luke 4:22)

The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. (John 7:46)

Never before had angels listened to such a prayer as Christ offered
at his baptism . . . (*2SP* 60.2)

After Christ rose up from the water and from the hand of John, he walked out to the bank of Jordan, and bowed in the attitude of prayer. The eyes of John were fastened upon Christ with the deepest interest and amazement. His heart was stirred with emotion as he looked upon him thus bowed as a suppliant. Christ's hands were raised upward, and his gaze seemed to penetrate Heaven. As the believer's example, his sinless humanity **suppliated support and strength from his Heavenly Father**, as he was about to commence his public labors as the Messiah. Jesus poured out his soul in earnest prayer. A new and important era was opening before him. His former peaceful, quiet life is to here end. He had been happy in a life of industry and toil, while fulfilling the duties devolving on a son. He was an example to those in childhood, youth, and manhood. His **deportment** showed that he felt the importance and solemnity of the hour. He knew that trials, toils, conflicts, sufferings, and death, were in the path his feet had entered. He felt the weight of the responsibilities he must bear. He was about to engage in new and arduous duties. A sense of the sinfulness of men, and the hardness of their hearts, which separated them from God, convinced him that but few would discern his merciful mission, and accept the salvation he came from Heaven to bring them. (2SP 60.1)

Never before had angels listened to such a prayer as Christ offered at his baptism, and **they were solicitous to be the bearers of the message from the Father to his Son.** But, no; direct from the Father issues the light of his glory. The heavens were opened, and beams of glory rested upon the Son of God, and assumed the form of a dove, in appearance like burnished gold. The dove-like form was emblematical of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. While the people stood spell-bound with amazement, their eyes fastened upon Christ, from the opening heavens came these words: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” The words of confirmation that Christ is the Son of God was given **to inspire faith in those who witnessed the scene, and to sustain the Son of God in his arduous work.** Notwithstanding the Son of God was clothed with humanity, yet Jehovah, with his own voice, assures him of his sonship with the Eternal. In this manifestation to his Son, God accepts humanity as exalted through the excellence of his beloved Son. (2SP 60.2)

When Christ presented himself for baptism, John recognized him at once as the superior one revealed to him. He discerned, in the **person** and **deportment** of Christ, a character above every other man he had ever seen. The very atmosphere of his presence was holy and awe-inspiring. Although he knew him not as the Messiah, yet never had such a holy influence been realized by John from any one as when in the presence of Christ. He felt the superiority of Christ at once . . .

(2SP 58.2)

Christ virtually says, On the bank of Jordan the heavens were opened before me, and the Spirit descended like a dove upon me. That scene at Jordan was but a token to evidence that I was the Son of God. If you believe in me as such, your faith shall be quickened, and you shall see that the heavens will be opened, and shall never be closed. I have opened them for you, and the angels of God, that are united with me in the reconciliation between earth and Heaven, uniting the believers on the earth with the Father above, will be ascending, bearing the prayers of the needy and distressed from the earth to the Father above, and descending, bringing blessings of hope, courage, health, and life, for the children of men. (*2SP* 67.1)

Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And **straightway** they forsook their nets, and followed him. And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And **straightway** he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him. (Mark 1:16–20)

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. (John 16:2)

But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.
(Mark 13:9)

But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; (Matthew 10:17)

And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and *unto* magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say. (Luke 12:11–12)

Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted *them* even unto strange cities.

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* (Acts 26:10–14)

Herod was affected as he listened to the pointed testimony of John, and, with deep interest, he inquired what he must do to become his disciple. He was convicted by the plain truths uttered by John. His conscience condemned him, for a woman of vile passions had gained his affections and controlled his mind. This unprincipled woman was ambitious for power and authority, and thought if she became the wife of Herod her object would be gained. As Herod listened to the practical truths proclaimed by John, reproving the transgression of the law of God, and setting forth the future punishment which the guilty must suffer, he trembled, and greatly desired to break the chain of lust which held him. He opened his mind to John, who brought Herod to the **law of God**, face to face, and told him it would be **impossible for him** to have part in the kingdom of the Messiah unless he should **break away from the unlawful** connections with his brother's wife, and, with his whole heart, **obey** the commandments of God. (2SP 69.2)

Mark 1:21-45

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