

The Gospel of Mark: Keys to Health

Background: An Approach to Bible Study

The Bible does not claim to be dictated by God. Instead, the scriptures indicate that God moved on men through His Holy Spirit and they then wrote from the perspective of their own individuality. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is promised to enlighten sincere students of the Bible, giving them insights, which will no doubt be influenced by their own individuality and needs. In short, the Holy Spirit guided the Bible writers and He wants to guide us as we study. Consider the following points as illustrated by Scripture:

- The Holy Spirit, working upon the human agent, is the source of the scriptures, “for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” 2 Peter 1: 21 (New American Standard Bible [NASB])
- The Holy Spirit will guide us individually into the truth of the Bible “when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” (John 16:13, King James Version [KJV])
- Without the Holy Spirit’s guidance we are in danger of twisting the scriptures to our own destruction. Peter wrote of how individuals in his day had done just that with the writings of Paul: “count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:15–18, English Standard Version [ESV])

Application: just because someone is quoting from the Bible does not mean he or she is speaking from God.

An Overview of the Gospels

When the Holy Spirit moved on the four gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), their personalities and experience influenced how they described what the Holy Spirit impressed them with. To understand the profound health applications of the gospel of Mark, we must understand who Mark was. However, before turning to Mark’s gospel, it is helpful to see examples of this dynamic in the three other Bible writers who told the story of Jesus.

Who was Matthew?

- The following passage reveals that Matthew worked as a publican or tax collector—as well as the disdain with which the Jews regarded his profession: “And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they

said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?"
Matthew 9:9-11, KJV

- Matthew's gospel was influenced by his background. This gospel writer appeared to be profoundly impressed by how God's love reached down to social outcasts like him and offered them a place in His kingdom.
- An example of this influence is seen in the first verses of the Gospel of Matthew when he provides the Bible's most unusual genealogy. Whereas typical Hebrew genealogies only mentioned the male lineage, Matthew lists four women—all of whom were social outcasts: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah..." (Matthew 1:1–6, ESV). Realize the following:
 - Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute to have relations with her father-in-law, Judah; thus were born Perez and Zerah. (See Genesis 38:1-30)
 - Rahab was a prostitute (e.g., see Joshua 2:1-15)
 - Ruth was from Moab, a nation at enmity with God's people and despised by the Jews (e.g., see Deuteronomy 23:3-4)
 - Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, was an adulteress (e.g., see 2 Samuel 11:1-5)

Who Was John?

- A Son of Thunder. This appellation applied by Jesus (see Mark 3:17) indicated that John and his brother James, had fiery tempers. Examples of their temper, ambition, and/or desire for revenge are seen in the following passages:
 - In Luke 9:51–56 James and John want to call fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans for their refusal to receive Jesus.
 - In Matthew 20:20-28, James and John want Jesus to give them the highest positions in His kingdom, exciting the indignation of the other ten disciples.
 - In Mark 9:38-39, John condemned a man who was not an acknowledged follower of Jesus because he was healing in Jesus' name.
- In spite of these deficiencies in John's character, Jesus kept on loving him (John 21:20). It was this love that apparently transformed John's life. Consequently when he wrote the story of Jesus, he gave us the gospel of love. In John's gospel we see how Jesus was everything to this disciple. In the very first chapter of John, Jesus is presented as life, light, grace, and truth.

Who was Luke?

- Luke was a medical doctor who accompanied Paul on many of his missionary journeys
 - see Colossians 4:14 where Luke is referred to as "the beloved physician"
 - in Acts, a book written by Luke, we find a fascinating insight into where Luke joined up with Paul's missionary team. Luke begins Acts 16 writing in the 3rd

person speaking of “they” and “them.” By the time we reach Acts 16:10, Luke is speaking of “we.” He apparently joined Paul in Troas.

- Why not study Luke, a physician, if we want to look at health insights from the story of Jesus’ life? Although unique medical details emerge in Luke’s gospel, from the outset of his book you see that his purpose is not specifically to write his gospel from a health angle. Instead Luke writes the story of Jesus for non-Jews with a physician’s slant; namely, helping them see all the facts that “clinch the diagnosis” that Jesus is the Messiah.

Who Was the Writer of the Gospel of Mark?

Perhaps no one draws us into a study of the health aspects of the story of Jesus’ life—especially as they relate to social support—than Mark. The social aspects of the early Christian church are inextricably woven around the man often referred to as John Mark.

1. John Mark was a witness to the early church meeting in his home...
 - In the context of Peter’s miraculous release from prison we read in Acts 12:12 “When he [Peter] realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying” (ESV).
 - Note: some translations read, “John whose surname was Mark”. However, the Greek *epikaleo* translated “surname” does not connote one’s last name as we think of it. (Compare Acts 11:13, “Simon whose surname was Peter.”)
 - How often was the church meeting in the days of Mark?
Acts 2:46-47 tells us: “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”
2. Tradition says John Mark fled from Jesus at Gethsemane. Mark 14:51
3. John Mark was associated with some of the first Christian missionaries. Acts 12:25, Acts 13:5
 - However, John Mark “failed,” leaving Paul’s missionary team... Acts 13:13
 - Ultimately, John Mark was the cause of division between Saul and Barnabas [the latter’s name meaning literally, “son of rest” or “son of encouragement”—Acts 4:36-37]. See Acts 15:38 where we read Paul’s estimation of John Mark’s earlier desertion saying he “had *apostanta* [in essence, *apostatized*] from them.”
 - Note: John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10)
4. A happy ending to his social relationships
 - John Mark was later “useful” to Paul. 2 Timothy 4:11.
 - John Mark was later described as the “son” of Peter. 1 Peter 5:13.