



Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel

Volume 17 | Number 2

Article 5

2016

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"Mark's Unique Contribution." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 17, no. 2 (2016): 56-85.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol17/iss2/5>

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Mark's Unique Contribution

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The influential Christian scholar Augustine (AD 354–430) championed the position that the Gospel of Mark was an abbreviated version of the Gospel of Matthew. Thus, Mark was thought to have nothing unique to offer the reader, and so his Gospel was neglected for centuries. In fact, the first full-length commentary on Mark didn't appear until the seventh century, and Mark was only sparsely commented on until the nineteenth century. Then, scholars theorized that Mark's was actually the first Gospel written and one of the main sources for Matthew and Luke; this belief that Mark was the oldest Gospel—and therefore the record closest to the life of Jesus Christ—created a frenzy of interest in the text that has not abated to this day. Scholars have closely analyzed it and have discovered many aspects that differ greatly from the other three Gospels. Latter-day Saint scholar Roger R. Keller compared the Gospels to “facets of a diamond,”¹ and that metaphor is most appropriate: each Gospel reflects different aspects of Jesus' life. The purpose of this study is to explore the distinctive aspects of the Gospel of Mark. My goal is to spark interest in Mark's Gospel among LDS scholars and teachers for its unique witness of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Writing Style

Although not always apparent in English translation or to the casual reader, there are many

features of Mark's writing style that are not as common in (or are completely absent from) the other Gospels. Many of these features show more affinity to the spoken word than the written word, perhaps indicating that Mark's Gospel was primarily an oral composition (more on this hereafter). The distinctive aspects of Mark's writing style include the following:

1. Mark uses Aramaic words and phrases² with disproportionate frequency relative to the length of the Gospel.³ There are differing theories as to why Mark included the Aramaic words in the Gospel. Since Jesus spoke in Aramaic, everything he said could have been presented in this Gospel in Aramaic; so why were these particular words and phrases included untranslated? Notice that some of the Aramaic words are in the context of healing (see Mark 5:41 and 7:34)—perhaps Mark felt it was important to include the actual wording because these had ritual significance. It has also been suggested that the Aramaic phrases represent the (only) times where Jesus' actual words (as opposed to a paraphrase) are preserved in the account, but there is no way to verify this.

2. While the Gospel of Mark is substantially shorter than the other three Gospels,⁴ the tendency in Mark is for an individual story to be longer than Matthew, Luke, or John's accounts of the same event. For example, Matthew and Mark both contain stories of a woman who comes to anoint Jesus at a dinner, but Mark's account has significantly more detail.⁵ Similarly, Mark tells the story of the hemorrhaging woman in ten verses while Matthew uses only three verses and Luke only six.⁶ The story of a man healed from a demon takes twenty verses for Mark to relate; Matthew tells the story in a mere seven verses, and the details that Matthew omits scrub the story of its political implications, which are front and center in Mark.⁷ The details in Mark's stories would have added vividness and drama and perhaps accounted for some of its popularity as an oral narrative. And since Mark not only includes more detail but also

has a shorter text length, this means that Mark tells substantially fewer stories than the other Gospels.

3. Mark's Gospel consists of episodes connected only loosely. (The technical term for this is parataxis.) About two-thirds of the verses⁸ in Mark begin with the word "and." This is not a writing style that wins kudos from those who appreciate sophisticated literary works, but it is a characteristic of oral narratives. The simple presentation may also be an appropriate manner in which to tell the story of a son of God who chose to live an unadorned human life.

4. One of the most distinctive characteristics of Mark's Gospel is his frequent use of the word *euthys* ("immediately").⁹ This word is used forty-one times in the Gospel, or, on average, over twice per chapter (although it is concentrated at the beginning of the Gospel, with ten occurrences in the first chapter). It creates a sense of a rapidly rushing narrative.

5. Many scholars have noted that Mark liked triple repetition, sometimes in an intensifying sequence.¹⁰ This may serve a theological purpose, especially since the number three was a symbol for God. It may also be a sign of an oral composition; groups of three are common to oral materials because they are easier to memorize and are pleasing to the ear.

6. Mark has a tendency to organize the Gospel by the type of material (miracles, controversies, parables),¹¹ not by theme (faith, patience, repentance), or, as we might expect, by chronology. It is important for the reader to realize that the material is thus organized.

7. Mark frequently uses foreshadowing;¹² he mentions to the audience something that will not be more fully revealed until later in the narrative.¹³ He also foreshadows events that will not happen in the Gospel text, but at a future point in history.¹⁴ The fact that he foreshadows events that are fulfilled within the text works to create trust in the audience, who then assume that the events foreshadowed beyond the text will actually come to pass.

8. Mark frequently “sandwiches” a story between two other sections of text with the goal of encouraging the audience to understand the center story in light of its surrounding material.¹⁵ Recognizing this pattern is very important to understanding the purpose and point of the stories that Mark tells. The reader who is aware of this pattern will gain far more from his or her study of Mark’s Gospel, as the meat of the sandwich is typically explained in more detail compared to the bread. This pattern may also have made it easier to remember the story as it was being transmitted orally.

9. Mark’s Gospel includes a lot of questions.¹⁶ These are rarely straightforward requests for information but are usually an indication of controversy; Jesus and his opponents frequently ask questions that spark debate and discussion.¹⁷ The questions engage the audience of the Gospel as they ponder the questions themselves. They also provide teaching opportunities for Jesus. Many of these questions, intended to entrap Jesus, end up “showcas[ing] the wisdom and cleverness of Jesus.”¹⁸ It is easy to imagine how these questions would have captured the attention of an audience listening to the Gospel orally.

10. Mark frequently uses the historical present tense, which means that he recounts events that happened in the past using the present tense.¹⁹ As one scholar writes, Mark “is especially fond of using the present tense to relay past happenings. Mark employs this ‘historical present’ over 150 times when other writers would have used the simple past tense.”²⁰ This might have been particularly appropriate in oral storytelling; it certainly creates a sense for the reader of being right in the middle of the action. Matthew and Luke will frequently change these verbs to the past tense.

11. Scholars have long recognized that the quality of Mark’s Greek is very poor: “Mark [writes] in an extremely plain, abrupt, often unidiomatic and dogged Koine [Greek] which

has generally been made to seem falsely natural, even eloquent, in English translations.”²¹ To create the appropriate effect in an English translation, it would need to include actual grammatical errors. Other interpreters have understood Mark’s poor Greek as intentionally simple in a way that “serve[s] to make Jesus the contemporary of those who hear or read the account.”²² In either case, it is good for the reader to remember that he or she is not reading a polished literary text (compare Luke’s Gospel, where that description does fit).

12. Mark is also known for his use of irony, often existing in multiple levels. For example, Jesus heals a leper and tells the leper not to tell anyone (see Mark 1:44–45). In the first bit of irony, the leper disobeys the one who has healed him. In the next layer, Jesus himself has to act like a leper and live in the wilderness in order to escape the crowds. In the final layer of irony, Jesus’ efforts to escape the crowds fail, and they come to him in the desert. Irony plays in to other themes that Mark develops, such as discipleship (more on this below); while the twelve repeatedly struggle to understand Jesus’ identity and teachings, despite his repeated efforts to teach them, the literally blind Bartimaeus is able to identify Jesus (see Mark 10:47). In another example, the same Pharisees who watch Jesus closely so they can accuse him of Sabbath-breaking for healing someone on the Sabbath will then, ironically, begin on the Sabbath to plot Jesus’ death (see Mark 3:6). The touch of the hemorrhaging woman, which under the law of Moses should have rendered Jesus ritually unclean, instead renders the woman healed (see Mark 5:34). In Mark 6:39, the disciples of John the Baptist come forward to claim his corpse and bury him; later, it is Joseph of Arimathea (see Mark 15:43)—not one of Jesus’ chosen inner circle of disciples—who will request and bury his body; Jesus’ closest male disciples have fled (although the women will look on from afar). The irony in Mark’s Gospel reaches its climax with the death of Jesus, where Jesus is mocked with symbols of kingship (see Mark 15:1–39); the reader

understands that Jesus is the true king, making the mockery ironic. Some interpreters have also taken the centurion's statement (see Mark 15:39) not as a genuine confession but rather as the final bit of ironic insult. Irony is an appropriate literary device for a Gospel that teaches that you save your life by losing it (see Mark 8:35) and that the Christ must suffer and die. It also would have created an affinity between writer and audience, because the audience, by recognizing the irony, attains the "insider" status that allows them to see themselves as part of Jesus' inner circle of disciples.

13. Mark's Gospel is very much focused on deeds; Jesus does not say much, which creates a picture of Jesus as active and dynamic.²³ There is no Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5–7) or Farewell Discourse (see John 14–17). This may also be an indicator of an oral narrative composition.

As the above evidence suggests, it seems likely that Mark's Gospel was originally more closely tied to oral presentation rather than written.²⁴ Perhaps this is because it was originally Peter's memoirs, perhaps because Mark designed it to meet the needs of an almost entirely illiterate group of Christians, or perhaps for some other reason. Regardless, it seems to bear the marks of a text that was transmitted orally. The normal method for the audience to experience this Gospel would have been for them to have listened to it being read out loud, most likely in one sitting.²⁵ Awareness of Mark's history as an oral composition can nuance how some parts of the text are interpreted. For example, references to "to hear" (Mark 4:9, 12, and 23) would have been understood the way references to "to see" are in a literate, visually focused culture; each phrase is a metaphor for "to understand."²⁶ In an oral text, keywords and repetition are generally appreciated more than they are in written texts, which are generally not read in one sitting or with the same awareness of this sort of detail.

Mark's history as an oral composition may explain why it was included in the New Testament. Joanna Dewey argues that the reason Mark survived is that it worked so well for oral performance and was popular and therefore spread. In fact, it is likely that even after a written copy of the Gospel of Mark existed, oral performances independent of the written text persisted: "Even after it was committed to writing around 70 CE, it continued to be performed orally, with minimal dependence on or even connection to manuscripts. In the process of being told and retold orally during the first century or two of Christianity, it became widely known orally to Christians in diverse parts of the empire."²⁷

Material Unique to Mark's Gospel

It might seem that analysis of the material unique to Mark's Gospel would give us good insight into Mark as a writer, but we must keep one caution in mind: since Mark (almost certainly) wrote first, the material that is unique to Mark is only unique because Matthew and Luke chose to omit it, not because Mark made the choice to include it. So looking at the material unique to Mark might tell us more about Matthew and Luke than it does about Mark. That said, an examination of this material, when carefully considered, can hint at Mark's unique preferences. There is surprisingly little material that only occurs in Mark's Gospel; one estimate is that fewer than 24 out of over 650 verses are unparalleled.²⁸ The following material is unique to this Gospel:

1. "Mark is the only one of the canonical Gospels to use the term [Gospel] at the beginning as a summary of its own contents."²⁹ It is curious that Matthew and Luke did not continue with this usage.

2. In Mark 1:13, when Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, there are wild beasts present; this detail is not included in the other Gospel accounts. If we accept the idea that Mark's Gospel is, at least in part, meant to help Christians survive the terrible persecution that resulted

from blame heaped upon them after a fire destroyed most of Rome in AD 64, then this detail would have been of great comfort to its readers, who might literally be thrown to the lions in the arena.³⁰

3. The teaching that “every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt” (Mark 9:49) is unique to Mark. (The second half of that verse may not be original to the Gospel of Mark because it does not appear in many of the oldest manuscripts.) Perhaps Matthew and Luke chose not to include this saying because its meaning was unclear, or perhaps it was particularly important to Mark because it spoke to the persecuted status of his audience. As one scholar wrote, “Jesus’ enigmatic statement had found fulfillment in the trial and persecution of Roman Christians under Nero.”³¹

4. The teaching that “the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27) is not found in any of the other Gospels. Perhaps Matthew and Luke were uncomfortable with a teaching that might be misused to condone lawlessness.

5. While both Matthew and Luke tell the story of the healing of the blind Bartimaeus, only Mark includes the man’s name.³² Scholars generally believe that names are added to the tradition as time goes on, which makes the absence of Bartimaeus’s name in Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts all the more surprising. However, it is possible that in this case, Mark included the name because Bartimaeus was known to his audience, and Matthew and Luke omitted it because he was not known to theirs. Similarly, Mark tells us the names of the sons of Simon of Cyrene, but Matthew and Luke, while including this story in their accounts, omit their names.³³

6. In Mark 3:20–21, Mark records that Jesus’ own family thought that he had lost his mind.³⁴ Matthew omits the reference (see Matthew 12:24–29), as does Luke. In general, Mark

seems to have a much higher tolerance for material that might be perceived as embarrassing; Matthew and Luke tend to omit this material.

7. Mark places the teachings in Mark 4:24 (“with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given”) and Mark 4:25 (“For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath”) sequentially. In Matthew, this material is divided between Matthew 7:2 and Matthew 13:12, and in Luke it is divided between Luke 8:18 and Luke 19:26.

8. Mark’s Gospel is the only account to contain the parable found in Mark 4:26–29. Perhaps Matthew and Luke omitted this story because it was so similar to the parable found in Mark 4:3–8.

9. Only Mark includes a reference to Jesus as “the son of Mary” (Mark 6:3). Matthew recasts it into a question: “is not his mother called Mary” (Matthew 13:55). There may have been discomfort associated with thinking of Jesus as “Mary’s son” because, for those who did not understand or believe in the virgin birth, it would have carried the taint of scandal to identify him by his mother and not his father. Once again, we see a higher level of comfort in Mark’s Gospel for potentially embarrassing material about Jesus. Mark is the only Gospel where Jesus is called a carpenter (Mark 6:3); in Matthew 13:55, he is the son of a carpenter. Similarly, Mark mentions Jesus’ sisters (Mark 6:3); the other Gospel writers do not.

10. Mark 6:8–10 permits the twelve to take a “staff” (Greek *rhabdos*) and directs them to take “sandals” (Greek *sandalion*) when they go out to preach. Matthew 10:10 forbids the taking of a staff (Greek *rhabdos*, KJV “staves”) as well as the taking of “shoes” (Greek *hupodema*); note, however, that while the Greek word for “staff” is the same, the Greek word for “sandals” differs. In Luke 9:3, no footwear is mentioned, but the prohibition on staffs (Greek

rhabdos, KJV “clubs”) is present. This is one of the few outright contradictions between the synoptic Gospels; most of the variation has to do with omissions or matters of emphasis. It is difficult to determine why Mark’s text is different from Matthew’s and Luke’s here. Perhaps the various sources for the Gospels remembered Jesus’ counsel differently, or perhaps the writers were willing to shape Jesus’ words to fit the current regulations for missionaries even at the cost of altering how Jesus had originally presented his teachings.

11. Mark explains Jewish customs that neither Matthew nor Luke explain to their audiences (see Mark 7:3–4; compare Matthew 15:2–3). It is likely that this information was necessary for Mark’s audience, which may have been largely Gentile, but not for Matthew’s, which is more likely to have been Jewish. Thus, not every unique move on Mark’s part is because of his literary strategy, theological commitments, or Matthew and Luke’s discomfort with what Mark wrote, but may have a more prosaic explanation in Mark’s efforts to meet the needs of his audience.

12. Mark’s Gospel is the only one to contain the declaration by the narrator, “Thus he declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19, KJV “purging all meats”; contrast Matthew 15:17–20). As Acts and Paul’s letters make clear,³⁵ dietary rules were a difficult issue for early Christians to navigate, and it is easy to imagine Mark including this note for his (likely) Gentile audience and Matthew omitting it, given his emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Mosaic law. It is possible to view the statement as an editorial comment by Mark that offered an interpretation of certain of Jesus’ words with which Matthew did not agree.

13. Unlike Matthew, Luke, and John, Mark contains no reference to Samaritans. Perhaps the conflicts between Jews and Samaritans held less relevance to Mark’s audience. But given the paucity of references to Samaritans in the other Gospels, this may just be a

coincidence.

14. Mark's Gospel is the only one to contain a "two-step" miracle: Jesus heals a blind man in stages (see Mark 8:23–25). Matthew and Luke omit this story, perhaps over discomfort at the idea that Jesus was not completely successful in his first attempt to heal the man. (Of course, it is possible to interpret this so that there is no fault with Jesus and that he, for whatever reason, chose not to instantly heal the man.)

15. In Mark 9:38–41, the disciples complain that someone who was not following them was casting out demons in Jesus' name. Part of Jesus' response is not included in the other Gospels: "For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward."

16. In Mark 12:32–34, after the scribe responds to Jesus' explanation of the greatest commandment, Jesus says that he is "not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34), which is not found in any other Gospel. Matthew and Luke may have been uncomfortable with Jesus' (admittedly tepid) praise of the scribe.

17. In what is probably the most enigmatic episode in the entire Gospel of Mark, a young man flees naked when Jesus is arrested (see Mark 14:51–52). There is no indication as to who this young man is³⁶ or anything else about him, although he may reappear to announce the Resurrection.³⁷ This story is not included in any of the other Gospels, perhaps because their authors didn't know what to make of it.

18. In Mark's Gospel, the centurion proclaims, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39) when Jesus dies. In Matthew's Gospel, the centurion makes a similar proclamation, but this is when he witnesses an earthquake at the time of Jesus' death (see Matthew 27:54);

Mark does not mention an earthquake. Interestingly, in Luke's Gospel, the centurion praises God and announces that Jesus was innocent (see Luke 23:47). As one scholar wrote, "Only Mark retains a truly creative tension in the confession of the centurion."³⁸ In more specific terms, Matthew eliminates the tension by having the centurion witness something spectacular (an earthquake), and Luke does so by focusing on Jesus' innocence instead of his identity. Only Mark contains the paradoxical image of a Gentile—a Roman soldier—realizing that the humiliating death of a political prisoner could be the death of the Son of God.³⁹

19. Only Mark includes the detail that Pilate asked a centurion whether Jesus was already dead (see Mark 15:44–45; compare Matthew 27:58; Luke 23:52–53; and John 19:38). While the text is not specific, it may be that this is the same centurion from Mark 15:39 (and, if not actually the same centurion, perhaps fulfilling the same literary role as a Gentile witness to Jesus' death); and so Mark's inclusion of this brief exchange may further cement the centurion's testimony from Mark 15:39. But it is also possible that Matthew, Luke, and John omit this detail because it wasn't required to move the story forward.

20. All four Gospels feature women visiting the tomb, but only in Mark's Gospel do they wonder about how they will move the stone from the tomb's entrance (see Mark 16:3; compare Matthew 28:2; Luke 24:2; and John 21:1). This is the sort of detail that would have heightened the drama in an oral presentation of Mark's Gospel, but perhaps seemed unnecessary in the written accounts of the other evangelists.

21. In Mark's Gospel, a "young man" (Mark 16:5) is in the tomb; Matthew's Gospel has the angel of the Lord (Matthew 28:2), Luke's Gospel has two men in shining clothing (Luke 24:4), and John's Gospel has no messenger—divine or otherwise—in the tomb (see John 20:1–10; see also note 31 at the end of this article). While there are multiple theories offered to explain

the differences between the four accounts of who was at the empty tomb, one way to understand Mark's presentation is to see it as part of his emphasis on discipleship (more on this below) and his minimization of miraculous events.

It is difficult to analyze the material unique to Mark's Gospel because it may be telling us more about Matthew and Luke's editorial choices than Mark's particular interests. But there does appear to be some pattern in the material unique to Mark: he seems to be more comfortable with stories that show the "human" side of Jesus than the other writers are. From a Latter-day Saint perspective, it is theologically important to maintain that Jesus had both divine and human aspects during mortality, and thus Mark's unique material can be an important counterweight to the other Gospels, particularly John, where Jesus is presented as more perfect and therefore less human.

A Major Theme: Discipleship

When the Gospels are read as separate texts, it becomes apparent that each writer emphasized certain themes. Matthew's Gospel strongly emphasizes Jesus' role as the one who fulfilled scripture. In Matthew, Jesus is the "new Moses" who brings to fruition all that had been prophesied. By way of contrast, Mark virtually never mentions this. In Luke, there is a definite emphasis on marginalized people: widows, orphans, the poor, the ill, and women take center stage as Jesus interacts with them. While there is some of this material in Mark's Gospel, it is much more subtle. John's Gospel is very cosmic and philosophical, and the distance between it and Mark's Gospel is quite great here. In contrast with the other three Gospels, the spotlight in Mark is almost always on the idea of discipleship; there is general agreement among scholars that discipleship is a key theme in this text.

The beginning of each Gospel showcases how each writer shapes his own distinct

themes. Matthew's Gospel launches with a genealogical list that ties Jesus to the time of the Old Testament, and the story includes multiple explicit references to the idea that the events surrounding Jesus' birth fulfilled scriptural prophecies.⁴⁰ Luke's Gospel begins with the private struggles of an older, infertile woman (see Luke 1:7) and a young woman (see Luke 1:27). John's Gospel, starting with "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), makes its philosophical and cosmic dimensions clear. By way of contrast, Mark begins his Gospel not with an exploration of Jesus' link to the Old Testament, or a focus on marginalized people, or a philosophical exploration, but a disciple: John the Baptist, who prepares people to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Mark's exploration of discipleship continues throughout his entire Gospel. If the author is the same person who is mentioned in Acts 15, then this was a particularly tender topic for him: Paul was planning a missionary journey, and Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, but Paul refused because John Mark had abandoned a previous missionary voyage (see Acts 15:38). If John Mark wrote this Gospel, then we know that he had already had serious challenges in his own experience of discipleship (although we do not know the circumstances around his absconding from that assignment). Additionally, if the immediate setting for Mark's Gospel is either the persecution that followed the fire in Rome or the Jewish War, then the audience might have been particularly concerned about what it meant to be a true disciple in a time of intense trial, as well as what might happen to those who experience setbacks and personal failures as disciples. We find that not just discipleship, but failed discipleship, is a core theme in Mark's Gospel.

Mark shows Jesus' disciples making significant mistakes: they don't understand the parables (see Mark 4:13; this material is not found in the other Gospels); they don't understand

what Jesus teaches (see Mark 8:14–21); Peter rebukes Jesus for his teachings (see Mark 8:32–33); they fail when they try to perform miracles (see Mark 9:14–29); they argue about who is best (see Mark 9:33–34); they ask for positions of honor (see Mark 10:35–40); Judas turns Jesus in to the authorities (see Mark 14:10–11, 18–21, and 41–46); they fall asleep when Jesus asks them to watch (see Mark 34–41); Peter denies that he knows Jesus (see Mark 14:29–21 and 66–72); they all flee when Jesus is arrested (see Mark 14:50–52); and the women leave the tomb in silence (see Mark 16:8). In this Gospel, Jesus’ disciples are far from flawless; instead, they are learners who repeatedly stumble.

This may or may not relate to Mark’s own experiences, but it does serve an important role in the narrative: the obtuseness of the disciples provides ample teaching opportunities for Jesus (which then become opportunities for the audience to learn) and also allows for Jesus to showcase his patience and faith in their eventual success. Joanna Dewey writes, “The very fact that Mark’s story is being told suggests that Mark views failure as part of continuing discipleship.”⁴¹ The failures of the disciples—and Jesus’ patience in continuing to teach them—become a subtle testimony of the power of the Atonement to bridge the gap between human inadequacy and the demands of discipleship. It may also highlight the importance of Pentecost: the role of the Holy Ghost is emphasized as we see how poorly the disciples function without it.⁴²

An unexpected twist to the discipleship theme is that, in contrast to the twelve disciples who were chosen by Jesus, minor characters who choose to follow Jesus are much better disciples; this group includes the paralytic whose sins are forgiven (Mark 2:1–12), the woman with the flow of blood (Mark 5:21–43), the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24–30), Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52), the widow donating to the temple (Mark 12:41–44), and the woman who

anoints Jesus (Mark 14:3–9). In Mark’s Gospel, the people that Jesus chooses to be disciples tend to do very poorly, while those who choose to follow Jesus seem to have a much better understanding of what it means to be a disciple. Perhaps the principle that the first shall be last and the last shall be first (see Mark 10:31) applies to reaching an understanding of true discipleship.

Jesus’ teachings on discipleship also feature prominently in this Gospel. In Mark 8:34, Jesus says, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Note how Jesus is emphasizing the costs—not the benefits—of discipleship here. Jesus does not encourage people to follow him because they will find happiness or wealth or community, but he explains to them that being a disciple entails self-sacrifice and persecution. Similarly, in Mark 9:35, Jesus says, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.” The word for *servant* finds its root in the idea of performing simple, menial, physical acts of service. Jesus is not promising his disciples status or power—he’s asking them to wait tables and tend to other physical needs. Even the highest-status males are expected to do the kind of work that was typically the sole domain of low-status females; as Joanna Dewey describes it, “The Twelve are called to do women’s work.”⁴³ Similarly, women in this Gospel are invited to join in work normally restricted to men: theological discussions (see Mark 7:24–30), the ritual of anointing (see Mark 14:3–9), and following a teacher (see Mark 15:40).⁴⁴

Throughout the text, Mark carefully structures the message on discipleship: the twelve are shown to fail again and again. Jesus does not break faith with them but rather continues to patiently teach them. At the end of the Gospel, the reference to Peter in Mark 16:7 continues this pattern: despite three outright denials that Peter even knew Jesus, it is assumed that Peter’s discipleship will continue. This would have been a very comforting message to Mark’s early

audience, and perhaps to Mark himself. Jesus is patient with disciples, even when they make mistakes. And not minor mistakes—even when they fundamentally misunderstand his mission, betray him, deny him, and are afraid at the news of the Resurrection, he does not abandon them. They are continually invited to follow him.

Women in the Gospel of Mark

Traditionally, Luke's Gospel has been thought to be the one with a special concern for women. But as feminist awareness has increased in recent decades, some scholars have taken a closer look at Mark's Gospel—not only because as the oldest Gospel it is the one closest to Jesus' lifetime, but also because of an increased recognition that Luke's Gospel tends to showcase women in stereotypically female roles,⁴⁵ while Mark's Gospel tends to have a more expansive view of women. For example, one of the first miracles that Jesus performs is to heal Peter's mother-in-law from a fever (see Mark 1:30–31). At the end of this brief account, we learn that she “ministered” to Jesus and the disciples. While the word used for “ministered” can mean simple, menial service, it is also the paradigm for the kind of service that disciples offer, and it is the same Greek word used in Mark 1:13 to describe the action of the angels. Thus this woman serves as the prototypical disciple in a text that is very concerned with that topic and that features repeated failures by the leading (male) disciples. Women definitely are included as “disciples” in Mark: “They are described as ‘following’ Jesus and ‘serving’ him, both words used to define discipleship in Mark (8:34; 9:35; 10:43).”⁴⁶ In general, the female disciples in Mark are more successful than the male disciples (with the possible exception of the ending, depending on how one interprets that story).

Throughout the Gospel, women interact with Jesus in ways that were generally not condoned in that culture. From the woman who touches Jesus' clothing seeking healing (which

would not have been permitted because she would have transmitted her impurity to him), to the Syrophenician woman who “talks back” to Jesus and is blessed for it, to the woman who interrupts a dinner party to anoint Jesus (women did not generally perform anointings), there are many women in this narrative who occupy space normally restricted to men.

Mark’s clever use of “sandwiches” (stories that are explicated based on the material that surrounds them) can convey an additional layer of meaning when compared with the other Gospels, even if both Mark and the other writers are telling the same story. For example, Mark and Matthew both recount the story of a woman who is healed when she touches the edge of Jesus’ clothing. Both writers note that the woman had had a hemorrhage of blood for twelve years. And in both narratives, this story is surrounded by references to the death and the raising of the daughter of a ruler of a synagogue. But only Mark includes details in this story that serve to emphasize the links between the stories. Specifically, a detail crucial to Mark’s telling (one that Matthew omits) is that the daughter was twelve years old. Thus, only in Mark’s account does this detail link the little girl and the woman. Twelve was a symbolic number, carrying associations of leadership from the idea of the twelve tribes of Israel. Mark associates both the woman and the girl with Israel, but the girl is “a daughter of the synagogue” in a literal sense, while the woman becomes “a daughter of Jesus” when Jesus addresses her as “Daughter” (Mark 5:34). In Mark, the woman and the girl serve as a commentary on what it means to be a daughter of the synagogue or a daughter of Jesus: the daughter of the synagogue is passive and is only healed through the intervention of her father; the daughter of Jesus is active (in socially inappropriate ways) and speaks for herself. (The status of women in Jesus’ movement is more independent than their status in the synagogues.) Thus, in Mark’s account, this is more than just two healing miracles.⁴⁷ The audience is encouraged to compare the stories and learn yet another

lesson from the comparison, but the comparison is muted in Matthew's account.

Similarly, while the anointing story occupies roughly the same location in Mark's Gospel as it does in Matthew's, Matthew omits the story of the widow's mite, and therefore eliminates the arrangement of the text that encourages the reader to compare the widow and the anointer. In Mark's telling, readers can see both women as commentary on the teachings in Mark 13 (which parallels Matthew 24), which makes the anointing story in Mark's Gospel much more meaningful. Matthew also avoids having Jesus use the word *anointed* to describe what the woman had done (Mark 14:8; contrast Matthew 26:12); this may have been because of his discomfort at the fairly radical idea of a woman anointing Jesus. Given how close the stories are verbally, it is fairly amazing how differently the anointing story functions in Matthew's Gospel.

Luke's Gospel also contains a story of an anointing (see Luke 7:36–50), although it is not clear if this story is based on the same historical incident behind Mark 14:3–9. In Luke (see Luke 7:36–50), the anointing happens much closer to the beginning of the Gospel (despite there being no solid indication of time or location in the story); is at the home of a Pharisee (not Simon the leper); involves a woman identified as a sinner who weeps, washes Jesus' feet with her tears, and anoints his feet (not his head); features an objection not to the cost of the ointment but to Jesus' interaction with a woman of low repute; involves Jesus sharing a parable; and ends with Jesus forgiving the woman for her sins. And yet the stories are so similar in basic outline that it is also difficult to conclude that they are separate historical incidents. But if we want to treat them as reflecting the same historical event, then we see that Luke has taken the story of a prophetic woman's act of devotion to Jesus and morphed it into the act of a sinful woman seeking forgiveness. Luke's is a beautiful story that speaks strongly to the power of the Atonement to heal broken lives, but it is nonetheless a very different story from Mark's. Mark features a

prophetic woman who helps the audience understand Jesus' mission; Luke presents a broken woman seeking forgiveness.

There is quite a bit of indirect evidence for the presence of women at the Last Supper. It was Jewish tradition for women to take part in Passover, and so to break from that tradition would have been worthy of mention in itself. Add that to the fact that, in all recorded cases, Jesus is as open to women's participation (if not more so) than his surrounding culture is, and it would have been doubly worthy of attention if his celebration of Passover excluded women. There is also additional evidence in Mark that points to the presence of women at the Last Supper. In Mark 14:20, referring to "one of the twelve" suggests that there were others present (see also Mark 14:16 and 17). Mark 15:41 indicates that women came up with Jesus to Jerusalem, and his purpose in going to Jerusalem was to celebrate the Passover—thus, women could very well have been accompanying him specifically to join in the Passover. Also, Mark 14:28 indicates that Jesus said at the Last Supper that he would go before his disciples to Galilee. At the tomb, the young man says, "He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." So the most logical reading is that these women were at the Last Supper and had heard this prophecy. In sum, there is very good evidence in Mark's Gospel for thinking that women were present at the Last Supper.

In Mark's Gospel, women are central to the stories of Jesus' ministry, and they take on roles that are surprisingly expansive, given the first-century context. One scholar, Susan Miller, suggests that the women in Mark's Gospel have three key roles: as examples of what it means to serve, as anointers (both in Mark 14:3–9 and in Mark 16:1–8), and as witnesses to Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection.⁴⁸ Given the very close overlap between these three concepts and Mark's key concerns as a writer (one who explores discipleship, the meaning of Jesus' ministry, and the

reality of the Resurrection), it is no exaggeration to claim that women are central to this Gospel narrative and occupy an important space in it as they model what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The Messianic Secret

There is a most curious aspect to Mark's Gospel: Jesus frequently tells people *not* to tell others what he has done for them, and sometimes he appears to try to hide his identity.⁴⁹ Scholars have offered various theories to explain this phenomenon, which came to be called the "messianic secret." The first prominent theory, advanced in the early twentieth century by William Wrede, was that the messianic secret did not originate with Jesus but rather was constructed later in the tradition in order to explain why Jesus was not perceived to be a Messiah. While this theory was popular for much of the twentieth century, it fell out of favor in the 1970s. Today, scholars generally recognize the tendency in Mark's Gospel for Jesus to put restrictions on the proclamation of his identity, but some reject the notion of a messianic secret existing in the first place. Even those who do accept the idea tend to favor explanations for it other than Wrede's. Some have held that secrecy was appropriate before Jesus' death, because it would have been premature to declare that Jesus was the Christ before that point. A variation on this theory is that it would have been misleading for people to follow Jesus solely because he was a miracle worker, and so Jesus did not want people drawn to him for that reason alone⁵⁰; support for this theory may be found in the idea that Jesus was actually quite open when prophesying about his suffering (see Mark 8:31–33).

A curious aspect about the secrecy motif is the frequency with which it is violated in Mark's Gospel; Jesus' requests for secrecy are often ignored, and Mark tells us all about it.⁵¹ These passages cast doubt on Wrede's theory that the idea of Jesus as Messiah is a later creation,

because if Mark is concocting a story that Jesus really was the Messiah, and the reason no one realized it was because Jesus told people not to tell, then it makes little sense to have Jesus' command be violated on multiple occasions.⁵² There is no current scholarly consensus regarding the messianic secret in Mark, although there is a general recognition that Jesus tried to limit transmission of knowledge about his identity. Beyond that, there is no agreement regarding the purpose or parameters of the prohibition.

A few Latter-day Saint writers have weighed in on the idea of secrecy in Mark's Gospel. Daniel C. Peterson points to the existence of the messianic secret as evidence that secrecy is not foreign to Christianity, and he says this in a defense of the Latter-day Saint practice of maintaining secrecy regarding temple rituals.⁵³ Daniel B. McKinlay has similarly argued that what can appear to be the messianic secret in Mark is not the result of Mark fabricating a practice of Jesus wanting to keep teachings private, but rather was the very real practice of restricting some teachings to an inner group of disciples.⁵⁴ Two objections might be raised to these interpretations: first, the material that Jesus asked the disciples to keep secret does not overlap with the material central to modern LDS temple rituals; and second, what Jesus tried to keep secret during his ministry *was* revealed in the Gospel of Mark, suggesting that the secrecy function is different in Mark.⁵⁵ Roger R. Keller explains the messianic secret in different terms, finding two reasons for the secret. First, the rush of people that resulted when Jesus' requests for secrecy were violated (see Mark 1:38, 45) made it impossible for Jesus to pursue his ministry; he had to go into the desert to avoid the crowds. Thus, according to Keller, the purpose of the secrecy was to permit Jesus to fulfill his ministry. Secondly, it created a false impression of what it meant to be the Messiah when people were focused on Jesus as a miracle worker and did not understand that Jesus had come to suffer and die.⁵⁶ This theory is more in line with the thinking

of non-LDS scholars on the subject.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about the messianic secret because the evidence for its existence is mixed and somewhat complicated. Perhaps it is simply safe to say that Mark has a general tendency to feature Jesus asking people not to publicize certain aspects of his ministry. Latter-day Saint readers would not generally be sympathetic to Wrede's argument that the idea of Jesus as Messiah originated not with Jesus but with the later church, but they would perhaps find an affinity between Jesus' requests for secrecy and modern LDS practices related to temple worship, although the analogy there is admittedly not perfect. Jesus' requests for people not to preach about his healing miracles is most likely tied to his desire that, before his death, he did not want people to be misled about what it means to be a Messiah.

Who Is Jesus? The Christology of Mark's Gospel

Each of the Gospel writers has a somewhat different way of describing Jesus and his ministry (the technical term for this is Christology). Mark is known for having a "low" Christology, meaning that Jesus' human aspects are more on display than they are in the other Gospels. (For example, it is difficult to imagine John, who has the "highest" Christology, featuring a miracle that required more than one step for completion; compare Mark 8:22–25.) The question of the precise nature of Jesus' identity is a large concern in this Gospel, and it is frequently explicitly commented on within the text itself.⁵⁷

Many scholars turn to the titles attributed to Jesus in Mark's Gospel in order to determine Mark's message about Jesus:

1. "Son of Man" is a key title in Mark's Gospel. It may relate to the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7:13, thus linking Jesus and the person Daniel saw in a vision who was given "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his

dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14), although other scholars dispute the connection to Daniel 7.⁵⁸ There may also be a connection to the use of “Son of Man” in Psalm 8.⁵⁹ Because “Son of Man” in Aramaic can simply be a form of self-reference (a way to say “I” or “someone in my position”), the phrase is an ideal encapsulation of Mark’s view of Jesus as one who is exalted but simultaneously meek. As one scholar put it, Jesus used this term as “as a form of deliberately oblique or ambiguous self-reference.”⁶⁰ Jesus never says that he is the Son of Man; he always speaks of the Son of Man in the third person, and the audience is invited to make the connection (see Mark 2:5, 10).⁶¹ Only Jesus uses the title “Son of Man” to describe himself (albeit indirectly) in the Gospel;⁶² other people do not use it.

2. The title most commonly used by other people to address Jesus in Mark’s Gospel is “Master.”⁶³ This title does not denote Jesus’ divinity, but rather suggests that most of the people around Jesus do not really understand his identity. Perhaps as a part of Mark’s thinking on discipleship or as a part of the extensive irony in this Gospel, it seems that the person calling Jesus “Master” usually does not accept him as such (see Mark 12:14, 19) or in the very statement shows that he or she does not understand what Jesus is teaching or doing (see Mark 4:38; 5:35; 9:17; 9:38; 10:35; 13:1). The incident in Mark 10:17–22 particularly exemplifies this situation, since the man in this story does not grasp what Jesus has to teach. This is also true of Peter’s and Judas’s identification of Jesus as “Master” (see Mark 11:21 and 14:45). There is one exception to this pattern: the use of “Master” in Mark 12:32 seems genuine, since Jesus’ interlocutor repeats his words in agreement. But Mark 12:34 makes it problematic: while the scribe is close to the kingdom of God, there is no indication that he either asks more questions or follows Jesus.

3. “Son (of God)” is another title applied to Jesus. It is used by non-human beings

(God and the demons), by the narrator, by Jesus as a direct reference to himself, by Jesus' enemies (antagonistically or ironically), and by the centurion, where its use is difficult to classify. Because it is used in the title of the Gospel (see Mark 1:1) and the climactic confession at the cross (see Mark 15:39), some have argued that it is the most important title for Jesus in Mark's Gospel.⁶⁴ Some scholars believe that Mark's original audience would have understood that the phrase "Son of God" implied "preexistence and deity."⁶⁵ (Other scholars reject this association, pointing out that the Old Testament uses it for mortal kings; see 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7.⁶⁶ There may be a distinction here based on the audience, with Jews thinking that a mere mortal could be God's son but Gentiles thinking that "Son of God" implied a divine status.⁶⁷) Additionally, some have understood "Christ" and "Son of God" to be synonymous because they seem to be used that way in 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7; some Jews in the first century understood that the Messiah was "God's son" based on these verses.⁶⁸ The theme of Jesus as God's Son is an important one to Mark, and the Gospel has a lot to say about it.⁶⁹

4. Another title used is "Christ."⁷⁰ Some scholars argue that this title is the most important one in Mark's Gospel because it is key to Peter's confession (see Mark 8:29), and it is unambiguously claimed by Jesus during his trial (see Mark 14:62).⁷¹ The fact that Peter can be rebuked by Jesus right after proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ (see Mark 8:33) suggests that Mark has something complicated to say about this title. The first half of the Gospel can be read to show Jesus as a miracle worker and successful debater—much what one would have expected the Christ to be, hence Peter's confession. But as soon as Peter makes that confession and Jesus begins to teach that he must suffer and die, Peter rebukes Jesus: clearly, suffering and death were not a part of Peter's conception of what the Christ was and did. At this point, the Gospel text pivots and the remaining narrative is largely concerned with presenting the suffering and death of

Jesus, hence redefining what it means to be “the Christ.” The story of the anointing in Mark 14, which functions as a narrative hinge between the life and death of Jesus, explains what it means to be the Christ by showing Jesus anointed for his death, both as a royal anointing and as a priestly anointing. Since *Christ* is the Greek word for *anointed*, the anointing story defines what it means to say that Jesus is the Christ.

5. Another title for Jesus is “Lord.”⁷² Because it can also be translated as “sir,” and since it sometimes refers to God the Father, many scholars dismiss “Lord” as an unimportant title because it is so difficult to interpret its use. But a minority of scholars suggest that this very ambiguity, which serves to affiliate Jesus with God the Father, might be important to fleshing out Mark’s understanding of who Jesus was—namely, Deity.⁷³

6. The title “son of David” does not seem to be a key title in this Gospel, but it is present nonetheless. Bartimaeus twice calls Jesus “Son of David” (Mark 10:47, 48). While Jesus does not rebuke Bartimaeus, Jesus will later specifically eschew identification of the Christ as the son of David (Mark 12:35–7). The title is perhaps insufficient because it presumes a purely Davidic kingship, which would not have the connotations of suffering and death that are a crucial part of Jesus’ messiahship.

7. Another title is “king of the Jews.”⁷⁴ It is certainly no accident that references to Jesus as the “king of the Jews” cluster around his trial, and the title is frequently used in ironic mockery of Jesus.

8. Other titles for Jesus in this Gospel include “rabbi”⁷⁵ and “prophet,”⁷⁶ although these do not seem to be key titles for Jesus.

9. There are also multiple times when Jesus is simply referred to as Jesus of Nazareth.⁷⁷ Because “Jesus” was the most common male name of this time and place, it would

have been necessary to identify him by a town name or in some other way. To call him “Jesus of Nazareth” is a sort of “anti-title,” suggesting that he did not have any special status. Of the five uses of “Jesus of Nazareth” in Mark’s Gospel, one is from a demon (see Mark 1:24); despite their evil character, the demons in this Gospel have accurate information. Bartimaeus, who is presented as a model follower, also uses this title (see Mark 10:47), further suggesting that it is an appropriate one. The narrator uses it in the beginning of the Gospel (see Mark 1:19), and the woman who speaks with Peter after Jesus is arrested uses it (see Mark 14:67); these two uses are perhaps expected. What is very surprising is that the young man at the tomb, when speaking to the women who have come to anoint Jesus’ body for burial, calls Jesus by this very title (see Mark 16:6), when the audience would likely have expected one of the dramatic titles (Christ, Son of God, and so forth) to be used at this crucial moment. The fact that this most modest of titles is used instead is not only evidence of Mark’s “low” Christology, but also may suggest that Mark doesn’t think very highly of titles for Jesus in general.

Perhaps it is part of Mark’s extensive use of irony that many of the most exalted titles applied to Jesus are used either by demons or in mockery; these titles illustrate the problem of naming in the Gospel. Some of the most compelling Christological titles come from the unclean spirits (see Mark 1:24; 3:11; and 5:7). Similarly, the fact that Peter can correctly label Jesus “the Christ” but then immediately show his lack of understanding of Jesus’ mission suggests the limitations of titles in this text. As Leander Keck explained, “To reconstruct the history of titles as if this were the study of Christology is like trying to understand the windows of Chartres cathedral by studying the history of coloured glass.”⁷⁸ In other words, studying Jesus’ titles alone does not necessarily grant insight into his divine destiny and messianic role. Some scholars turn to what is called “narrative Christology” to understand Jesus; that is, they look to *stories* about

Jesus instead of *titles* that have been applied to him.⁷⁹

For example, Jesus preached extensively about the “kingdom of God.”⁸⁰ While this preaching doesn’t give a title to Jesus, knowing that his ministry was focused on teaching people what the kingdom of God would be like does indeed tell us a lot about him. He is a “teacher,” not because of a title but rather because he does, in fact, teach. Additionally, there are frequent references in Mark’s Gospel to the idea that Jesus taught “with authority.”⁸¹ It tells us a lot about Jesus to say that he had God’s authority. While a concept of priesthood authority congruent with modern Latter-day Saint thought is not specifically articulated in the Gospel of Mark, the idea that people around Jesus were aware of the authority that he held becomes a starting point for thinking about priesthood in this text, especially since Jesus shares that authority with certain of his followers.⁸²

We also learn about who Jesus is when we see him repeatedly victorious as he engages in controversial discussions,⁸³ and we see an entirely different side of his personality as he experiences a range of human emotions.⁸⁴ These incidents reveal who he is—in some ways better than a title ever could.

But perhaps the most significant part of what we might call Mark’s narrative Christology is the fact that Jesus consistently and repeatedly prophesies that he will suffer and die.⁸⁵ This may be some of the most important Christological material in the Gospel precisely because it was so difficult for his disciples to understand. The common expectation in first-century Judaism was that the Messiah would liberate the people from Roman rule and then reign victoriously; the idea that the Messiah would suffer and die was not generally accepted.⁸⁶ Jesus’ predictions that he will suffer and die thus can be seen as a key part of Mark’s Christology.

A more strictly narrative-based Christology can also seek to understand Jesus based on

what he actually does: heal people, hold his own against religious authorities, teach about God's kingdom, etc. Perhaps the most fruitful avenue for considering the Christology of Mark's Gospel is a close analysis of Mark 14:3–9, where an unnamed woman anoints Jesus. Because the act is presented as a burial anointing, a priestly anointing, and a royal anointing all at once, three different aspects of what it means to be “the Christ” (or, to translate instead of transliterate into English, “the anointed”) are simultaneously encapsulated in the woman's single prophetic act.⁸⁷ Jesus' statement that her act will be recounted wherever the Gospel is preached hints at the supreme significance of this anointing. It is only through recognition of the need for Jesus to suffer and die, the priestly aspects of his ministry, and his royal nature that the audience can understand what it means to say that he is “the Christ.”

In sum, it might be fair to say that Mark's Christology relies on two intertwined pillars, whether we imagine them as the two aspects of the anointing ritual, as the idea of suffering plus glory, or as the idea of “Son of Man” and “Son of God.” Jesus is presented as a healer, teacher, leader, authority figure, crowd-gatherer, and debate-winner. But he is also presented as someone who is humble, patient, caring, attentive to marginal people, and as someone who willingly suffers and dies a humiliating and painful death. The distinctiveness of Jesus in Mark's Gospel is that he combined the two seemingly contradictory ideas of suffering and glory. His suffering is highlighted by his ability, as the Son of God, to have avoided pain had he wanted to; his glory is highlighted by the choice he made to set aside that glory to the benefit of humankind.

Conclusions

This exploration of Mark's writing style, unique material, theme of discipleship, treatment of women, messianic secret, and Christology has suggested that—while he shares with the other Gospel writers a deep testimony of Jesus Christ—Mark presents his Gospel in a distinct manner

and with singular concerns. Traditionally, Latter-day Saints have combined the Gospel accounts into one story of Jesus; while this harmonizing approach has its benefits, it also risks losing the unique voice of each Gospel writer.⁸⁸ Latter-day Saints can imagine the loss if the distinct voices of modern leaders were harmonized in general conference: we would surely mourn the end of the unique style that each leader brings to his or her conference talks. Similarly, great insights into the life of Jesus Christ can be amplified when each Gospel is treated as a distinct literary work.

Notes

¹ See Roger R. Keller, “Mark and Luke: Two Facets of a Diamond,” in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The New Testament*, ed. Frank F. Judd Jr. and Gaye Strathearn (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 92–107.

² See Mark 3:17 (“Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder”; omitted in Matthew 10:2 and Luke 6:14); Mark 5:41 (“Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say thee, arise”; omitted in Matthew 9:25 and Luke 8:54); Mark 7:11 (“Corban, that is to say, a gift”; omitted in Matthew 15:5, and there is no similar story in Luke); Mark 7:34 (“Ephphatha, that is, Be opened”; omitted in Matthew 15:29–31, and there is no similar story in Luke); Mark 9:5 (“rabbi”; KJV “master”; Matthew 17:4 uses “Lord” instead, and Luke 9:33 uses “master” [Greek *epistates*] instead); Mark 9:43 (“hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched”); Mark 10:46 (“Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus”; omitted in Matthew 20:30 and Luke 18:35); Mark 10:51 (“rabbouni”; KJV; “Lord”; Matthew 20:33 and Luke 18:41 use “Lord” [Greek *kurios*] instead); Mark 11:9–10 (“hosanna”; Matthew 21:9 keeps the usage, but it is omitted in Luke 19:38); Mark 11:21 (“rabbi”; KJV “Master”; Matthew 21:20 omits it, and there is no similar story in Luke); Mark 14:36.

³ (“Abba, Father”; Matthew 26:39 and 42 and Luke 22:42 omit it); Mark 14:45 (“rabbi”; KJV “master”; Matthew 26:49 uses it, but Luke 22:47 omits it); Mark 15:22 (“Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull”; Matthew 27:33 uses it, but Luke 23:33 omits it); and Mark 15:34 (“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”; Matthew 27:46 uses it, while Luke 23:45–46 omits it). The overall pattern is clear: Mark is far more likely to use Aramaic; only rarely will Matthew retain the Aramaic, and Luke will almost always omit it.

⁴ Mark has 16 chapters to Matthew’s 28, Luke’s 24, and John’s 21.

⁵ Matthew omits the following details when compared with Mark’s account: the ointment was spikenard (Mark 14:3; contrast Matthew 26:7); the woman broke the box (Mark 14:3; contrast Matthew 26:7); the cost for which the anointing oil could have been sold (Mark 14:5; contrast Matthew 26:9); the murmuring against the woman (Mark 14:5; contrast Matthew 26:5); Jesus’ statement to leave the woman alone (Mark 14:6; contrast Matthew 26:10); Jesus’ statement that they can help the poor at any time (Mark 14:7; contrast Matthew 26:11); and Jesus’ statement that the woman did what she could (Mark 14:8; contrast Matthew 26:12). Matthew adds this phrase: “For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body” (Matthew 26:12), presumably so the sense of Jesus’ comment won’t be lost. Luke also has a story of a woman who anoints Jesus,

although scholars debate whether it is based on the same historical incident that gave rise to Matthew 26 and Mark 14. In this case, Luke's account on the anointing is longer, because Jesus tells a parable in the story, but this expansion is an exception to the general rule that Matthew and Luke will normally tell the same story as Mark in a shorter form.

⁶ See Mark 5:25–34; Matthew 9:20–22; and Luke 43–48.

⁷ See Mark 5:1–20 and Matthew 8:28–34. Interestingly, in this case, Luke's account is roughly the same length as Mark's (see Luke 8:26–39).

⁸ Verse numbers were added in the sixteenth century and so are not original to the Gospel; they are used here for convenience.

⁹ *Eutheos* or *euthys* (“immediately”) in Mark's Gospel: Mark 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21; 2:8, 12; 3:6; 4:5, 15–17, 29; 5:2, 29, 30, 42; 6:25, 27, 45, 50, 54; 8:10; 9:15, 20, 24; 11:3 (KJV “straightway”); Mark 7:35 (KJV: “straightway”; note that there is a textual variant that omits the word here); Mark 1:28, 29, 42, 43 (KJV “forthwith”); Mark 1:30 (KJV “anon”); Mark 10:52; 11:2; 14:43, 45 (KJV “as soon as”); Mark 1:23; 7:25; 14:72 (not translated in the KJV); and Mark 15:1.

¹⁰ The three-fold pattern is found in many instances: the responses to Jesus' baptism (opening heavens, descending spirit, hearing a voice; see Mark 1:10–11), the calling of the disciples (fishermen, Levi, the twelve; see Mark 1:16–20; 2:14; and 3:13–19), Jesus' prophecies of his suffering and death (which contain three elements and are repeated three times; see Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33–34); Jesus' warnings (“if your hand/foot/eye offend thee . . .”; see Mark 9:43, 45, 47); Jesus' return to the disciples in Gethsemane (see Mark 14:32–41); Peter's denial of Jesus (see Mark 14:66–72); time mentioned during the Crucifixion (see Mark 15:25, 33, 34); groups mocking Jesus on the cross (passersby, chief priests and scribes, and the others being crucified; see Mark 15:3, 29–30, 32); and reactions to Jesus' death (the veil of the temple, the centurion, and the women; see Mark 15:38–40). The pattern is also found in the grouping of disciples (Peter, James, and John; see Mark 5:37; 9:2; and 14:33); the adversaries to Jesus (chief priests, scribes, and elders; see Mark 8:31; 11:27; 14:43, 53; and 15:1); the women at the cross and tomb (Mary Magdalene and other women; see Mark 15:40 and 16:1); and the references to three days (see Mark 8:2, 31; 14:58; and 15:29).

¹¹ Mark places together miracles (Mark 1:21–45 and 4:35–5:43), controversies (Mark 2:1–3:6 and 11:27–12:44), parables (Mark 4:1–34), prophecies of Jesus' suffering and death (three within a narrow section of text: Mark 8:31–10:34), and teachings about the last days and persecution (Mark 13:1–37).

¹² See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 237, 240, 267, 315.

¹³ Examples of foreshadowing in Mark's Gospel include the coming of someone mightier than John the Baptist (mentioned in Mark 1:7; fulfilled in Mark 1:21–28); the arrest of John the Baptist (mentioned in Mark 1:14; fulfilled in Mark 6:14–27); the taking away of the “bridegroom” (mentioned in Mark 2:20; fulfilled in Mark 14:43–46); the plot to destroy Jesus (mentioned in Mark 3:6; fulfilled in Mark 15:37); Jesus' prophecies of his suffering and death (Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32–33; fulfilled in Mark 14:43–46); Jesus' telling the disciples to find a man with a pitcher of water (Mark 14:13; fulfilled in Mark 14:16); Jesus' prophecies that he will be betrayed by a close associate (Mark 14:18; fulfilled in Mark 14:43); Jesus' prophecy of Peter's denial (Mark 14:30; fulfilled in Mark 14:50–52, 66–72).

¹⁴ Prophecies that will be fulfilled after the end of the text include the following: Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8); the deaths of James and John (Mark 10:38–39); the destruction

of the temple (Mark 13:2); the story of the anointing told all over the world (Mark 14:9); Jesus' drinking of the fruit of the vine in the kingdom (Mark 14:25); and Jesus' meeting the disciples after the Resurrection (Mark 16:7).

¹⁵ There are many examples of "sandwiched" stories in Mark's Gospel. A discussion of Jesus' authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:6–10) is surrounded by the story of a lame man whose sins he forgives (Mark 2:1–5, 11–12). A controversy about Satan (Mark 3:22–30) is surrounded by references to Jesus' family (Mark 3:20–21, 31–35). A question about why Jesus taught in parables (Mark 4:10–12) is surrounded by the parable of the sower (Mark 4:3–9, 13–20). The healing of the hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:25–34) is surrounded by the story of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21–24, 35–43). The death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29) is surrounded by the mission of the twelve (Mark 6:7–13, 30–31). The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8) is surrounded by references to who or what is coming (Mark 9:1, 9–13). The story of casting the moneychangers out of the temple (Mark 11:15–19) is surrounded by references to the fig tree (Mark 11:12–14, 20–25). Jesus' anointing (Mark 14:3–9) is surrounded by references to the plot to kill him (Mark 14:1–2, 10–11). Finally, Jesus' trial (Mark 14:55–65) is surrounded by references to Peter (Mark 14:54, 66–72).

¹⁶ See Jerome H. Neyrey, "Questions, Chreiai, and Honor Challenges: The Interface of Rhetoric and Culture in Mark's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (October 1998): 657f.

¹⁷ See Mark 2:7, 8–9, 16, 18–19, 24–26; 3:4, 23, 33; 4:38, 40–41; 5:39; 6:2–3, 38; 7:5, 18–19; 8:4–5, 12, 17–21, 27–29, 36–37; 9:11, 19, 33; 10:2, 17, 26, 38, 51; 11:3, 17, 28, 31; 12:9, 14–16, 23–24, 26, 28, 35; 13:2, 4; 14:4, 6, 14, 19, 37, 48, 60, 63–64; 15:2, 9, 12, 34; and 16:3.

¹⁸ See Neyrey, "Questions," 657f.

¹⁹ See William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 26.

²⁰ Reynolds Price, *Three Gospels* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 17.

²¹ See Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 24.

²² See Eric D. Huntsman, "The Petrine *Kērygma* and the Gospel according to Mark," in *The Ministry of Peter, the Chief Apostle: The 43rd Annual BYU Sperry Symposium* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 181.

²³ See Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

²⁴ It takes between an hour and a half and two hours to listen to Mark's Gospel read aloud.

²⁵ See Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 44–45.

²⁶ Joanna Dewey, "The Survival of Mark's Gospel: A Good Story?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 3 (September 2004): 496.

²⁷ According to Robert H. Stein, 23 out of 666 verses are unique. See Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 16.

²⁸ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 3.

²⁹ Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 15.

³⁰ See Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 24.

³¹ Compare Mark 10:46–52 with Matthew 20:29–34 and Luke 18:35–43.

³² Compare Mark 15:21 with Matthew 27:32 and Luke 23:26. Interestingly, the JST changes *Alexander* to *Alexandria*.

³³ The KJV for Mark 3:21 reads, "And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself." This verse more likely refers to family, not friends; the

end of the verse implies that Jesus is “out of his mind.”

³⁴ See Acts 10:9–19 and Galatians 2:11–18.

³⁵ A few scholars have suggested that this is an oblique reference to the author of the Gospel, but that seems excessively speculative.

³⁶ Because Mark has a “young man” at the tomb (*neaniskos*, “young man”), not *angelos* (“messenger” or “angel,” which is the word used in Matthew 28:2; Luke 24:4 has two men in shining clothing), and the only other use of *neaniskos* in Mark is to describe the young man who flees when Jesus is arrested, it is possible that the person in the tomb is the same person who fled at the arrest.

³⁷ Marvin Meyer, “Taking Up the Cross and Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (2002): 230–38.

³⁸ It is possible to interpret the centurion’s statement ironically, although most scholars do not read it this way. See the commentary on Mark 15:39.

³⁹ See Matthew 1:22 and 2:5, 15, 17.

⁴⁰ Joanna Dewey, “Women in the Gospel of Mark,” *Word & World* 26, no. 1 (2006): 29.

⁴¹ Stein, *Mark*, 31.

⁴² Dewey, “Women in the Gospel of Mark,” 25.

⁴³ Note that women are still expected to engage in traditional acts of service; see Mark 1:31.

⁴⁴ For example, Elizabeth becomes a mother (Luke 1), Mary’s story is focused on her motherhood (Luke 2), a widow has her son restored to her (Luke 7:11–15), and a woman in a parable cleans her home (Luke 15:8–10).

⁴⁵ Dewey, “Women in the Gospel of Mark,” 28.

⁴⁶ See Julie M. Smith, “A Redemptive Reading of Mark 5:25–34,” *The Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 95–105.

⁴⁷ See Susan Miller, *Women in Mark’s Gospel* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 193–198.

⁴⁸ See Susan Miller, *Women in Mark’s Gospel* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 193–198.

⁴⁹ For examples of the messianic secret, see Mark 1:23, 34, 43–45; 3:11–12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, 30; and 9:9. There is one odd exception to the general rule of secrecy: Jesus tells the Gentile man who had had a demon to tell his family that Jesus had healed him (see Mark 5:19).

⁵⁰ Of course, this raises an important question: Why did Jesus perform miracles if it was not helpful for people to know about them?

⁵¹ See Mark 1:25–28, 43–45; and 7:36–37.

⁵² See Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 40–41.

⁵³ See Daniel C. Peterson, *Offenders for a Word* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998).

⁵⁴ See Daniel B. McKinlay, *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 492–514.

⁵⁵ For it to be parallel with modern Latter-day Saint practice, one would envision a situation where, a generation after Joseph Smith’s death, LDS writers made the contents of the temple ceremony freely available in writing.

⁵⁶ See Keller, “Two Facets of a Diamond,” 92–107.

⁵⁷ The question of Jesus’ true identity is raised in Mark 1:27; 2:7; 4:41; 6:2–3; 8:27–29; 11:28; 14:61; and 15:2.

⁵⁸ See Richard Bauckham, “The Son of Man: ‘A Man in My Position’ or ‘Someone,’” *Journal for*

the Study of the New Testament 23 (1985): 23–33.

⁵⁹ See Gordon D. Kirchhevel, “The ‘Son of Man’ Passages in Mark,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 181–87.

⁶⁰ See Bauckham, “The Son of Man,” 23–33.

⁶¹ See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Christology and the Son of Man: What the Markan Jesus Says Instead,” *Biblical Interpretation* 11, nos. 3–4 (2003): 373–85

⁶² Occurrences of the “Son of Man” in Mark’s Gospel: 2:10, 28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21, 41, 62. (As the italics indicate, the phrase “Son of Man” is not present in the Greek text for Mark 13:34; it simply reads “man.”)

⁶³ Modern translations usually translate the Greek word *didaskalos* as “teacher.” Occurrences of *didaskalos* in Mark’s Gospel include 4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; and 14:14. (The KJV for Mark 9:5, 11:21, and 14:45 read “master,” but the Greek word here is *rabbi*, not *didaskalos*. Mark 13:35 KJV has “master,” but the Greek word is *kyrios*, usually translated in the KJV as “Lord.”)

⁶⁴ See Norman Perrin, “Creative Use of the Son of Man Traditions by Mark,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 23, no. 4 (1968): 357–65.

⁶⁵ Stein, *Mark*, 41.

⁶⁶ See Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary*, 34.

⁶⁷ See Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary*, 34.

⁶⁸ See N. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 50.

⁶⁹ See Mark 1:11, 24; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:6–8, 25–26; 13:32; 14:61–62; and 15:39.

⁷⁰ Instances of *Christ* in Mark’s Gospel include 1:1; 8:29; 9:41; 12:35; 13:21–22; 14:61; and 15:32. While the KJV for Mark 13:6 contains the word *Christ*, the Greek text does not.

⁷¹ See Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 93–94.

⁷² Occurrences of *Lord* include Mark 1:3; 2:28; 5:19; 7:28 (it may mean “sir” here); 9:24; 11:3, 9–10; 12:9, 11, 29–30, 36–37; and 13:20, 35 (KJV “master”). The KJV for Mark 6:21 contains *lords*, but this is a different Greek word; similarly, Mark 10:51 contains *Lord* in the KJV, but the Greek word is different.

⁷³ See Daniel Johansson, “Kyrios in the Gospel of Mark,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 1 (2010): 101–24.

⁷⁴ The title “king of the Jews” is found in Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, and 26; it is also included in verse 32 as “king of Israel.”

⁷⁵ Occurrences of *rabbi* include Mark 9:5 (KJV “Master”); 10:51 (KJV “Lord”; Greek *rhabboni*); 11:21 (KJV “Master”); and 14:45 (KJV “Master”).

⁷⁶ Instances of *prophet* include Mark 6:4 (where Jesus alludes to the idea of being a prophet); 6:15; and 8:28 (in the latter two verses, unnamed people think he might be a prophet). In 11:32, John the Baptist is considered a prophet by Jesus’ adversaries. In Mark 1:2, “the [Old Testament] prophets” are mentioned. In Mark 13:14, Daniel is called a prophet

⁷⁷ . Occurrences of “Jesus of Nazareth” include Mark 1:24; 10:47; 14:67; and 16:6.

⁷⁸ L. E. Keck, “Toward the Renewal of NT Christology,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 362–77.

⁷⁹ See Julie M. Smith, “Narrative Atonement Theology in the Gospel of Mark,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2015): 29–41.

⁸⁰ Jesus preaches about the kingdom of God in Mark 1:14–15; 4:11, 26, 30; 9:1, 47; 10:14–15,

23–25; 12:34; and 14:25. The kingdom of God is also mentioned in Mark 15:43. Contrast Mark 3:24; 6:23; and 13:8.

⁸¹ References to Jesus' authority occur in Mark 1:21–27; 2:10–11, 28; 4:39–41; and 11:27–33.

⁸² References to Jesus sharing authority occur in Mark 3:14–15; 6:7; and, in parable form, in 13:34.

⁸³ Verbal controversies occur in Mark 2:1–3:6; 11:15–19, 27–33; and 12:1–44.

⁸⁴ References to Jesus' emotions in Mark's Gospel include Mark 1:41 (compassion or anger, depending on the textual variant); 1:43 (displeasure); 3:5 (anger and grief); 6:6 (amazement); 6:34 (compassion); 8:12 (precise emotion not stated, but he "sighs deeply"); 10:14 (displeasure); 10:21 (love); and 14:34 (sorrow). While Mark shows Jesus experiencing a wide range of emotions, Matthew and Luke will frequently omit these references.

⁸⁵ Prophecies of Jesus' suffering and death include Mark 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33–34; 12:1–12 (in parable form); and 14:24–25, 36.

⁸⁶ The Old Testament passages that Latter-day Saints usually understand to suggest that the Messiah would suffer and die—including especially the "suffering servant" passages in Isaiah—were generally not understood to apply to the Messiah, but perhaps to Israel as a corporate body.

⁸⁷ See Julie M. Smith, "'She Hath Wrought a Good Work': The Anointing of Jesus in Mark's Gospel," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5 (2013): 31–46.

⁸⁸ See Gaye Strathearn and Frank F. Judd Jr., "The Distinctive Testimonies of the Four Gospels," *Religious Educator* 8, no. 2 (2007): 58–85.