Appendix

Producing an Outline of Mark's Gospel

Most modern commentaries on Mark outline the gospel. They first divide the text into major sections (e.g., "Mark 8:27–10:52: The Journey to Jerusalem"). Then, they divide these into smaller units (e.g., "Mark 10:32–45: The Third Passion Prediction") and subunits (e.g., "Mark 10:32–34: Jesus Predicts his Death").

In addition, some modern printings of the actual text of Mark break up the gospel into sections and provide summarizing titles for each. Indeed, even the standard modern edition of Mark's original Greek (published by the United Bible Societies) does this.

By contrast, a minority of modern scholars have argued that outlines and summarizing titles are inappropriate. Mark's gospel is a seamless web whose themes crisscross in highly complex ways, and it is misleading to divide up the text or to draw special attention to only one dimension of a passage which contains many. Just as it would destroy the beautiful patterns of an oriental carpet to cut it up into strips, so dividing up Mark and labeling the individual sections ruins our perception of the whole.

In the original Greek text of Mark, there were no breaks at all. Typically, ancient manuscripts have no section titles or paragraphs. Indeed, they do not even have punctuation or space between words. All there is is an uninterrupted series of individual letters!

Naturally, however, when an ancient person read the gospel out loud to the Christian assembly, there must have been breaks between smaller units and perhaps even indications of larger structural features. Certainly, for example, the reader paused
at the end of sentences. Readers who had training in rhetoric or drama—as so many people in the ancient world did—might have used differing inflections of their voices to help the audience make thematic connections between various parts of the gospel (e.g., the three passion predictions in Mark 8–10).

Any good modern outline of the gospel must respect the overriding structural features. Clearly, there are in Mark crucial transitions, important refrains, and other dominant literary indications. Thus, for example, it is hard to deny that the gospel's plot takes a major turn when Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus replies that he must suffer (8:27ff.). Another major turn occurs when Jesus actually arrives in the vicinity of Jerusalem where the suffering will take place (11:1ff.). Accordingly, any outline should indicate such central structures.

At the same time, however, anyone who attempts to outline Mark must sometimes choose to highlight certain themes and other features at the expense of equally important ones. Part of the genius of Mark is that he was able to use the same material to be part of multiple structures. Thus, for example, in the commentary I argued that the two-stage healing of the blind man in 8:22–26 has two very different literary functions. On the one hand, it points forward to the two great confessions to Jesus which follow immediately. When Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah but should not have to suffer, he sees only partially. Full sight is confessing that Jesus is God's Son, a confession which soon follows. Nevertheless, the same two-stage healing continues the pattern of declining miracles due to declining faith. The healing of the blind man is more difficult than the preceding healing (7:31–37) and less difficult than the subsequent one (9:14–29). In the context of a single outline, however, a person cannot honor both literary functions of the miracle and so must choose the one he or she decides is more significant.
Because any outline must highlight some themes and other features at the expense of equally important ones, no single outline can be definitive, and in fact many different ones are helpful. The number of scholarly outlines of Mark is practically as great as the number of scholars. This abundance is a testimony to the richness of Mark and the importance of highlighting different parts of the web of inner connections.

At this point, it might be a useful exercise for the reader to produce a personal outline of Mark. In this little commentary, I have pointed out the most important literary structures and also tried to indicate some of the web of inner connections. In the actual translation, I have shown where I feel such things as paragraph breaks might be. I now invite my readers to come up with their own outlines. I predict that, at least in many details, the resulting outlines will all be different, but probably none of them will be "wrong." By comparing such outlines, readers will gain a greater sense of the beauty and complexity of Mark's gospel and have more appreciation for both the insight and limitations of what I have written.

After completing their own outlines, readers might be interested in comparing them with mine.

An Outline of Mark's Gospel

I. Title: The Beginning of the Good News of Jesus the Messiah, God's Son (1:1).

II. Prologue: Jesus is God's Son who will baptize with the Holy Spirit but who first must suffer (1:2-13).
   A. John the Baptist announces the coming of the mighty one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:2-8).
   B. Jesus receives the Holy Spirit, and God declares that Jesus is his Son but in so doing indicates that Jesus must suffer (1:9-11). Then Satan tests Jesus (1:12-13).
III. Part 1: Jesus begins his ministry of preparation for God's rule and hides his identity as God's Son (1:14–3:12).

A. Jesus begins his ministry of preparation (1:14–20).
   1. He proclaims that God's rule has drawn near and that people must repent (1:14–15).
   2. He calls four students and tells them that one day he will make them fishers of human beings (1:16–20).

B. Jesus silences demons who attempt to reveal that he is God's Son and tries to avoid public acclaim for his miracles (1:21–45).
   1. Jesus casts out and silences a demon who declares he is "God's holy one" (1:21–28).
   3. Jesus casts out many demons and does not let them reveal who he is (1:32–34).
   4. Jesus insists on going elsewhere when everyone is looking for him (1:35–39).
   5. Jesus heals a leper and orders him not to publicize the miracle, and when the leper does, Jesus withdraws to the desert (1:40–45).

C. Jesus publicly incites opposition and proclaims he is a human being (2:1–3:6).
   1. Jesus publicly heals a paralytic and insists that as a "human being" he has the power to forgive sins. Consequently, the scribes become concerned (2:1–12).
   2. Jesus associates with tax collectors and sinners and so provokes the scribes and Pharisees (2:13–17).
   3. Jesus defends his students for their unorthodox custom of not fasting and, apparently, irritates the disciples of John and those of the Pharisees. Jesus identifies himself as the "bridegroom" (2:18–22).
   4. Jesus defends his students for picking grain on the Sabbath and so irritates the Pharisees. Jesus insists that as a "human being" he is Lord of the Sabbath (2:23–28).
   5. Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath, prompting the Pharisees and Herodians to plot to kill him (3:1–6).

D. Summary: Jesus tries to escape public attention and refuses to let the demons reveal that he is God's Son (3:7–12).
IV. Part 2: Jesus continues his ministry of preparation by telling his students that they must patiently endure and that they can trust him. However, they fail to understand (3:13–8:21 [or 8:26]).

A. Jesus selects his students, and they are his true family.
   1. Jesus chooses the twelve to share his ministry (3:13–19).
   2. His relatives and the scribes assume Jesus is possessed, and Jesus denies it (3:20–30).
   3. Jesus declares that his true family are those who do God’s will (3:31–35).

B. Jesus tells his students the secret that his followers must patiently suffer as they wait for the full coming of God’s rule (4:1–34).
   1. Jesus tells the parable of the sower and explains privately to his students that it means they must endure with patience (4:1–25).
      a. Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower to the crowd (4:1–9).
      b. He informs his students that he uses parables so outsiders will not understand (4:10–12).
      c. He explains to his students that the parable teaches that only those who endure will bear fruit (4:13–20).
      d. He indicates that later outsiders will also learn the meaning (4:21–23).
      e. He warns his students to pay attention to what he has taught them (4:24–25).
   2. Jesus tells parables which indicate that God’s rule will come later (4:26–33).
      b. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (4:30–32).
   3. Summary: Jesus tells parables to outsiders and explains the meaning to his students (4:33–34).

C. Jesus works a series of miracles whose message is that we must have faith in him (4:35–6:6a).
   1. The Stilling of the Storm. Jesus challenges his students to trust him despite danger, since he exercises the power of God (4:35–41).
2. The Exorcism of the Gerasene Demoniac. Jesus works a miracle which frightens the villagers, and they ask him to leave (5:1-20).

3. Two miracles contrasting trust and distrust (5:21-43).
   a. The Healing of the Hemorrhaging Woman. The woman trusts Jesus’ power to heal her, and Jesus insists on bringing the miracle to public attention (5:24b-34).
   b. The Raising of Jairus’s Daughter. People do not trust that Jesus can raise the dead, and so when he works the miracle, Jesus insists that it should not be publicized (5:21-24a, 35-43).

4. Jesus works a few miracles in Nazareth and marvels at the lack of faith (6:1-6a).

D. Jesus teaches his students that their mission will be difficult (6:6b-6:30).
   1. Jesus sends the twelve out to preach and tells them they must go empty-handed and be aware that they may not be received. They go out, work, and return (6:7-13, 30).
   2. John the Baptist is executed for preaching God’s word (6:14-29).

E. Jesus works a series of miracles in which he again challenges his students to recognize that he has divine power and so they should trust him and persevere. However, they fail to understand (6:31-56).
   1. The feeding of the five thousand. Jesus challenges his students to feed the multitude, and he then takes what they have and enables them to do so (6:31-44).
   2. The walking on water. Jesus sends his students into a difficult situation and then saves them by his divine power, but they fail to understand (6:45-52).
   3. The healing of many sick in Gennesaret. The people show the faith his students lack (6:53-56).

F. Jesus teaches that lack of faith is what truly defiles (7:1-30).
   1. The hypocritical tradition of the elders. Jesus teaches his students that real sin comes from within and includes foolish unbelief (7:1-23).
2. The healing of the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter. Jesus responds to the woman’s persistent faith despite the fact that she is ritually unclean (7:24-30).

G. Due to other people’s lack of faith, Jesus has difficulty working miracles and insists that they be kept secret (7:31-8:26).

1. The healing of the deaf and dumb man. Jesus has difficulty working the miracle and insists that it not be publicized (7:31-37).

2. The feeding of the four thousand. Jesus dismisses the crowd to keep them from perceiving the miracle. The disciples still have no trust in Jesus, and the miracle is less than the previous feeding (8:1-10).

3. The Pharisees in their skepticism demand a sign from Jesus, but he refuses to give one (8:11-13).

4. Conclusion: The disciples’ hearts are hardened through lack of faith, and so the miracles are decreasing (8:14-21).

5. Transitional giving of sight story: Jesus has to heal a blind man twice, and he orders the man to avoid talking to anyone (8:22-26). This story also symbolizes the growth in understanding noted below.

V. Part 3: Jesus tells his students plainly that he is God’s Son and he and they must suffer, but they do not respond positively (8:27-10:52).

A. Jesus plainly tells his students for the first time that he is God’s Son and both he and they must suffer.

1. Peter’s confession and the first passion prediction, negative reaction, and teaching (8:27-9:1).
   a. In response to Jesus’ question, Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah (8:27-29).
   b. Jesus responds by saying openly that he must suffer. Peter reacts negatively, and Jesus reprimands him (8:30-33).
   c. Jesus tells people that his followers must suffer in order to be saved (8:34-9:1).

2. The Transfiguration (9:2-13). Jesus reveals to Peter, James, and John that he is God’s Son, but orders them not to tell anyone until the resurrection. Jesus
like John the Baptist must suffer. The three disciples react with confusion.

B. The healing of the demon-possessed boy. The least possible faith makes the miracle as difficult as possible (9:14–29). The time for miracles has now passed.

C. Second passion prediction, negative reaction, and teaching (9:30–37).
   1. Jesus predicts his execution and resurrection, but his students do not understand (9:30–32).
   2. The disciples discuss which of them is the greatest (9:33–34).
   3. Jesus teaches that whoever wishes to be first must be last and what we do to the least in the community we do to Jesus (9:35–37).

D. Jesus gives an outline of how Christians should serve various members of his fellowship (9:38–10:31). We must:
   1. Be charitable to outsiders who do not harm us (9:38–41).
   2. Avoid hurting the defenseless believer, lest we be cast into Gehenna (9:42–50).
   5. Give up our wealth (10:17–27).
   6. Summary: Christians are a single family in which the first must be the last (10:28–31).

E. The third passion prediction, negative reaction, and teaching (10:32–45).
   2. James and John ask for the seats of honor in the kingdom, and the ten become angry (10:35–41).
   3. Jesus teaches that whoever wants to be first must be last, in imitation of the self-sacrifice of Jesus himself (10:42–45).

VI. Part 4: Jesus begins to reveal his identity to the world and incites attempts to destroy him (10:46 [or 11:1]–12:44).

A. Transitional giving of sight story. Bartimaeus proclaims that Jesus is the Son of David. Jesus refuses to let him be silenced. Jesus heals him of his blindness, and Bartimaeus follows him "on the road" (10:46–52).
B. Jesus acts as God’s anointed and provokes a plot against him (11:1-25).
   2. Jesus cleanses the temple and curses the fig tree whose destruction foreshadows the temple’s. As a result, the religious authorities want to arrest Jesus (11:12-25).
C. A series of controversy stories about Jesus’ authority. These suggest he is God’s Son (11:27-12:37).
   1. Introduction: The religious leaders demand to know the source of Jesus’ authority, and he suggests his authority comes from the same place as John’s (i.e., “from heaven”) (11:27-33).
   2. Jesus tells the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (12:1-12). The parable suggests that Jesus is God’s Son, and the authorities try to arrest him.
   3. The Pharisees and Herodians fail to trap Jesus with a question about taxes (12:13-17).
   4. The Sadducees fail to discredit Jesus with a question about the resurrection (12:18-27).
   5. The question about the great commandment. Jesus’ answer silences his critics (12:28-34).
   6. Conclusion: Jesus hints to his critics that the Messiah is in reality God’s Son (12:35-37).
D. Jesus denounces the scribes for their greed and praises the widow for her generosity (12:38-44).

VII. Part 5: Jesus foretells in detail the suffering of his followers and warns them not to be deceived by the false prophets who work miracles. Instead, they must be faithful as they await the end (13:1-37).
   A. Introduction.
      1. In response to a comment by a disciple, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple (13:1-2).
      2. Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask privately when this will take place (13:3-4).
   B. Jesus’ prophecy (13:5-37).
      1. Introduction: Jesus warns against the false prophets (13:5-6).
APPENDIX: AN OUTLINE OF MARK'S GOSPEL

2. The sufferings of his followers prior to the great tribulation (13:7–13).
3. The tribulation and warnings against following the false prophets who work miracles (13:14–23).
5. Jesus tells that the time is soon but unknown; so we must watch (13:28–37).

VIII. Part 6: Jesus is acclaimed God's Son as he suffers and dies (14:1–15:39). The disciples fail to be faithful.
   A. As the authorities and Judas plot against Jesus, a woman anoints him (14:1–11).
   B. The last supper (14:12–26).
      1. Preparations for the supper (14:12–16).
      2. At supper Jesus announces the betrayal (14:17–21).
      3. The institution of the eucharist (14:22–25).
      4. Jesus and his students depart for the Mount of Olives (14:26).
   C. Jesus predicts Peter's denial (14:27–31).
   D. Jesus prays for strength in Gethsemane while the disciples sleep (14:32–42).
   E. The betrayal and arrest and the flight of the disciples (14:43–52).
   F. The hearing before the high priest. Jesus proclaims he is God's Son and is condemned to death for blasphemy. Meanwhile, Peter denies knowing Jesus (14:53–72).
   G. The trial before Pilate. Pilate condemns Jesus for being the King of the Jews (15:1–15).
   H. The soldiers ironically acclaim Jesus as king (15:16–20).
   I. The crucifixion. The world ironically acclaims Jesus as king (15:21–27).
   J. The bystanders dare Jesus to work a miracle to save himself and make them believe (15:29–32).
   K. The death of Jesus. The curtain of the sanctuary is torn, and the centurion declares that Jesus is God's Son (15:33–39).

IX. Epilogue (15:40–16:8).
   A. Jesus' burial (15:40–47).
   B. The women go to the tomb and learn that Jesus has risen, but fail to share the news (16:1–8).
Notes

1. Fowler takes the more radical view that Mark himself composed the feeding of the five thousand on the model of the feeding of the four thousand. R.M. Fowler, _Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark_ (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).


3. Other details in the two feedings also suggest decline. Thus, in the first story Jesus starts with only two fish (6:41) and feeds five thousand men, whereas in the second, he starts with a few fish (8:7) and feeds four thousand (with no suggestion that they were only men). To be sure, in the second story Mark uses a word which can mean “little fish.” However, the word also means simply “fish.” It is harder to know whether the different terms Mark uses for “basket” point to a decline, since both wicker and mat baskets came in various sizes. Wicker baskets were normally stronger than mat baskets, and so perhaps when the two terms were set side by side, an ancient reader might have assumed the wicker baskets were larger, just as we might assume that a “hamper” would normally be bigger than a “basket.” For a discussion of the different words for “basket” see F.J.A. Hort, “A Note by the Late Dr Hort on the Words kophinos, spuris, sargane,” _The Journal of Theological Studies_ 10 (1909):567–71.

4. By the “reader” Mark especially means the person who would read the book to the Christian assembly. It was important for him or her to be informed, because after the reading, the congregation might ask questions or make comments.
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