“Why Does Mark’s Gospel Omit the Resurrection and the Virgin Birth?”

If Jesus really did rise from the dead, why didn’t Mark say he saw him after the fact? Is Mark not the first gospel written? If I had hung around with a guy for three years and then seen him after he had died I would certainly write about it. Also, why does Mark not mention the virgin birth? If it were so important why didn’t Paul mention it?

Your first question alludes to a textual problem in the manuscript evidence for the end of the book—namely verses 9-20 of the last chapter (Mark 16:8-20). These twelve verses *do* give an account of the resurrection of Christ. The controversy comes about in that two of the earliest (almost complete) manuscripts we have—(Sinaiticus and Vaticanus [dated mid-300’s A.D.]—*omit* the verses. What is also true is that the scribes who wrote these two codices *left some blank space* after verse 8, indicating that they *knew* of a longer ending to the Gospel of Mark, but they did not have it available from the manuscripts they were copying.

Most all other manuscripts and early versions (translations into other languages) include vs. 9-20. Even earlier evidence is found among the Early Patristic Fathers (the church leaders which followed immediately after the Apostles’ deaths), substantiating that these twelve verses were not only known two hundred years *before* Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, but that there was support for their inclusion (since they each quoted authoritatively from the “disputed” passage (cf. Justin Martyr, *Apology 1.45,* ca. A.D.145; Tatian, *Diatessaron*, ca. A.D. 170; and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.10.6 ca. A.D. 180).

Your second question alludes to the fact that Mark was the

first gospel written. This is generally accepted, although there is still a persistent argument among textual critics that Matthew may have written his gospel in Aramaic *first* (which was later translated into Greek).

Your third comment about Mark is based on a wrong assumption. Mark was *not* one of the Twelve Disciples, and therefore he didn't "hang around with Jesus for three years." What do we know about Mark, or John Mark, as he is also called? There is some scriptural evidence that the home in Jerusalem where Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover in the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion, and the place where they gathered for prayer (Acts 1:13) after Jesus was laid in the tomb, was the home of John Mark and his parents (Acts 12:12).

Also, there is an unusual event, unique to Mark's Gospel, found in Mark 14:51-52. The preceding verses describe the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the fact that "Everyone deserted Him and fled, as Jesus had predicted," (cf. Mk. 14:27 and 14:50), including Peter. Immediately following this, Mark records the incident of a young man following Jesus, "wearing nothing but a linen sheet (a sleeping garment) over his naked body; and they seized him. But he left the linen sheet behind, and escaped naked" (Mk. 14: 51,52).

The Greek word used to describe him, *neoniskos*, indicates a young man in the prime of his life, from late teens to late thirties. Most interpreters believe that this young man was John Mark. After Jesus and the disciples had celebrated the Passover and left for Gethsemane, John Mark removed his outer cloak and went to bed wrapped in a linen sleeping garment. Apparently a servant awakened him and made him aware of Judas' betrayal scheme, and he made his way to Gethsemane, not bothering to dress, which is where the incident occurred. He would hardly have mentioned such an incident unless it had a special significance for him as a turning point in his life.

This is the same John Mark that accompanied Paul and Barnabas later on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). This is also the same John Mark that brought about a strong contention between Paul and Barnabas as they discussed whom they would take on their **second** missionary journey (Acts 15:37-40). Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again, but Paul resisted this, because apparently John Mark, still a young man, had found the first missionary journey too "tough" and he "deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work" (Acts 15:38). So Barnabas took Mark, and Paul took Silas, resulting in two missionary teams. As he had formerly discipled Paul (the new convert), Barnabas, a builder of men, now turned his attention to discipling John Mark.

Later on, we find that Mark became the travelling companion of the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and Peter speaks affectionately of him as "my (spiritual) son, Mark" (1 Peter 5:13). This indicates that Mark was probably converted by Peter. Even Paul later had a change of heart toward Mark, saying of him to Timothy, "Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is *useful to me* for ministry (2 Timothy 4:ll)"

Let me at this point discuss the four gospels a little, as their authorship and *purpose* bear directly upon your next questions.

With regard to authorship, the crucial factor of credibility was *eyewitness* testimony: that is, the writers of the gospels either had to have personally witnessed these events or they had to have an intimate association of and verification from those who had witnessed these events (from the baptism of John to the Resurrection).

Both *Matthew* and *John* qualify because they were both among the twelve disciples. Though not an apostle, *Mark* had the best opportunity in his mother's house in Jerusalem and his personal connection with Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and other

prominent disciples for gathering the most authentic information concerning the gospel history. And we also know that Mark was the travelling companion of Peter, who is the real eyewitness reflected throughout Mark's gospel. The document has been called by some the "Gospel of Peter"!

Papias, a Church Father, mentions Mark in the early 100's as the "interpreter" of Peter, "writing down" the personal reminiscences of Peter's discourses/sermons delivered over the course of their journeys together. Clement of Alexandria, a little later in the second century, informs us that "the people of Rome were so pleased with Peter's preaching that they requested Mark, his attendant, to put it down in writing, which Peter neither encouraged nor hindered."

We learn that *Luke,* though not an eyewitness, was the travelling companion of the apostle Paul on some of his later missionary journeys. Of the four gospels, his gospel reaches the highest level of scholastic and literary quality, and his Prologue (Luke 1:1-4) gives clear indication that he gave careful consideration to the compiling of eyewitness sources available to him: "—just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word have handed them down to us" (1:2). His treatment of contemporary places, people and events in the secular Roman world have a high degree of accuracy when compared with non-biblical, historical material.

There is good evidence that both Luke and Matthew may have used Mark's gospel as a source (or a common corpus of material which preceded Mark), as well as other oral or written sources. Since the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's gospel appears to be that of Mary, there is a strong possibility that the source for Luke's beginning chapters which record events concerning Christ's birth came directly from His mother.

Luke visited all the principal apostolic churches from Jerusalem to Rome. He met Peter, Mark, and Barnabas at Antioch, James and his elders at Jerusalem, Philip and his

daughters at Caesarea, and he had first hand access and benefit to all the information which Paul himself had received by revelation or collected from personal contact with all his fellow apostles and other first generation disciples.

The four gospels are eyewitness portraits of the life and events of Jesus Christ. They do, however, reveal somewhat different purposes with respect to emphasis. The Gospel of *Matthew* without doubt was intended for the Jewish community and a primary focus on Jesus as the *Messiah* who historically fulfilled the prophetic predictions and promises mentioned throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Gospel of *Luke* portrays Christ as the "Son of Man," that is, with an emphasis on the *humanity* of Christ, and it was written primarily to the Gentile world.

The Gospel of *John* has yet a different focus. John clearly identified that his primary purpose was to prove that Jesus was *God Himself*. When John wrote his gospel near the end of the first century, Gnostics and other sects were beginning to question the divine nature of Christ, and John's major intent in his Gospel was to answer these critics.

The Gospel of *Mark* was written to demonstrate Christ as the *Servant:* "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Nativity accounts in Matthew and Luke make sense, because they would be important to establish both Messianic and human lineage. It does not, however, suit Mark's purpose, as the lineage of a "slave" or a "servant" is unimportant. This answers your question about why one would not expect Mark to mention the virgin birth in his gospel. It did not suit his purpose.

Your final question was why Paul did not mention the Virgin Birth. I believe he does. In Galatians 4:4 we have these words: "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His

Son, **made, born of** *(ginomai*—originating, coming from) **a woman**, born under the Law." Now obviously every person born is "born" of a woman. So what is Paul referring to? He is referring specifically to two promises from the Old Testament, specifically, Isaiah 7:14 and Genesis 3:15. The Isaiah passage says: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a (miraculous) *sign*: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (God With Us)." Matthew 1:23 cites the fulfillment of this messianic promise. The sign *is* the virgin birth.

Genesis 3:15 contains the first messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. After Adam and Eve's disobedience God pronounces three judgments: upon Adam, Eve, and Satan. Addressing Satan in the verse God says: "I will put enmity (a barrier) between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; And *he* shall bruise (crush) your head, and you shall bruise *his* heel."

Following quickly after the entrance of sin comes the promise of a solution. God promises that a way will be found to undo and to rectify the consequences of their disobedience. It will involve the promise of a "seed" which is referred to by the personal pronoun "He." A conflict or battle is described which will occur at some future time and will result in a mortal blow to Satan's *head* and a non-mortal wound to the "seed's" *heel*.

Speaking to the disciples of His coming death, Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. . . Now my soul has become troubled: and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for *this purpose* I came to this hour. . .*Now* judgment is upon this world; *now* the ruler (Satan) of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.' But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death

by which He was to die" (John 12:23-33). This passage describes the mortal blow Christ inflicted upon Satan by His death and resurrection: "He shall crush your head."

The passage also alludes to the bruising, suffering and death Christ endured on the Cross—something that our Lord dreaded here, and earlier in His prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Save Me from this hour; let this cup pass from Me." But in order for "the Seed of the woman" to triumph over sin, it was necessary for Him to suffer at the hands of Satan: "You shall bruise his heel."

The "enmity" or "barrier" between Satan's seed (those now contaminated by sin) and the woman's seed **is** the *virgin birth*.

Mary was that elect woman, a virgin, from whom the One Seed came. He was to be the seed of the woman, not of Adam, the man: "And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I know no man?" And the Angel said to her, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason that holy thing born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34-35).

The Virgin Birth, therefore, is *very* important, because without it, Jesus would be just another human being like you and me, and He would in no way qualify to be a Redeemer for even *one* sinful human being, much less for *all* humans. Shepard has observed:

> *"No convincing evidence against the Virgin birth of Jesus . . .can be found in the New Testament. The difficulty of accounting for His life on any other ground is greater than the difficulty of accepting the Virgin birth as a fact." (J.W. Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946, p. 1).*

Apart from this explanation, the context of Paul's words in Galatians 4:4 are meaningless. He is simply referring to the

broader, messianic context understood by all the Jewish community when they referred to “the woman.”

_____, I hope this material will help answer the questions you raised.

Sincerely yours,

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