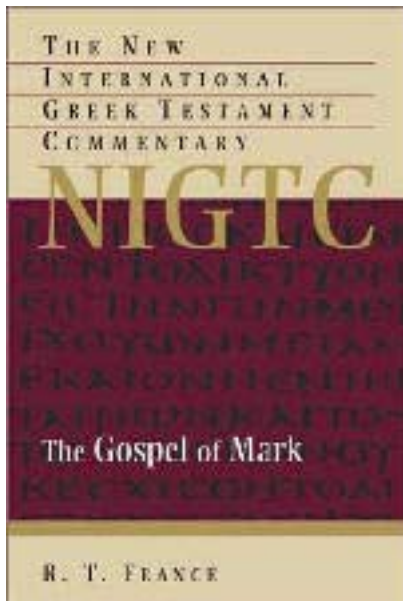


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**France, R. T.**

*The Gospel of Mark*

The New International Greek Testament  
Commentary

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This recent addition to the New International Greek Testament Commentary series is a model of tempered scholarship. The series itself is based on the text of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) and the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed.). Writing in this series, France strictly interprets the object of his commentary. He states that he does not address form-critical issues regularly, nor does he take up questions of linguistic background and the like. In general, his analysis is contained to the New Testament Greek text and to the textual witnesses referenced in the aforementioned volume.

In the introduction, the author attends to the preliminaries of the book's genre, structure, message, and purpose. He also addresses the Synoptic problem briefly. On each topic, the reader is in the hands of a master who understands that the minority, while critical and vocal, do not represent the whole of scholarship. Hence, France validates his perspectives by reference to others who hold the same position rather than laboriously rebutting every minority opinion in print. Where it is necessary to nuance his perspective from others, France does so succinctly with his logic simply communicated. The precious value of this style is that it leaves more room for the commentary itself.

France sees the structure of the second Gospel as the title followed by a prologue (1:2–13) and a narrative occurring in three acts. The three acts are differentiated by geography. Act 1 (1:14–8:21) contains Jesus ministry in Galilee. Act 2 (8:22–10:52) teaches about the cross as it describes the travels from Galilee to Jerusalem. Finally, act 3 (11:1–16:8) takes place in Jerusalem and begins with the triumphal entry.

In the detail of the commentary, France demonstrates the import of paying attention to detail as he teases out elements for analysis. In this teasing, however, a weakness appears in his method. France rightly considers possible allusions to Judaic literature. However, this consideration is very often restricted to the Hebrew Bible and tends to underrepresent the apocryphal/pseudepigraphical literature.

One example of this may be found in France's analysis of the parable of the Mustard Seed. France delves into the botanical nature of the mustard seed and possible echoes of Ezekiel's two cedars (Ezek 17:23; 31:6) and the tree of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 4:9, 18). However, he does not seem to be aware of other possible sources: the apocalyptic knowledge gained by Adam upon eating from the tree of knowledge (*L.A.E.* 29.2–11), the tree of wisdom in *1 En.* 82.1–3 (used to describe the life-bringing power of Enoch's apocalyptic wisdom), and Ben Sira's (24:12–22) depiction of the tree of wisdom that grants life.

One finds also that France's discussion would benefit at times from giving attention to linguistic studies on Mark's sources. In particular, M. Black's *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (124), while having its own problems of methodology, would benefit France's conclusion that 4:8 and 20 are best read with three numerical phrases. Instead of this, France is content to rely solely on later textual witnesses in Latin and Coptic, part of the Nestle-Aland critical apparatus.

These types of problems aside, the work is exceptional. Refusing to write a commentary on commentaries, France pulls sparingly and illustratively from other commentators. In his conclusions, France is acutely aware of the theological conclusions of his analysis. However, the end never justifies the means in his treatment of the text. The result is a work of surprising freshness that will doubtless be a spring from which future studies will draw benefit.