

Mark

Title and Holy Writer

Like the other Gospels, there is no mention in this book, or in the rest of Scripture, to the identity of the holy writer of this Gospel. Yet from the very early days of the New Testament church, this Gospel was attributed to John Mark, from which we have received the title *“The Gospel according to Mark.”*

Mark, whose Hebrew name was John (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37; 13:5,13), was the son of Mary, a strong supporter of the Christian church in Jerusalem. It was to her home that Peter returned following his miraculous release from prison. ***“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12).***

Being the cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10), Mark went with Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 12:25) and along with them on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:5). But half way through the trip, he left the missionaries and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13; 15:38). Due to a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas about taking Mark on the second missionary journey, they parted ways, with Paul taking Silas and returning to Syria and Cilicia and Barnabas taking Mark and going to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-41).

In time there must have been a reconciliation since Mark was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment (Paul states that Mark is with him - cf. Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24). Later, Paul would even speak highly of Mark, and asks Timothy to bring Mark with him to Rome, writing, ***“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11).***

So Mark had a close connection with the apostle Paul, and with the preaching of the Gospel in many different areas. But Mark also had a close connection to the apostle Peter who wrote: ***“She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son” (1 Peter 5:13).*** Many of the early church fathers pointed to

this close relationship between Peter and Mark, saying that Mark wrote this Gospel from Peter’s eyewitness account of the life of Christ. On church father, Papias (140 A.D.), wrote, *“Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered...”*

Time and Place of Writing

Based on many witnesses like the passage above, as well as the content of the Gospel itself, it is generally held that Mark wrote this history of the life of Christ for a Roman readership, while he was with Peter in Rome (called “Babylon” in the passage above).

The Book of Acts records the spread of Christianity through Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece and into Italy. With this spread of the Gospel, and the growth of a Christian congregation in Rome, a time came when a Gospel was needed by those who were in Rome. The Holy Spirit filled this need through the evangelist, Mark.

The date of writing must have been before the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD) because the prophecy of the destruction of the temple (13:2) had yet to be fulfilled at the time of writing. Like the place, the date cannot be conclusively determined, though it is generally placed in the mid 60’s AD.

Characteristics

The characteristics of the Gospel according to Mark help to show that, unlike Matthew, Mark was originally intended for a Gentile audience, probably those in Rome. Consider the following:

- While Mark does refer to Jesus quoting passages from the Old Testament, he himself quotes the Old Testament only one time – in the opening verses of the Gospel (1:2-3). The fact that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy would not have been as important to Gentile readers.
- We also see that Mark describes customs and geography which would be unfamiliar to the Gentiles. For example: the custom of washing hands before eating (7:2-4); the explanation of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (14:12); the explanation of the day of preparation (15:42); and he also

details a bit of geography which would be helpful to the far away Gentile reader (11:1; 13:3).

- We notice that Mark defines Hebrew and Aramaic expressions which would be unfamiliar to the Gentiles:
 - ✓ **“Boanerges, that is, ‘Sons of Thunder’”** - 3:17
 - ✓ **“‘Talitha, cumi,’ which is translated, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise.’”** - 5:41
 - ✓ **“‘Corban’— (that is, a gift to God)”** - 7:11
 - ✓ **“‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened’”** - 7:34
 - ✓ **“Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull”** - 15:22
- Mark also makes frequent use of Latin words and expressions, which are not used by other Gospel writers.
 - ✓ Mark uses the Latin word *centurion*, where the other Gospel writers always use the Greek equivalent, *hekatontarches* (15:39,44,45).
 - ✓ In the account of the widow’s two mites, Mark gives the equivalent of those two coins using the Latin word *quadrans* (12:42).
 - ✓ In the account of the beheading of John the Baptist, Mark uses the Latin title *spekoulator* (6:27) for the executioner.

Purpose

The Gospel according to Mark is a Gospel of action. It is the shortest of all the Gospels, and it moves quickly from one incident to another, without focusing on specific details (the Greek word *eutheos*, usually translated *immediately*, occurs 40 times in Mark, as often as the rest of the New Testament books combined! Just look these references in chapter one: 1:10,18,20,21,29,30,31,42,43).

Mark deals more with the deeds of Jesus than with His sayings. His purpose is stated in 1:1, **“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,”** that is, to show Jesus to be the Son

of God, which is proven by His great works and deeds. Mark shows that Jesus has power over evil spirits (1:23-27; 3:11-12,14; 5:7); power over sickness (1:29-34; 5:25-30; 7:37); power over the forces of nature (4:35-41); and power over death (5:35-42). Mark records seventeen specific miracles of Jesus, as well as stating five other times that Jesus healed many (1:32-34; 1:39; 3:7-12; 6:5; 6:53-56).

While Mark seldom records in detail the discourses of Jesus, he clearly emphasizes the power of the Word in Jesus’ teaching. He writes, **“And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22)**. Mark also repeatedly records Jesus’ desire to teach the people: **“But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth’ (Mark 1:38)**.

A second purpose of Mark’s Gospel is stated in 10:45, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”** In this Gospel the evangelist seeks to show God’s Son as the saving Servant, dedicated to the goal of man’s salvation even to the point of death. This is shown throughout the book as Mark records Jesus’ ability to help mankind, and also by emphasizing Jesus’ willingness and desire to help mankind. We are told that Jesus was **“moved with compassion” (1:41; cf. 5:19; 6:34; 8:2)**; and **“loved him” (10:21)**. This is brought to a climax as Jesus willingly goes to the cross to save mankind. Even after His resurrection Jesus sends His followers out with the saving Gospel saying, **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:15-16)**.

Outline

- I. **Historical Introduction (1:1-14)**
- II. **Jesus Proves Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God, by His mighty teaching and deeds (1:14-8:26)**
- III. **Jesus Proves Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God, by His suffering, death and resurrection (8:27-16:20)**