

A Survey of the Gospel of Mark

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Author:

The author is very careful to not identify himself, but John Mark is universally accepted as writer of this gospel (**Acts 12:12, 25**). This gives us the impression that he may have been writing for someone else. In fact, it is the unanimous testimony of early church fathers that Mark was the author. John was his Jewish name, and Marcus (Mark) was his Roman name. The only insight we have of authorship is found in **Mark 14:51-52** when there is mention of "a certain young man" who fled the scene of Jesus' arrest naked. This is likely Mark who tagged along after the last supper, which was probably held at his house. There is no other reason for him to mention this incident if it was not him.

John Mark is mentioned ten times in the New Testament. He is often infamously remembered, by a casual reader, for his conflict with the apostle Paul. His mother was a wealthy and prominent Christian in the Jerusalem church, the church probably met in their home (mentioned above), and he was well connected. Therefore, John Mark joined Paul and Barnabas (his cousin or uncle) on the first missionary journey, but not on the second because of a strong disagreement about John Mark's presence (**Acts 15:37-38**). He may have been homesick, or worried about his mother, but it still frustrated Paul. However, near the end of Paul's life he called for Mark to be with him (**II Timothy 4:11**).

It is likely that in the first century, John Mark was known more for his association with the Apostle Peter, who was evidently his spiritual son in the faith (**I Peter 5:13**). From Peter he received first-hand information concerning the events and teachings of Jesus. Early scholarship notes that John Mark preserved the information in written form. Around 140 AD, Papias wrote that the Apostle John called Mark the interpreter for the Apostle Peter's work. Also around the same time, Justin Martyr called Mark's gospel "the memoirs of Peter."

Date:

As stated in the lesson on Matthew, the Gospels are difficult to date, but the consensus is that this book was written between 50-60 AD. It may have been the first "complete" gospel written. It is also likely that Matthew and Luke used John Mark as a source. Roughly 95% percent of Mark is found in the gospel of Matthew and/or the gospel of Luke.

Theme:

The theme of his gospel seems to be that Jesus is the Messiah. John Mark is the "Joe Friday" gospel writer with his "Just the facts, maam" approach. His details surrounding Palestine, especially Jerusalem, give him depth and detail, but the swift transitions show his story as one of re-telling and not personal eyewitness testimony.

Mark does an excellent job of presenting the military might of Jesus. We see his power, through the stories of him casting out demons, healing a wide range of physical ailments, calming emotional turmoil, silencing government fears, and discussing his own role in the judgment of mankind. However, Mark will also reveal Jesus' service and sacrifice.

Audience:

Mark's gospel seems to be written for Roman believers, particularly Gentiles. He understood Jewish customs, but he wrote in such a way that the Romans could understand. He uses ten Latin words, some of which do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, but he balances those things by explaining Jewish customs and traditions. He chooses to omit the genealogy of Jesus and jumps right into Jesus' ministry. He ignores the long narratives (i.e. Sermon on the Mount, Sermon on the Plain). He also rarely quotes from the Old Testament. However, when he does it is used to fit his theme, that Jesus is the Messiah.

It was at the time of the writing that Christians in Rome were beginning to experience persecution under the Roman government. They needed guidance and encouragement. Mark hoped that his gospel would help to build up their faith. Unlike the other accounts, the Gospel of Mark is not just a collection of sermons, stories, and miracles, but a simple narrative to reveal the Messiah. The Gentiles needed to hear Jesus' story in their own unique way, so John Mark hoped his gospel would suffice.

There are many uniquely Roman traditions mentioned in the Gospel of Mark, but one of the most interesting is the mention of Simon of Cyrene (**Mark 15:21-28**). Roman soldiers often required services from its citizens without payment. The Jews often were forced to serve as porters for a set distance (one mile - **Matthew 5:41**). As a Jewish North African, visiting for Passover, Simon gets forced into carrying the cross for Jesus. This must have had a lasting effect on Simon and his sons Alexander and Rufus (**Romans 16:13**). A Roman could relate to that story more than anyone else.

Key Verses:

Mark 1:11, 1:17, 1:38, 3:31-35, 5:19, 6:30-44, 8:1-12, 8:22-26, 9:1, 9:38-50, 10:13-16, 10:32-45, 11:6-11, 11:15-19, 12:17, 12:29-33, 12:38-44, 13:28-37, 14:51, 14:66-72, 15:21-28, 16:15-18

Outline:

- I. *The Early Ministry of Jesus (1:1-45)*
- II. *The Conflicts with Jesus (2:1-3:35)*
- III. *The Parables of Jesus (4:1-34)*
- IV. *The Miracles of Jesus (4:35-5:34)*
- V. *The Followers of Jesus (6:1-8:21)*
- VI. *The Mission of Jesus (8:22-9:50)*
- VII. *The Teachings of Jesus (10:1-52)*
- VIII. *The Authority of Jesus (11:1-12:44)*
- IX. *The Prophecy of Jesus (13:1-37)*
- X. *The Persecution of Jesus (14:1-52)*
- XI. *The Rejection of Jesus (14:53-15:15)*
- XII. *The Completed work of Jesus (15:16-16:20)*