

The Gospel of Mark Introduction

A. Author

1. Mark, also called John Mark
2. Cousin of Barnabas
3. He was active in ministry and is mentioned in Acts, Colossians, Philemon, 2 Timothy and 1 Peter
4. He traveled with Paul on his first missionary journey, but when he deserted Paul and headed back to Jerusalem it created a rift between the two and Barnabas ended up taking Mark with him
5. A number of church fathers indicate that he became a traveling companion of Peter, who refers to him as, "**Mark, my son**" in 1 Peter 5:13
6. Ultimately, he redeemed himself in the eyes of Paul with Paul referring to him as a "fellow worker" (Philemon 24) and asking Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:11 to "**get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.**"

B. Background

1. Internal and external evidence favors a writing date somewhere in the late 50s or so, meaning it was written within 20 to 30 years of Jesus' death
2. While Matthew's and John's Gospel appear to have Jewish readers in mind, Mark (like Luke) appears to be written to Gentiles, particularly those in Rome
 - a. He doesn't quote the OT as much
 - b. When he mentions Jewish customs he explains them
 - c. He translates Aramaic terms
 - d. When he references time he uses the Roman system rather than the Jewish system
3. Mark was not a witness to Jesus' life or ministry but he was a traveling companion of Peter who was; tradition and most church fathers suggest Mark's writing was based off Peter's preaching and what he personally learned from him

C. Relationship to the Other Gospels

1. There are four Gospels and Matthew, Mark and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they are similar in some significant ways
2. There is debate as to how Matthew, Mark and Luke relate to one another
 - a. The predominant theory is that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke copied from him
 - b. While this *could* explain the similarities, it doesn't account for the vast differences between them
 - c. A major problem with this is that it's not supported by tradition or the writings of most of the Church Fathers who claim that Matthew was written first
 - d. It also doesn't make sense that Matthew, an eye-witness of Jesus' life and ministry would copy from Mark, someone who wasn't a witness
 - e. Finally, the driving force behind this theory is historical criticism which often serves to undermine and explain away the supernatural inspiration of the Scriptures

- f. Because God is the ultimate Author of the Gospels, and penned them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we should expect them to be similar!

D. Uniqueness and Message of Mark's Gospel

1. Why do we have four different Gospels?
 - a. Different audiences:
 - 1) Mark and Luke target gentiles
 - 2) Matthew and John target Jews
 - b. Different purposes:
 - 1) Matthew: heavily focuses on Jesus' teaching
 - 2) Luke: wanted to create an accurate historical record of Jesus' life and ministry and that of the early church (Acts)
 - 3) John: apologetical and evangelistic—he set out to prove that Jesus was the Son of God and that by believing in Him we might have eternal life (tradition also holds that John was aware of Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels and he wrote his Gospel to provide material not found in those)
2. Mark's Purpose
 - a. Mark's purpose was to demonstrate that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of God
 - b. He opens his Gospel with, "**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God**" (1:1). Let's unpack this:
 - 1) The "**beginning of the gospel**"
 - a) The Greek word for gospel, evangelion, refers to good news
 - b) Among the Romans, it referred to joyful tidings (joyful news) and held special significance because it was tied to the cult of the emperors who were worshipped as gods
 - c) Special occasions related to the emperors like their birthdays or inaugurations were celebrated as history altering events and the announcements about such events were called evangels
 - d) We actually have a calendar inscription announcing the birthday of Octavian (Augustus) from 9 B.C. which sounds almost identical to Mark's words: "**the birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of joyful tidings which have been proclaimed on his account.**"
 - e) According to William Lane in his commentary on Mark, an evangel in the Roman world referred to "an historical event which introduces a new situation for the world. In this perspective the Roman would understand Mark's proclamation of Jesus the Messiah. Beginning with the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry, Mark announces Jesus' coming as an event that brings about a radically new state of affairs for mankind" (p. 43)
 - f) This makes sense when we consider that the arrival of Jesus Christ was the beginning of the final phase in God's redemptive plan for mankind—it literally changed history and ushered in a new era
 - 2) "**of Jesus Christ**"
 - a) Christ is not Jesus' last name <grin>--it is a title

- b) Christ is a translation of the OT Hebrew word meshiach, or Messiah, which means “anointed one”
 - c) So, the good news that would radically alter history was that Jesus was the anointed one, the promised Messiah from the OT
- 3) **“the Son of God”**
- a) A declaration of deity
 - b) But also proof of his role as Messiah since the OT prophesied that the Messiah would be God in the flesh

E. Outline and Themes

1. Mark is hard to break down into distinct sections because he’s a story teller (often adding nice little details) and His gospel flows like one big story:
 - a. It seems his goal is to show Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God not simply by showing the miracles that He performed, but by showing how Jesus’ life reflected His role as Messiah
 - b. Mark doesn’t seem to follow a strict chronology of Jesus’ life:
 - 1) For instance, it’s known that Jesus made multiple trips to Jerusalem because these are recorded in the other Gospels
 - 2) However, Mark doesn’t mention these trips and only shows Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem
 - 3) Rather, Mark selected and arranged events from Jesus life in order to present Jesus’ life as a journey from the wilderness of Galilee, into Jerusalem, and finally climaxing in crucifixion and resurrection
 - 4) In fact, one interesting feature with Mark’s Gospel is that he uses the word “immediately” forty times (!) which serves to move the narrative along at a brisk pace (see Mark 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30)
 - c. Regardless, most scholars attempt to separate the book into three sections, though they don’t always agree on where these sections start and end:
 - 1) His Galilean ministry (1:14-6:13-8:38)
 - 2) His journey to Jerusalem (9:1-10:52)
 - 3) His ministry in Jerusalem, including the passion week, his crucifixion and resurrection (11:1-16:13)
2. There are some interesting literary things to touch on:
 - a. The declarations by Peter and the Roman Centurion:
 - 1) Remember how Mark starts his Gospel? (1:1): **“The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”**
 - 2) Well, right in the middle of his Gospel we find Peter declaring, **“You are the Christ”** (8:29)
 - 3) Then, at the end of the book we have the Roman centurion proclaiming, **“Truly, this man was the Son of God”** (15:39)
 - b. There are two explanatory discourses in Mark:
 - 1) As mentioned above, while Matthew focuses heavily on the teaching of Jesus, Mark seems less interested in what Jesus taught and more on proving He is the Messiah

- 2) However, Mark breaks from his “story” format twice and presents what can be described as explanatory discourses by Jesus and both have to do with the Kingdom of God:
 - a) 4:1-34: Parables of the sower and souls, seed/crop and mustard seed
 - b) 13:3-35: End Times and the Second Coming

- c. Mark begins his Gospel with a 14 verse prologue which is his initial proof of these two realities:
 - 1) Jesus is the prophecies Messiah (2-8):
 - a) Mark points to John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the promised forerunner and prophet that would prepare the way for the Messiah
 - b) John’s presence was proof that the kingdom of God had arrived and Messiah was soon to follow

 - 2) Jesus is the Son of God (9-13)—as declared by God Himself at Jesus’ baptism

- d. Terms:
 - 1) Son of Man (14x)—Jesus’ favorite title for Himself (used over 80 times in the NT), which serves to highlight not just His humanity, but His divinity as the Heavenly Son of Man prophesied in Daniel 7
 - 2) Son of God (3x)
 - 3) Messiah/Christ (8x)
 - 4) King of the Jews (5x)
 - 5) Son of David (3x)
 - 6) Son of the Blessed One (1x)
 - 7) Son of the Most High (2x)
 - 8) Kingdom of God (14x)