

The Gospel of Mark

Mark was probably the first of the four Gospels to be written, about 53-55 A.D, although, there are some who believe that it was not written until after Peter's death, about 67-70 A.D. Papias (60-130), bishop of Hierapolis, recorded that Mark was a close associate with Peter, perhaps a secretary. We know that Peter stayed in Mark's mother's home in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). It appears that this is where a close relationship developed between them. Peter speaks of him as a dearly loved son (I Peter 5:13) indicating that much of his training may have been accomplished by Peter. Most believe that Mark became Peter's interpreter, who then wrote accurately all that Peter remembered.

A number of Bible scholars believe that Mark was written from Rome to the Romans. Many believe that Babylon in I Peter 5:13 represents Rome. There are some others who think that Mark wrote it from Alexandria, Egypt where he later was a pastor. Mark is the shortest and the simplest of the four Gospels, and outside of a few minor comments, he lets the narrative speak for itself.

I. The Author

1. Mark's name is not mentioned in his gospel account; however, tradition identifies him as John Mark of Jerusalem.
2. Nothing is known about his father, but Mary, the sister of Barnabas, was John Mark's mother, which means that John Mark and Barnabas were related to one another (Colossians 4:10). His family must have had some wealth in as much as Mary owned a home large enough in Jerusalem for the believers to meet (Acts 12:12). We know that Barnabas owned sizeable acreage of land (Acts 4:37).
3. It is not known when Mark was born but it is estimated that he was about twenty years old at the time of the crucifixion.
4. John was his Jewish name while Mark was his Roman name, which gradually superceded the former, much like Peter superceded Simon.
5. It is believed that Mark was led to Christ by Peter in as much as Peter referred to him as *Mark my son* in the faith (I Peter 5:13). The fact that Peter is mentioned in Mark, more than the other gospels may indicate their close relationship and that most of the eye-witness accounts came from Peter. When Peter escaped from prison, he fled to Mark's mother's home where the Christians were praying for his release. I Peter 5:13 indicates that Mark was in Babylon with Peter. It may be that Peter even helped Mark write his Gospel. He certainly was a primary source of information.
6. Many Bible scholars believe that Mark knew all of the apostles and Jesus during our Lord's earthly ministry. Some think that it was his home that had the upper room where Christ met with His disciples the night before His crucifixion (Mark 14:12-16). If that is the case, it is assumed that it was the same place where the disciples and other followers of Christ waited for the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-2:2).
7. It was probably due to his relationship to Barnabas that he became a member of the team on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:3-13). He went as far as Cyprus with them, but when the team moved into Pamphylia (central Turkey) he departed and went back to Jerusalem. This caused some hard feelings between Paul and Barnabas. Paul did not think Mark had a valid reason for leaving and more or less writes John Mark off. There are a number of reasons why Mark could have defected.
 - A. Perhaps he was not called by the Lord to be a missionary.
 - B. It is possible, due to his young age that he was not yet spiritually mature and was given to emotional and spiritual *ups and downs*.

- C. Some think that he had a conflict with Paul because of his Gentile emphasis, which might indicate that Mark's Jewish feelings may have been revealing some prejudice. Later when Barnabas suggested that they give Mark another chance, Paul and Barnabas disagreed and they split up. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus while Paul left on his second missionary journey with Silas.

Time is said to heal all wounds. There is a period of about ten years where the Bible is silent on Mark's activities. During this time, Mark must have matured in the faith and the differences were resolved between him and Paul. Mark rejoined Paul (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24). Paul recommended him to the Colossian church and later testified that he was profitable to Him (II Timothy 4:11).

8. Tradition preserved by Eusebius notes that Mark founded the church of Alexandria and continued to pastor there until the time of his death, which was a martyr's death.
9. Mark's account of Gethsemane (14:51-52) is so explicit and so moving that it demands an eyewitness. Since the disciples were not available, it is assumed that Mark was the silent witness (*a certain young man in Gethsemane*) suggested in his account. He may have risen hurriedly from his bed to follow the apostolic band from his mother's upper room. Later when the soldiers tried to catch him, he may have left his sheet in their hands to escape to safety.
10. The early church recognized Mark to be the author of this second Gospel. Papias, Irenaeus, Clement and Origen are among the church fathers that attested to his authorship.

II. Mark's Audience

Both external and internal evidence would suggest that the original audience was written primarily to Gentiles, to encourage Roman Christians who were facing severe persecution and martyrdom and to convince the unsaved of the deity of Christ.

1. There is a marked absence of Old Testament quotations of which would only interest the Jew.
2. There is no account of Christ's genealogy, His miraculous conception, or the events surrounding His birth. This would be very meaningful to the Jews who looked for a Messiah, but not to the Gentiles.
3. There is no Christmas account in Mark: No nativity, star, angels, Bethlehem, Nazareth, or boyhood.
4. Mark explains Jewish customs, which the Gentile would not understand, such as the washing of the hands in Mark 7:3. Mark had to explain that the day of preparation was the day prior to the Sabbath (15:42).
5. There is no mention of Jewish law.
6. Mark describes geographical locations such as the Mount of Olives (13:3) and the Jordan River (1:5). All of the Jews would have known that the Mount of Olives was opposite the Temple in Jerusalem.
7. Only Mark uses Latin terms such as "legion" and "centurion."
8. Roman instead of Jewish divisions of the night are given.
9. Roman terms for money are used instead of Jewish.
10. There are no long discourses in Mark since the Romans would not have been interested in what He said but in what He did.
11. The indictments that are recorded in Matthew against Christ are missing. The indictments of a king would be important but not the indictments of a servant.

III. Purpose of the Letter – Christ in Mark

Mark wrote to persuade the Romans as to the deity of Christ and His mission in the world. He presents the life of Jesus Christ in two symmetrical acts, revealing a two-fold purpose.

1. **His identity as a Servant** – teaching, preaching and healing - His work in Galilee (Mark 1-8).
2. **His identity as the Son of God**: His purpose as a Savior, dying on the cross – His work in Jerusalem (Mark 9-16).

Mark emphasizes the ***Servanthood of Jehovah*** portraying Christ as humble, obedient and submissive, possessing power and authority (1:1, 11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 13:32; 14:61; 15:39). He is the servant of Isaiah 52:13-15 and Philippians 2:5-11. It should be noted that he does not record Christ's genealogy as does Matthew and Luke. No one would think of recording the genealogy of a servant. As a servant to both Paul and Peter, Mark would have understood the concept of being a servant – obedient and submissive.

Matthew, Luke and John emphasize what Jesus said while Mark emphasizes what Jesus did. He best traces the narrative of Christ's life, expanding on themes relating to His identity and purpose. Christ is seen as a man of action, always on the move and constantly ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of others. Twenty miracles are recorded with references to many more. Words like "immediately" or "straightway" appear forty-two times in this brief Gospel. Mark looks at the life of Christ and says – *Here is what Christ's life is about!*

The aspect of Christ's power is important to the Romans with whom power was everything. In Mark, the works of Christ authenticate His Words. Mark is dedicated to detailing the final week of Christ's life in Jerusalem.

V. Style

Mark is not a biography, but a topical narrative that is filled with minute, graphic touches that indicate he would have had to be an eyewitness to many of the events he wrote about. His style is simple, vivid, terse, chronological, direct and condensed. He makes Christ live before the reader and the effect of His works and words are sensed in those gathered about Him.

The testimony in Mark concerning Christ is illustrated in chapter one with simple rapid-fire statements:

- Mark 1:1 - Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
- Mark 1:2 - What Malachi said about Jesus.
- Mark 1:3 - What Isaiah said about Jesus.
- Mark 1:4-8 - What John said about Jesus.
- Mark 1:9,10 - What the Holy Spirit said about Jesus.
- Mark 1:11 - What God the Father said about Jesus.
- Mark 1:12, 13 - Reveals Christ's relationship to the angels.

VI. Keys

1. Two key words: ***Servant*** and ***immediately*** (or straightway).
2. Key Verse: ***"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).***
3. Theme: Jesus in action as a servant.
4. Key chapter: Chapter 8 is a pivotal chapter revealing a shift in emphasis in Christ's ministry. The key event here is Peter's confession – ***Thou art the Christ***. Up to this point, Christ seeks to validate His ministry. After Peter's confession, He begins to prepare His followers for His death at the hands of the religious leaders. Everything beyond chapter 8 moves towards Calvary.

VII. General Contents (Outline based on Key Verse)

- I. Even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve.
 - A. Teachings (1-4)
 - B. Miracles (5 – 7)
 - C. Testimony of Peter (8)
 - D. Transfiguration (9)
 - E. Teachings in Perea (10)

- II. And to give His life a ransom for many.
 - A. Ministry in Jerusalem (11-13)
 - B. Ministry on the cross (14-15)
 - C. Ministry after the resurrection (16)

Geographical Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-8)
- II. His work in Galilee (1:9 – 9:50)
- III. His week in Jerusalem (10:1 – 15:47)
- IV. Culmination (16:6) – ***“He is not here; He is risen.”***

An Expanded Outline

- I. PREPARATION OF THE SERVANT (1:1-1:13)
 - A. Christ’s forerunner (1:2-8)
 - B. Christ’s Baptism (1:9-11)
 - C. Christ’s Temptation (1:12-13)
- II. PERFORMANCE OF THE SERVANT (1:14 – 9:50)
 - A. Ministry in Galilee (1:14-7:23)
 - 1. Call of the first disciples (1:14 – 20)
 - 2. Preaching in Galilee (1:21-45)
 - 3. Healing of a paralytic man (2:1-12) - Early opposition (2:1-3:6)
 - 4. The Call of Matthew 2:13-17).
 - 5. Fasting (2:18-22).
 - 6. The Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-28).
 - 7. Healing on the Sabbath (3:1-5)
 - B. Motivated by His popularity (3:6-35)
 - 1. Pharisees took counsel to destroy Him (3:6)
 - 2. Casting out demons by the sea (3:6-11)
 - 3. The Twelve Disciples chosen (3:12-21)
 - 4. The unpardonable sin (3:22-30) – *He’s insane, an agent of Beelzebub.*
 - 5. Family ties (3:31-35).
 - C. Parabolic Teaching (4:1 – 4:34) Mighty Works (4:35 – 5:43)
 - D. Rejection in His hometown of Nazareth (6:1-6)
 - E. Mission of the Twelve (6:7 – 13)
 - F. Herod and John the Baptist (6:14 – 6:29)
 - G. Miracles and Teachings in Galilee and Beyond (6:30 – 8:26)
 - 1. Feeding of the 5,000
 - 2. Walking on the sea
 - 3. Reaction of the Pharisees
 - 4. Ministry in Tyre and Sidon (7:24 – 7:30)
 - 5. Ministry in Decapolis (7:31 – 7:37)
 - 6. Feeding of the 4,000 (8:1 – 9)
 - H. Christ’s Messiahship Proclaimed (8:27 – 9:39)
 - 1. Peter’s Confession (8:27-9:1).
 - 2. Christ’s Transfiguration (9:2-29).
- I. Rebuke and warnings (9:30 – 9:50)

- III. PILGRIMAGE OF THE SERVANT (10:1 – 10:52) – To Jerusalem
 - A. Conflict with Judaism (10:1 – 10:31) – Preaching in Perea
 - 1. Discourse on divorce (10:2-12).
 - 2. Discourse concerning children (10:13-16).
 - 3. Discourse concerning eternal life (10:17-22)
 - 4. Discourse concerning riches (10:23-31).
 - B. Cross and Service (10:32 – 10:45) – Going up to Jerusalem
 - C. Further service – Healing of Bartimaeus (10:46 – 10:52)
- IV. PASSION OF THE SERVANT (11:1 – 16:20)
 - A. Entry and opening events (11:1 – 11:26)
 - B. Teaching in Jerusalem (11:27 – 12:44)
 - 1. His authority is challenged (11:27 – 11:33)
 - 2. Parable of the Vineyard (12:1 – 12:12) – Spoken against those who questioned His authority – Pharisees, Herodians, etc.
 - 3. Forecast regarding the end times (13:1 – 13:37)
 - C. Passion narrative (14:1 – 15:47) – The Servant “obedient unto death.”
 - D. The risen Servant exalted to authority (16:1 – 16:20).

VIII. Odds and Ends

1. Mark ends his work much in the same way the gospel began – with a certain abruptness. This abruptness is indicated again with the words *immediately* and *straightway*, and in an attempt to briefly cover the events of Christ’s life, he leaves a number of issues unresolved. For example: Who won the struggle between Christ and Satan in Mark 4? When the disciples asked, *Who can this be*, in Mark 4, the question is not answered. Mark assumes certain information to be publicly known.
 2. Matthew, Luke and John emphasize the *words* of Christ while Mark gives us a history of His *works*.
 3. The Gospel of Mark clearly reveals that the coming of Christ was not something suddenly contrived by God the Father, Son and Spirit. From the very beginning of His work, Mark quotes Malachi and Isaiah to reveal that what is written in Mark was planned from the very *beginning*.
 4. Mark 16:9-20 is textually dubious and two of the best manuscripts of the New Testament do not include this passage in the text. It appears because the King James translators used sixteenth-century knowledge and tradition and therefore accepted it as part of Mark. Later publishers and translators showed respect for these scholars and accepted it as being written by Mark, even though the vocabulary and style of Greek are not like Mark’s.
- Principle:** Never build a doctrine based on a questionable text. There are groups today who have ignored this principle and handle snakes and accept other signs as an indication of salvation.
5. The last reference to Mark in the New Testament appears in I Timothy 4:11. Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark to Rome so that he could benefit from his services while awaiting martyrdom in prison.
 6. A final word of application: The words *immediately* and *straightway* reveal the enthusiasm and dedication of Christ to His ministry. He recognized the brief time element of His ministry. Every believer ought to serve Christ in the same way, not knowing when Christ will return or when our time on this earth will be ended. We must further recognize that a true disciple of Jesus Christ cannot fail to act on what he believes. Those who are lost all around us need to see the life of Christ lived in His followers. We must be active witnesses to the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE for Sermon on September 11, 2011

The Gospel of Mark: Introduction *from* Mark 1:1
Pastor George Stiekes

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four Gospels and is distinguished by its simplicity: The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

Mark wrote to persuade the Romans as to the deity of Christ and His mission in the world. He presents the life of Jesus Christ in two symmetrical acts, revealing a two-fold purpose.

1. His identity as a Servant, teaching, preaching and healing, emphasizing His work in Galilee (Mark 1-8).

2. His identity as the Son of God, with the power to forgive sins and change lives, emphasizing His work in Jerusalem (Mark 9-16).

We can trust Christ, as having the authority to forgive our sins and grant to us eternal life. Understanding this truth should lead us to trust Him as our Savior and then to serve Him as our Lord.