

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Background and Authorship

Early tradition says that the Gospel of Mark was written in Rome sometime between AD 65 and 70 by John Mark. This view is supported by the inclusion of a number of Latin words and by the author's habit of explaining Jewish customs, as if speaking to a Gentile audience (2:18; 7:3,4; 12:18). According to Papias (AD 140), Mark was the "interpreter of Peter" and wrote down Peter's teachings after the apostle was martyred in Rome. Irenaeus (AD 175) calls Mark "the disciple and interpreter of Peter," and affirms the apostolic source of the Gospel of Mark. Details are included by Mark that would be known only by an eyewitness, and several incidents reported by Mark were witnessed only by Peter and one or two others (5:21-24, 35-43; 9:2-13).

While "Mark" was a very common name in the first century, tradition holds that the writer is the same John Mark who is frequently mentioned in the NT (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phlm. 24; 1 Pet. 5:13). Mark's story is fascinating in itself. This young cousin of Barnabas had gone along on Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey, but left the others at Perga and returned to Jerusalem. Paul viewed this as desertion, and when Barnabas wanted to take Mark along on a second missionary venture, Paul adamantly refused. After an intense argument, the long-time friends parted company. Paul replaced Barnabas with Silas, while Barnabas took Mark and started out on a mission of his own. Later references to Mark in the Epistles indicate that the rift was healed. Paul writes of Mark as one who is "helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11), and Peter calls Mark "my son" (1 Pet. 5:13).

Like the story of Jonah in the OT, Mark's experience brings encouragement. Early failures need not dismay us. God is rich in grace, and grace holds out the promise of that second chance.

(above material taken from The Revel Bible Dictionary)

The early church fathers unanimously agreed that: (1) the second Gospel was written by Mark, and (2) the source of information for this Gospel is the preaching of Peter. We assume that the "Mark" referred to is the same person as the "John [Hebrew name], also called Mark [Latin name]" (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37) mentioned ten times in the New Testament (see also Acts 13:5, 13; 15:39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phlm 24:1; 1 Pet. 5:13).

John Mark was a Jewish Christian, the son of Mary, whose house was an early Christian meeting place (Acts 12:12). He may have become a Christian under the influence of Peter (note 1 Peter 5:13, where Peter referred to him as "my son").

Date

The account in Mark centering around Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem suggests a date before AD 70, which is when the temple was destroyed by

the Roman army. Many scholars believe that Matthew and Luke used Mark's Gospel as a source for their own Gospels. If so, the book was probably written between AD 55 and 63.

Occasion and Purpose

The overwhelming testimony of the early church is that the second Gospel was written primarily for Gentile Roman Christians, and many features of the book support that conclusion. For example, Mark doesn't quote from the Old Testament much; he wouldn't be expected to do so for people who would be largely unacquainted with it. He explains Jewish customs, which he wouldn't have to do if he were writing to Jews (7:3-4). He uses the Roman method of measuring time (6:8), etc.

Mark's Gospel presents Jesus as the Servant who came "to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (10:45); his purpose was primarily pastoral. The Greek word for disciple ("learner") occurs some forty times, always in the plural and always referring to more than the twelve apostles. One of the more striking aspects of Mark's presentation of the disciples is how often they misunderstand God's ways and Jesus' identity, and even deny Him (for example, 4:13, 40; 6:52; 7:17-19; 8:17-21; 14:21, 27). Mark apparently wanted his readers to understand that discipleship and failure are not mutually exclusive; Biblical realism would help keep the Roman Christians from giving up in disillusionment when they faced hardship and stumbled.

(above material taken from 30 Days to Understanding the Bible by Max Anders)

Theological Contributions

Mark brackets his document by the distinctive phrase "Son of God." He introduces his readers to "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1) in the hope that after reading about what Jesus has done they will conclude, with the centurion who witnessed the crucifixion, that "surely this man was the Son of god" (15:39)

Mark develops this theme throughout his book. He not only repeats the phrase "Son of God", but demonstrates through his description of Jesus' acts that Christ has divine authority. Mark reports few of Jesus' parables but most of his miracles. Only chapter 13 contains any extended discourse, while five incidents of early conflict with the Pharisees establish Christ's authority to speak and act as God (2:1-12, 15-17, 18-22, 23-28; 3:1-6). The narrative then continues with the report of a series of miracles which prove that Jesus' claim is founded in reality. The works Christ performs show him to be the Son of God.

Mark's Gospel divides naturally into two equal parts. Chapters 1-9 describe Jesus' ministry in Galilee. The works and wonders Jesus performed in Galilee provide a basis on which the reader can affirm Peter's confession that Jesus is not just another prophet but the Christ (8:29). Chapters 10-16 then focus on the major work of Jesus: his passion, death, and resurrection. Mark calls on his readers to see that Jesus died, not because he was powerless, but because it was his purpose to die. In fact, Jesus

predicted his own death (8:31-33; 10:32-34; 14:1-10, 24, 25). The resurrection then demonstrates that Jesus is the Son of God and also that the purpose in his dying has been achieved.

Mark: A Reading and Study Guide

Chapter	Content Summary	Related Articles
1	John the Baptist introduces Jesus. After Jesus is baptized and tempted, he calls his disciples and performs healing miracles	John the Baptist Baptism Miracle
2	Jesus heals a paralytic, calls Levi (Matthew) to discipleship, and answers questions about fasting	Heal Fast
3	Jesus teaches and heals on the Sabbath, appoints twelve apostles, and is accused of being in league with Satan	Pharisees Satan
4	Jesus teaches in parables and exercises his power to calm a storm at sea	Parable
5	Jesus heals a demon-possessed man; heals a chronically ill woman, and raises a young girl from the dead	Demon Death
6	Jesus is rejected in Nazareth, but sends out the twelve to preach. John the Baptist is beheaded. Jesus feeds 5,000 and walks on the water	Synagogue Disciple
7	Jesus is criticized for not following tradition. A Syrophenician woman exercises faith. Jesus continues to heal	Clean and Unclean Faith
8	Jesus feeds 4,000 and warns against the “yeast” of the Pharisees. Peter confesses Jesus is the Christ, and the Lord predicts his own death	Leaven Christ Life
9	Jesus is transfigured and returns to heal a demonized child. His disciples argue about greatness, and Jesus warns against causing others to sin	Transfiguration Great Hell
10	Jesus teaches on divorce, blesses children, and challenges a rich, young man. He again predicts his death and warns against the wrong kind of spiritual leadership	Divorce Kingdom Death of Christ Leadership
11	Jesus makes a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, clears the Temple of traders, and refuses to answer questions about his authority	Temple Jerusalem Authority

Chapter	Content Summary	Related Articles
12	Jesus tells the parable of the tenants. He avoids traps set by his enemies and affirms the greatest commandment in OT law	Taxes Resurrection Commandment
13	Jesus speaks about his return at history's end	Second Coming
14	Jesus is anointed with perfume at Bethany, holds a last supper with his disciples, and prays in Gethsemane. He is arrested and tried before the Sanhedrin and denied Peter	Anoint Last Supper Prayer Sanhedrin
15	Jesus is tried by Pilate, mocked by Roman soldiers and crucified. He dies, and is buried	Pilate Crucifixion
16	Jesus is raised from the dead and seen alive by women followers	Resurrection

The second and shortest Gospel in the NT, Mark is believed by most scholars to be the earliest of the Biblical accounts of Christ's life. Mark is characterized by a fast-paced narrative, punctuated by the repeated use of "immediately" or "straightway". The writer vividly describes the scenes he portrays, as when he pictures the Gerasa pacing "night and day among the tombs and in the hills" where he "would cry out and cut himself with stone" (Mk. 5:5). Mark's focus on Jesus as a man of action makes this brief Gospel one of the easiest to read and most attractive of NT books.

(above material taken from The Revel Bible Dictionary)

Message

1. Jesus: the Son of God-- Mark starts with the words: 'The beginnings of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God' 1:1
2. Jesus: the Son of Man--Mark also shows us the humanness of Jesus
 - He is grieved 3:5
 - He has compassion on the crowds 6:34
 - He is troubled 14:33
 - Mark uses the title 'Son of Man' fourteen times; this is his preferred title for Jesus
3. The actual words of Jesus—Mark records for us Peter's memory of some of the actual Aramaic words used by Jesus
 - 'Talitha kum!', Wake up, little girl! 5:41
 - 'Ephphatha', Open! 7:34
 - 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? 15:34

4. The kindness of Jesus—Mark records Peter’s memory of Jesus’ special kindness to him and Peter’s awareness that he did not deserve it. Peter makes Mark leave out Jesus’ words about Peter being a rock because Peter remembered when he was not a rock. (See Matt. 16:18, 19)

Application

Mark shows us:

1. The importance of the right doctrine
 - It couldn’t come from demons even though they had to submit to his power
 - It couldn’t come from those who had been healed even though they were grateful
 - It couldn’t come from the apostles, until they had been properly taughtChristian doctrine is not common sense but divine wisdom.
2. That miracles are natural with God
 - Mark never apologises for a miracle, never attempts to explain it away
 - Jesus’ miracles point to his nature. Take away his miracles and you cast doubt on his deity.
 - Miracles are, were and always will be amazing. Mark repeatedly follows up the story of a miracle with the observation that the people were ‘amazed’, ‘filled with awe’.
 - Notice particularly the collection of miracles in chapter 5 which show Jesus’ power over: demons (1-20); disease (24-34); death (35-43)
3. That opposition often comes from religious people
 - The scribes 2:6
 - The Pharisees 2:24
 - The Herodians 3:6
 - The Chief Priests
 - The Sadducees

(above material taken from Opening up God’s Word: The Compact Survey of the Bible by John Balchin)