

## **Gospel of Mark**

### **Title:**

Mark, for whom this gospel is named, was a close companion of the Apostle Peter and a recurring character in the book of Acts, where he is known as “John who was also called Mark” (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 39).

It was to John Mark’s mother’s home in Jerusalem that Peter went when released from prison (Acts 12:12).

John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Pauls’ first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5).

But he deserted on the way in Perga and returned to Jerusalem (Acts. 13:13).

When Barnabas wanted Paul to take John Mark on the second missionary journey, Paul refused.

The friction which resulted between Paul and Barnabas led to their separation (Acts 15:38-40).

But John Mark’s earlier vacillation evidently gave way to great strength and maturity, and in time he proved himself even to the Apostle Paul.

When Paul wrote the Colossians, he instructed them that if John Mark came, they were to welcome him (Col. 4:10).

Paul even listed Mark as a fellow worker (Philemon 24).

Later, Paul told Timothy to “Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service” (2 Tim. 4:11).

John Mark’s restoration to useful ministry may have been, in part, due to the ministry of Peter.

Peter’s close relationship with Mark is evident from his description of him as “my son, Mark” (1 Peter 5:13).

Peter, of course, was no stranger to failure himself, and his influence on the younger man was no doubt instrumental in helping him out of the instability of his youth and into the strength and maturity he would need for the work to which God had called him.

### **Author – Date:**

Ancient testimony names John Mark as the writer.

Few have challenged this tradition; none has done so persuasively.

The gospel itself may contain a cryptic allusion to its author (14:51-52), but no name is given.

In Scripture Mark sometimes goes by the name John alone (Acts 13:5, 13; 15:37), sometimes by Mark alone (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Philem. 24; 1 Pet. 5:13), and twice by both names (Acts 12:12).

He was the son of Mary, a woman of some means in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12).

Unlike the epistles, the gospels do not name their authors.

The early church fathers, however, unanimously affirm that Mark wrote this second gospel.

Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, writing about A.D. 140, noted:

And the presbyter “the Apostle John”, said this:

Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ.

For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him.

But afterwards, as I said previously, he had accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instruction to the necessities (of his hearers), but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord’s sayings.

Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them.

For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements (From the Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord (6).

Justin Martyr, writing about A.D. 150, referred to the Gospel of Mark as “the memoirs of Peter”, and suggested that Mark committed his gospel to writing while in Italy.

This agrees with the uniform voice of early tradition, which regarded this gospel as having been written in Rome, for the benefit of Roman Christians.

Irenaeus, writing about A.D. 185, called Mark “the disciple and interpreter of Peter”, and recorded that the second gospel consisted of what Peter preached about Christ.

The testimony of the church fathers differs as to whether this gospel was written before or after Peter’s death (ca. A.D. 67-78).

Paul regarded him as one of the few who were faithful to his ministry to the end (2 Tim. 4:11).

All of this suggests that Mark was a seasoned veteran of the Christian walk.

He was well versed in apostolic teaching; and he had extensive missionary experience under wise guides.

Most importantly, he learned firsthand that God gives penitent believers opportunity to recover from past failure.

Mark not only heard redemption and new life proclaimed, he experienced it in his own life.

Evangelical scholars have suggested dates for the writing of Mark's gospel ranging from A.D. 50 to A.D. 70.

A date before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70 is required by the comment of Jesus in 13:2.

Luke's gospel was clearly written before Acts (Acts 1:1-3).

The date of the writing of Acts can probably be fixed at about A.D. 63, because that is shortly after the narrative ends (See introduction to Acts: Author and Date).

It is there likely, though not certain, that Mark was written at an early date, probably sometime in the 50s.

Many scholars date Mark in the 60's A.D.

Some date it later, since (Mark 13:2), predicts the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70), and they deny that Jesus could have foretold the future.

But predictive prophecy is quite within the ability of the Jesus of the New Testament.

Mark has in fact been dated by some as early as the 40's.

The exact date is not crucial to a grasp of Mark's message.

In any case the book bears the stamp of an early and authentic written witness to Jesus' ministry.

### **Background – Setting:**

Whereas Matthew was written to a Jewish audience, Mark seems to have targeted Roman believers, particularly Gentiles.

When employing Aramaic terms, Mark translated them for his readers (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34).

On the other hand, in some places he used Latin expressions instead of their Greek equivalents (5:9; 6:27; 12:15, 42; 15:16, 39).

He also reckoned time according to the Roman system (6:48; 13:35), and carefully explained Jewish customs (7:3-4; 14:12; 15:42).

Mark omitted Jewish elements, such as the genealogies found in Matthew and Luke.

This gospel also makes fewer references to the Old Testament, and includes less material that would be of particular interest to Jewish readers, such as that which is critical of the Pharisee and Sadducees (Sadducees are mentioned only once, in 12:18).

When mentioning Simon of Cyrene (15:21), Mark identifies him as the father of Rufus, a prominent member of the church at Rome (Rom. 16:13).

All of this does supports the traditional view that Mark was written for a Gentile audience initially at Rome.

The friction which resulted between Paul and Barnabas led to their separation (Acts 15:38-40).

But John Mark's earlier vacillation evidently gave way to greater strength and maturity, and in time he proved himself even to the Apostle Paul.

When Paul wrote the Colossians, he instructed them that if John Mark came, they were to welcome him (Col. 4:10).

Paul even listed Mark as a fellow worker (Philemon 24).

Later, Paul told Timothy to "Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service" (2 Tim. 4:11).

There is good evidence that this gospel reflects Peter's contribution.

Mark and Peter certainly had close ties (1 Pet. 5:13); perhaps Peter led him to Christ.

The gospel was composed by one who had considerable skill in literary, historical, and theological presentation and this points to Mark's own God-given insight.

Yet comparison of the Gospel of Mark with Peter's sermons in Acts and with other data, suggest we are listening to a version of a story told in part by the venerable apostle Peter himself.

### **Historical – Theological Themes:**

Mark presents Jesus as the suffering Servant of the Lord (10:45).

His focus is on the deeds of Jesus more than His teaching, particularly emphasizing both service and sacrifice.

Mark omits the lengthy discourses found in the other gospels, often relating only brief excerpts to give the gist of Jesus' teaching.

Mark also omits any account of Jesus' ancestry and birth, beginning where Jesus' public ministry began, with His baptism by John in the wilderness.

Mark demonstrated the humanity of Christ more clearly than any of the other evangelists, emphasizing Christ's human emotions (1:41; 3:5; 6:34; 8:12; 9:36), His human limitations (4:38; 11:12; 13:32), and other small details that highlight the human side of the Son of God (e.g. 7:33-34; 8:12; 9:36; 10:13-16).

### **Distinctive Outlook:**

Well over a third of the book (chapters 11-16), deals with a tiny fraction of Jesus' earthly lifetime: the last week.

Now Chapter 10 gives an account of Jesus' ministry as He moved slowly southward from Galilee to Jerusalem.

This leaves (1:14-9:50), to cover His extensive work in Galilee, while the opening verses (1:1-13), vouch for the credentials of the Christ: His prophetic connections, His intimate kinship with God the Father and God the Spirit, and His bearing of the worst temptations that Satan could throw at Him.

- (1) There seems no reason to reject the ancient tradition that Mark wrote primarily for a largely Gentile audience resident in Rome.

This might account for many Latin terms found in the Gospel of Mark.

This would also explain the lack of a genealogy of Christ and less direct dependence on the Old Testament than we find in Matthew and Luke.

On the other hand, non-Jewish converts to Christ were still quite aware of their Old Testament roots.

We may conclude that Mark is Christocentric and action-oriented (immediately, or a synonym of this word, occurs over 40 times).

Mark strives for conciseness and brevity. The other gospels serve to fill out the Marcan framework. However, Mark does contain many unique details.

- (2) Mark seeks to involve the reader in the gospel's witness to Jesus Christ.

He does this through an uncomplicated and vivid literary style.

He also writes in such a way that the discerning reader feels addressed or questioned, often by Jesus Himself.

Mark does not aim merely to convey information.

He seeks rather to furnish grounds for our decision to follow and keep following the main character of the gospel: Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Mark does not admit of easy topical analysis.

Many suggestions have been made.

This outline seeks to relate Jesus' actions and teaching to His geographical location.