

Gospel of Mark

Author

Although there is no direct internal evidence of authorship, it was the unanimous testimony of the early church that this Gospel was written by John Mark (“John, also called Mark,” Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37). The most important evidence comes from Papias (A.D. 140), who quotes an even earlier source as saying: (1) Mark was a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things said and done by the Lord; (2) this tradition did not come to Mark as a finished, sequential account of the life of our Lord, but as the preaching of Peter—preaching directed to the needs of the early Christian communities; (3) Mark accurately preserved this material. The conclusion drawn from this tradition is that the Gospel of Mark largely consists of the preaching and stories of Peter arranged and shaped by Mark. Mark also traveled with Paul on at least one missionary journey, so Paul’s influence is reflected in his Gospel as well.

John Mark in the New Testament

It is generally agreed that the Mark who is associated with Peter in the early non-Biblical tradition is also the John Mark of the New Testament. The first mention of him is in connection with his mother, Mary, who had a house in Jerusalem that served as a meeting place for believers (Ac 12:12). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem after the “famine visit,” Mark accompanied them (Ac 12:25). Mark next appears as a “helper” to Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Ac 13:5), but he left them at Perga in Pamphylia to return to Jerusalem (Ac 13:13). Paul must have been deeply disappointed with Mark’s actions on this occasion, because when Barnabas proposed taking Mark on the second journey, Paul flatly refused, a refusal that broke up their working relationship (Ac 15:36-39).

So Barnabus took Mark, who was his cousin (Col 4:10), and departed for Cyprus. No further mention is made of either of them in the book of Acts. Mark reappears in Paul’s letter to the Colossians written from Rome. Paul sends a greeting from Mark and adds: “You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him” (Col 4:10; Phm 24). At this point Mark was apparently beginning to win his way back into Paul’s confidence. By the end of Paul’s life, Mark had fully regained Paul’s favor (2 Tim 4:11).

Place and Time of Origin

According to early church tradition, Mark was written “in the regions of Italy” or, more specifically, in Rome. Mark was written somewhere between 50 and 70 A.D., probably in the mid 60’s; it was the first gospel written, forming the basis for much of Matthew and Luke.

Recipients

The evidence points to the church at Rome, or at least to Gentile readers. Mark explains Jewish customs (7:2-4; 15:42), translates Aramaic words (3:17; 5:41; 7:11,34; 15:22,34) and seems to have a special interest in persecution and martyrdom (8:34-38; 13:9-13)—subjects of special concern to Roman believers

Special Characteristics

Mark’s Gospel is a simple, succinct, unadorned, yet vivid account of Jesus’ ministry. It reads like an action-packed drama, emphasizing more what Jesus did than what he said (for example, he records only 9 of Jesus’ 46 parables). Mark moves quickly from one episode in Jesus’ life and ministry to another. He uses the word “immediately” 47 times giving this whole account a sense of urgency.

Gospel of Mark ~ Discussion Questions

1. What does the word “gospel” mean?
2. Is it important to know the background of the writer of the book? Why? Have you ever gotten an e-mail that was attributed to a well-known person (Andy Rooney, Bill O'Reilly, Jay Leno, etc.) and then found out from Snopes it was written by some unknown person? Did it lose credibility (even if true)?
3. How old was Mark?
4. Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabus when they visited Antioch and he also went on Paul's first missionary journey. But in Perga Mark left them to return to Jerusalem. Why might he have done this? Have you ever gotten part way into a trip or a task and then turned back (or felt like turning back)? How did the leader or others on the trip feel about you?
5. Years later, Mark is with Paul in Rome (Col 4:10) and still later Paul says he is “helpful” to him (real words of praise from Paul, 2 Tim 4:11). If you're in someone's bad graces, what do you usually do: (A) walk away from it, (B) try to turn the situation around? Have you ever tried to win back the confidence of a teacher or boss? Were you able to do it? How?
6. What makes you discouraged? (A) failing on a task? (B) disapproval of a teacher, boss, or leader? (C) feeling you'll never be as good as someone else? (D) feeling your prayers aren't being answered? What do you do about this?
7. When this book was written, Christians were being persecuted in Rome. The great fire in 64 A.D., probably started by Nero, was blamed on Christians. Do you think Mark may have written the book to prepare his readers for such suffering? Would learning more about Jesus' life make a person more able to bear persecution? How about you? What form does persecution of Christians take today?
8. The places of greatest persecution of Christians today are North Korea, Turkey, Cyprus, Algeria, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Sudan, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, China, Vietnam, and India. What do many of these nations have in common? Who are the targets of most of the persecution?
9. In verse 1:1, Mark characterizes the entire book as, “the beginning of the Gospel.” What do you think he means by this?

Gospel of Mark ~ Leader's Guide

Scriptures cited in the description of the Gospel of Mark.

Acts 12:12 – When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

Acts 12:25 – When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

Acts 15:37 – Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,

Acts 13:5 – When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

Acts 13:13 – (In Pisidian Antioch) From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

Acts 15:36-39 – ³⁶ Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,

Colossians 4:10 – My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

2 Timothy 4:11 – Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

1. What does the word “gospel” mean?

Gospel is from the Old English (god-spell) meaning “good story” or “good news,” an accurate word-for-word translation from the Greek. Before the first gospel, Mark, was written, Paul used the term when he reminded the people of Corinth “of the gospel I preached to you” (1 Cor 15.1). The gospel or good news is that God provided salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

2. Is it important to know the background of the writer of the book? Why? Have

you ever gotten an e-mail that was attributed to a well-known person (Andy Rooney, Bill O'Reilly, Jay Leno, etc.) and then found out from Snopes it was written by some unknown person? Did it lose credibility (even if true)?

3. How old was Mark?

We don't know. Some commentators hold that he was young, perhaps a teenager, because he seemed to show immaturity when he left Paul. Others think he was the age of the other apostles (30s ?) because he was accepted as an equal by them. The point is that we don't know and the real point is: does it matter?

4. Mark accompanied Paul and Barabus when they visited Antioch and also went on Paul's first missionary journey. But in Perga Mark left them to return to Jerusalem. Why might he have done this?

Mark may have felt out of his depth on a missionary trip, he may have been scared, or he may have had a perfectly good reason to turn back (perhaps his mother was ailing, he felt he had to assist in the harvest, or he was sick and didn't want to admit it). We just don't know the reason; all we know is that he turned back and Paul was unhappy with him.

5. Years later, Mark is with Paul in Rome (Col 4:10) and still later Paul says he is "helpful" to him (real words of praise from Paul, 2 Tim 4:11). If you're in someone's bad graces, what do you usually do: (A) walk away from it, (B) try to turn the situation around? Have you ever tried to win back the confidence of a teacher or boss? Were you able to do it? How?

6. What makes you discouraged? (A) failing on a task? (B) disapproval of a teacher, boss, or leader? (C) feeling you'll never be as good as someone else? (D) feeling your prayers aren't being answered? What do you do about this?

7. When this book was written, Christians were being persecuted in Rome. The great fire in 64 A.D., probably started by Nero, was blamed on Christians. Do you think Mark may have written the book to prepare his readers for such suffering? Would learning more about Jesus' life make a person more able to bear persecution? How about you? What form does persecution of Christians take today?

8. The places of greatest persecution of Christians today are North Korea, Turkey, Cyprus, Algeria, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Sudan, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, China, Vietnam, and India. What do many of these nations have in common? Who are the targets of most of the persecution?

Much of the persecution of Christians originates in Muslim countries, most of which have laws that mandate that "blasphemies" of the Qur'an are to be met with

punishment. The most common targets of persecution are Roman Catholic priests and evangelical Christian missionaries. That is not to say that others aren't persecuted as well; it is estimated that more than 1.5 million Christians have been killed by the Janjaweed, the Arab Muslim militia, in northern Sudan since 1984. More than 30,000 Christians were displaced from their homes Kano, the largest city in Muslim-controlled northern Nigeria. These are just two examples of many.

9. In verse 1:1, Mark characterizes the entire book as, "the beginning of the Gospel." What do you think he means by this?

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus comprise the "beginning," of which the apostolic preaching in Acts is the continuation.

Additional Discussion Questions

Read 2 Chronicles 18:1 to 18:22. (Read to 19:3 if you want the end of the story.)

1. (2 Chron 18:3)

- A. Who are *you* allied with? Who are *you* loyal to?
- B. Do the people with whom you are allied have worthy goals?
- C. Do you share your values with them?

2. What is your (you, personally) main purpose in life? Is having a relationship with God in you life mission statement?

3. (2 Chron 18:6)

- A. Do you ask God about things? Big things? Just the “most important” things? Small things too? How about the tiny details?
- B. When you first wake up in the morning, what do you do? Do you ever ask God, “what do you want me to do today?”
- C. Do you ask (or have you ever asked) God to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit that lives in you?
- D. Do you go directly to God for advice or do you do as Jehoshaphat did and seek the counsel of a prophet (or pastor or counselor).

4. (2 Chron 18:7)

- A. Do you surround yourself with (a) truth-tellers or (b) people who agree with you and say what you want to hear? Which do you like best? Who do you respect most?
- B. Are you a truth-teller or do you say what others want to hear?
- C. Is it sometimes easier to sidestep a difficult or sensitive issue?
- D. When do you find yourself avoiding sensitive issues or telling “little white lies?” (a) with spouse or close family members, (b) with boss or person in authority, (c) with friends, (d) with people you don’t know well, (e) with others?

5. (2 Chron 18:15)

- A. Can you recognize the truth or lies when you hear it? Always?
- B. Do you want to hear the truth? Always?

6. (2 Chron 18:18-21) Do you believe that God has a relationship with Satan to accomplish His (God’s) purpose? (Also see Job 1:6-12 and Job 2:1-6)

7. One of these things will trip you up: fame, power, money, sex. Can you avoid this? How can you resist those forces?