



## The Gospel of Mark - Introduction

### Author and Title

Widespread evidence from the early church period affirms that Peter passed on reports of the words and deeds of Jesus to his attendant and writer, John Mark. Of particular significance in this regard are the brief statements by Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis (circa AD120), which were preserved by Eusebius of Cæsarea (AD260-340). Papias states that he received oral tradition from John the elder and apostle, and he passes on the following regarding Mark:

1. He was the writer for Peter.
2. He wrote down accurately as much as he could remember of Peter's words, which the latter had adapted to the needs of the moment.
3. He was neither an eyewitness of Jesus, nor a disciple.
4. It was his desire not to omit or misrepresent anything. Papias concluded that the Gospel of Mark gains its apostolic and reliable character from its Petrine origin.

Internal evidence also supports the testimony of the early church that Peter stands behind Mark's Gospel. Mark's account is especially vivid when recounting incidents involving Peter. It presents the weaknesses of Peter, as well as the other disciples as a whole, and omits praiseworthy or noticeable references to Peter that are reported in Matthew and Luke. It has also been observed that there exists a certain structural proximity between Peter's Cæsarea speech: *<<Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judæa, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. 'We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead*

*on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name’>> (Acts 10:34-43), and the Gospel of Mark. In fact, Peter’s address makes an excellent summary statement for the Gospel.*

Mark served with Barnabas, Paul and Peter at various stages during the early days of the church. He was in Rome in the early to mid- 60s with Peter when he wrote his first epistle: *<<She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark>> (1 Peter 5:13)*, although this was probably a few years after the Gospel was published, see Date.

John Mark was the nephew of Barnabas and went with his uncle and Paul on their first missionary journey, leaving prematurely, which led later to a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas: *<<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.” Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 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. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches>> (Acts 15:36-41)*. Paul was later reconciled to Mark and makes reference to him as a co-worker in several of his letters. He even requests his presence as he awaited execution in Rome: *<<Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry>> (2 Timothy 4:11)*.

## Date

The external and internal data most convincingly point to Rome as the place of composition and a date for Mark in the mid to late-50s AD, although some scholars date it in the mid or late-60s. The argument in favour of the earlier date is that the Book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome circa AD62, leading many scholars to believe that Acts was written around that time. Others suggest that Acts does not end at the point it was written because the key point of Acts is that the Gospel had made it to Rome.

If Acts was written in the early 60s, then Luke’s Gospel was written before Acts, which can be seen by comparing: *<<With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught>> (Luke 1:3-4)*, with: *<<In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen>> (Acts 1:1-2)*, sometime in the early 60s. Since Luke uses much of the material found in Mark’s Gospel and uses it as a basis for his overall structure, which is the clear majority view among

scholars today, then Mark was written before Luke. This would place Mark in the mid- to late-50s.

In fact, such a date fits with an early church tradition that Peter was in Rome in the early- to mid-50s. Eusebius, writing circa AD325, says, ‘in the same reign of Claudius [who died in AD54] the Providence of the universe guided to Rome the great and mighty Peter preaching the Gospel. But the hearers of Peter were not satisfied with a single hearing but with every kind of exhortation besought Mark seeing that he was Peter’s follower, to leave them a written statement of the teaching given to them verbally, nor did they cease until they had persuaded him, and so became the cause of the Scripture called the Gospel of Mark’ (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History). This is confirmed by a similar tradition in Ecclesiastical History, quoting Clement of Alexandria, who lived circa AD155-220.

The Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark, from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, also places the writing during Peter’s lifetime, for it says that Mark ‘wrote this Gospel in parts of Italy. When Peter heard this, he approved and affirmed it by his own authority for the reading of the church’.

However, if a somewhat later date for Luke-Acts is adopted, or if the similarities between Mark and Luke do not demonstrate that Luke used a completed written copy of Mark, then a date for Mark in the mid- to late-60s is possible. Some find support for this in a statement from Irenæus, who died circa AD195, that ‘After their [Peter and Paul’s] departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter’ (Against Heresies 3.1.2). If Peter’s ‘departure’ refers to his death, and Peter died sometime between AD64-67, then the Gospel of Mark would have been written after that time. On the other hand, this may refer not to the writing but to the publication of Mark, or may speak of Peter and Paul’s ‘departure’ from Rome, not their death. So a date in the mid- to late-50s is most likely, but a date in the mid-60s is possible.

### Theme

The ultimate purpose and theme of Mark is to present and defend Jesus’ universal call to discipleship. Mark returns often to this theme, and as the narrative unfolds he categorises his main audience as either followers or opponents of Jesus. The outline demonstrates that Mark’s central effort in presenting and supporting this call is to narrate the identity and teaching of Jesus. This fact implies that discipleship for Mark is essentially a relationship with Jesus, not merely following a certain code of conduct.

Fellowship with Jesus marks the heart of the disciple’s life, and this fellowship includes trusting him, confessing him, taking note of his conduct, following his teaching, and being shaped by a relationship to him. Discipleship also means being prepared to face the kind of rejection that Jesus faced.

### Summary of Salvation History

Mark tells of Jesus’ coming to bring everlasting salvation, as prophesied in the OT, and to triumph over sin and Satan. The ultimate fulfilment comes with his crucifixion and resurrection.

## Key Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Verses</u>
1 Jesus seeks to correct messianic expectations and misunderstandings.	1:25; 1:34; 1:44; 3:12; 4:10-12; 5:18-19; 5:43; 8:30; 9:9.
2 Jesus is man.	3:5; 4:38; 6:6; 7:34; 8:12; 8:33; 10:14; 11:12; 14:33-42.
3 Jesus is the Son of God.	1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 8:38; 9:7; 12:6-8; 13:32; 14:36; 14:61; 15:39.
4 Jesus is the Son of Man with all power and authority.	1:16-34; 2:3-12; 2:23-28; 3:11; 4:35-41; 6:45-52; 7:1-23; 10:1-12.
5 Jesus as the Son of Man must suffer.	8:31; 10:45; 14:21; 14:36.
6 Jesus is Lord.	2:28; 12:35-37; 14:62.
7 Jesus calls his followers to imitate him in humble service, self-denial, and suffering.	8:34-38; 9:35-37; 10:35-45.
8 Jesus teaches on the kingdom of God, and implies that God continues to call a people to himself.	1:15; 4:1-41; 9:1; 14:25; 15:43.

## Purpose of Mark

Although Mark wrote in Rome, the Gospel of Mark was composed for the wider church as the record of the apostolic testimony of Peter. Even during the early church period, Gentile Christians were frequently mentioned as the recipients of this Gospel. Mark addresses an audience that is largely unfamiliar with Jewish customs. He intends to familiarise them with those customs, because only then will they understand the coming of Jesus as the culmination of God's work with Israel and the entire world.

## Writing Style

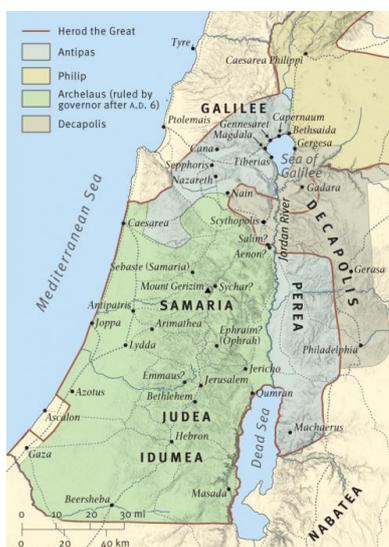
Of the four Gospels, Mark is a fast moving, action packed thriller, consisting of noteworthy clips as well as typical or representative events; snatches of speeches or dialogues; and commentary by the narrator. Mark's approach to the biographical data is that of a careful recorder. Mark's Gospel, however, is not a biography in the modern sense, as there is no attempt to describe Jesus physically, refer to his family origins, or portray Jesus' inner life. Rather, like other ancient biographies, which were called a *bios* or life, Mark's purpose is to speak about the actions and teachings of Jesus that present his ministry and mission.

At the same time the book is an implied proclamation and apologetic work that hints at the redemptive meaning of the events recorded. All of the Gospels are hero stories. Additionally, Mark's Gospel is made up of the usual array of subgenres found in the NT Gospels, including calling stories, recognition stories, witness/testimony stories, encounter stories, conflict or controversy stories, pronouncement stories, miracle stories, parables, discourses and sermons, proverbs or sayings, the passion and resurrection accounts.

Even though the overall format of Mark's Gospel is narrative, it does not possess a continuous story line but is a collection of discrete units. There are crowd scenes, small-group scenes, public and private scenes. The resulting book is a collage or mosaic of the life of Jesus. The best way to negotiate this format is to regard oneself as Mark's travelling companion as he assembles his documentary on the life of Christ. The main unifying element in the mosaic is the protagonist, Christ himself.

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four but, as stated, it is a fast-paced narrative. Mark tends to include vivid descriptive details, and he prefers Greek verbs that portray an action in process. He often records people's responses to what Jesus did and said. Like all storytellers, Mark selected his material by two criteria: he chose events that were typical or representative in the life of Jesus, such as miracles of healing and the telling of parables, and unique, once-only events, especially those connected with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

## The Setting of Mark



The events in the book of Mark take place almost entirely within the vicinity of Palestine, an area extending roughly from Caesarea Philippi in the north to Beersheba in the south. During this time it was ruled by the Roman Empire.

The book opens with Jesus' baptism by John during the rule of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs Antipas and Philip, and it closes with Jesus' death and resurrection about three years later.

## Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-13)
  - a. John the Baptist Prepares the Way (1:1-8)
  - b. The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (1:9-13)
- II. Demonstration of Jesus' Authority (1:14-8:26)
  - a. Jesus' early Galilean ministry (1:14-3:12)
    - i. The Calling of the First Disciples (1:14-20)
    - ii. Jesus Drives Out an Evil Spirit (1:21-28)
    - iii. Jesus Heals Many (1:29-34)
    - iv. Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place (1:35-39)
    - v. A Man With Leprosy (1:40-45)
    - vi. Jesus Heals a Paralytic (2:1-12)
    - vii. The Calling of Levi (2:13-17)
    - viii. Jesus Questioned About Fasting (2:18-22)
    - ix. Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-3:6)
    - x. Crowds Follow Jesus (3:7-12)
  - b. Jesus' later Galilean ministry (3:13-6:6a)
    - i. Calling of the Twelve (3:13-35)
      1. The Appointing of the Twelve Apostles (3:13-19)
      2. Jesus and Beelzebub (3:20-30)
      3. Jesus' Mother and Brothers (3:31-35)
    - ii. Parables (4:1-34)
      1. The Parable of the Sower (4:1-20)
      2. A Lamp on a Stand (4:21-25)
      3. The Parable of the Growing Seed (4:26-29)
      4. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (4:30-34)
    - iii. Nature miracle, exorcism, and healing (4:35-5:43)
      1. Jesus Calms the Storm (4:35-41)
      2. The Healing of a Demon-possessed Man (5:1-20)
      3. A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman (5:21-43)
    - iv. A Prophet Without Honour (6:1-6a)
  - c. Work beyond Galilee (6:6b-8:26)
    - i. Jesus Sends Out the Twelve (6:6b-13)
    - ii. John the Baptist Beheaded (6:14-29)
    - iii. Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (6:30-44)
    - iv. Jesus Walks on the Water (6:45-56)

- v. Clean and Unclean (7:1-23)
  - vi. Opening to Gentiles (7:24-30)
  - vii. Additional miracles in Decapolis and Bethsaida (7:31-8:26)
    1. The Healing of a Deaf and Mute Man (7:31-37)
    2. Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand (8:1-13)
    3. The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod (8:14-21)
    4. The Healing of a Blind Man at Bethsaida (8:22-26)
- III. Testing Jesus' Authority in Suffering (8:27-16:8)
- a. Journey to Jerusalem (8:27-10:52)
    - i. Peter's Confession of Christ (8:27-30)
    - ii. Jesus Predicts His Death (8:31-9:1)
    - iii. The Transfiguration (9:2-13)
    - iv. The Healing of a Boy With an Evil Spirit (9:14-32)
    - v. Instruction on discipleship: putting others first (9:33-50)
      1. Who Is the Greatest? (9:33-37)
      2. Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us (9:38-41)
      3. Causing to Sin (9:42-50)
    - vi. Instruction on discipleship: divorce, wealth, humility (10:1-52)
      1. Divorce (10:1-12)
      2. The Little Children and Jesus (10:13-16)
      3. The Rich Young Man (10:17-31)
      4. Jesus Again Predicts His Death (10:32-34)
      5. The Request of James and John (10:35-45)
      6. Blind Bartimæus Receives His Sight (10:46-52)
  - b. Entering and judging Jerusalem (11:1-13:37)
    - i. The Triumphal Jerusalem (11:1-11)
    - ii. Jesus' judgment on religious leaders (11:12-12:44)
      1. Jesus Clears the Temple (11:12-19)
      2. The Withered Fig Tree (11:20-26)
      3. The Authority of Jesus Questioned (11:27-33)
      4. The Parable of the Tenants (12:1-12)
      5. Paying Taxes to Cæsar (12:13-17)
      6. Marriage at the Resurrection (12:18-27)
      7. The Greatest Commandment (12:28-34)
      8. Whose Son Is the Christ? (12:35-40)
      9. The Widow's Offering (12:41-44)

- iii. Jesus and the coming judgment (13:1-37)
  - 1. Signs of the End of the Age (13:1-31)
  - 2. The Day and Hour Unknown (13:32-37)
- c. Death and resurrection in Jerusalem (14:1-16:8)
  - i. Betrayal (14:1-52)
    - 1. Jesus Anointed at Bethany (14:1-11)
    - 2. The Lord's Supper (14:12-26)
    - 3. Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial (14:27-31)
    - 4. Gethsemane (14:32-42)
    - 5. Jesus Arrested (14:43-52)
  - ii. Trial (14:53-15:20)
    - 1. Before the Sanhedrin (14:53-65)
    - 2. Peter Disowns Jesus (14:66-72)
    - 3. Jesus Before Pilate (15:1-15)
    - 4. The Soldiers Mock Jesus (15:16-20)
  - iii. Crucifixion and resurrection (15:21-16:8)
    - 1. The Crucifixion (15:21-32)
    - 2. The Death of Jesus (15:33-41)
    - 3. The Burial of Jesus (15:42-47)
    - 4. The Resurrection (16:1-8)
  - iv. [Longer ending of Mark (16:9-20)]

[The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.]