

Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Uniqueness of the Gospel of Mark:

There are four Gospels in the New Testament. Though many of the same events are recorded in each of them, each human author, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote to a distinctive original audience and focused on a different aspect of Jesus' life and ministry.

The gospel of Matthew focuses on Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, Luke describes Jesus as the One who welcomes outsiders, and John emphasizes Jesus as the eternal Son of God. Mark focuses on Jesus as the One who ushers in the kingdom of God. Through His life and teaching, and especially through His death and resurrection, Jesus fulfills all the Old Testament hopes and promises, ushering in His kingdom on earth.

Of the four Gospels, Mark was probably the first one written. It is the shortest and fastest-paced gospel. Mark repeatedly transitions to a new section of his narrative with the word “immediately.” Mark’s gospel moves at a rapid pace and with heightened intensity as Jesus quickly approaches the final week of His earthly life and ministry.

Author, Date and Place of the Gospel of Mark:

Early church testimony is unanimous that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark. In the New Testament, John Mark is identified as a cousin of Barnabas. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey in the book of Acts. His mother is described as having a home in Jerusalem in which the early disciples met. Peter mentions John Mark as his son in the faith in I Peter.

The evidence affirming that Mark wrote the second gospel was widespread in the early church. Although in recent centuries some

scholars have tried to deny this traditional view, they have not refuted the ancient testimony to Mark's authorship, nor have they been able to point to anything in the gospel itself that rules out Mark as its author.

Mark wrote his account of Jesus, possibly in the mid-to-late 50's or 60's AD. Mark relied heavily on the eyewitness account of the Apostle Peter. Though written in Rome, Mark's Gospel was aimed at the wider church, especially those who had not been raised as Jews, as is evident from the way Mark at times explains Jewish customs.

Purpose of the Gospel of Mark and the Early Church:

In one sense, Mark and the other three gospels shared one common purpose: to preserve a true historical record of Jesus' life and teachings. From 50 A.D. onward, more and more of the apostles and eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were dying, so there was an increasing need to preserve their testimony and witness. The 4th century Christian leader and historian, Eusebius, and other early church writers noted that Mark's purpose was to preserve Peter's eyewitness account of Jesus' ministry.

But preserving this record was not Mark's only purpose. As with every gospel writer, Mark didn't just want his readers to learn about Jesus. He also wanted them to learn truths from the life of Jesus which applied to their own lives. Living as a follower of Jesus in the early days of the Christian movement could be costly.

The 60's A.D. was a really challenging time for Christians. In the year 59, Nero had been the Roman emperor for five years. In his sixth year and until his death in 68 A.D., Nero became increasingly erratic and unpredictable. The Apostle Paul arrived in Rome in about A.D. 60, willing to die for Christ and passionately declaring that Jesus is Lord and His gospel is for everybody.

When there was a great fire in Rome on July the 18th, A.D. 64, with Nero himself as the probable arsonist, Nero shifted the blame on to the sect called the Christians. Under the rule of Nero, Christians were persecuted severely. And Nero wasn't the worst in terms of persecuting Christians. Other Roman emperors attacked Christianity even more fiercely. History records many cases of Christians suffering death by being nailed to crosses or burned to death because of their worship of Jesus.

We are greatly blessed to live in a nation which guarantees the freedom of worship. Today, this is not the situation in many places around the world. Every day, thousands of Christians suffer persecution simply because they profess Jesus Christ is Lord.

A good portion of the gospel of Mark is intended to strengthen the faith of 1st and 21st century followers of Jesus. Discipleship or following Jesus is essentially a relationship with Jesus, not merely following a certain code of conduct. This relationship with Jesus includes trusting Him and following Him even if we suffer for His sake.

As we face difficulties, temptations and even suffering for Jesus sake, we can be confident Jesus has already faced them. He was unjustly condemned, beaten by Roman soldiers and crucified on a cross, on the town garbage heap, outside the city gates. And Jesus' cross was His conquest; achieving salvation through suffering and death and rising again in victory. The gospel of Mark assures all who trust and follow Jesus, we too, will be conquerors through faith in Him.

Key Verse in the Gospel of Mark

"Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14 –15)

Outline of the Gospel of Mark

Introduction (1:1–15)

Demonstration of Jesus' Authority (1:16–8:26)

Jesus' early Galilean ministry (1:16–3:12)

Jesus' later Galilean ministry (3:13–6:6)

Work beyond Galilee (6:7–8:26)

Testing Jesus' Authority in Suffering (8:27–16:8)

Journey to Jerusalem (8:27–10:52)

Entering and judging Jerusalem (11:1–13:37)

Death and resurrection in Jerusalem (14:1–16:8)

"Longer ending of Mark" (16:9–20; see note)]