

Gospel of Mark

Overview

Intro: Mark is the shortest gospel – roughly 60% of Matthew and Luke. Additionally, only about 3 or 4% of Mark is unique. Matthew begins with genealogy and Luke with the infancy narrative, but Mark just jumps right in and begins with John the Baptist preaching and Jesus' baptism. Mark's gospel begins with John the Baptist like a "roaring lion" in the desert. Hence, Mark is associated with a lion.

Who: The heading "according to Mark" appears in the earliest manuscripts we have of the second gospel, which date back to the third century (Healy, Introduction). According to tradition, Mark was the interpreter of St. Peter. Church historian Eusebius, writing in the 4th century, quotes Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (AD 60-130), who says:

- *Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things done or said by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them.*

Clement of Alexandria (150 – 215), Irenaeus (115 – 202), Tertullian (155 – 225), and Origen (185 – 254) give similar testimony that Mark was Peter's interpreter. Peter refers to Mark as "my son" who was with him in "Babylon" (Rome) in 1 Peter 5:13.

- Mark's knowledge of Latin/Greek may have helped Peter who did not know either language well. God always brings people in our lives to help us.

John (Jewish name) Mark (Roman name) is in Acts 12:25, 15:37. In Colossians 4:10 we learn that Mark is the cousin of Barnabas, a Levite. Finally, in Acts 12:12 we learn that Mark's mother owned a home in Jerusalem where Christians gathered and prayed.

Tradition has Mark going to Alexandria where he became bishop and eventually martyred in the streets. In 828 AD, his relics were stolen by two merchants and brought to Venice where they now rest under the high altar in St. Mark's Basilica.

Audience: Evidence suggests that Mark wrote for Roman Christians, and in particular, Christians in crisis. Under Emperor Nero (64 – 68 AD), the Church in Rome suffered brutal persecution. Rome burned on July 19, 64 AD. 10 of the 14 districts burned down. Nero blamed the Christians, who then had them tortured, burned, and fed to the wild beasts.

- **Key:** Mark writes to strengthen Christians suffering persecution to strengthen them. Jesus suffered. Following Jesus will involve suffering.

Mark borrows words like legion, praetorium, and centurion that would have been familiar to Romans. He explains Jewish customs unfamiliar to his readers (7:3-4). Ironically, a Roman centurion confesses that Jesus is the Son of God (15:39).

When: Shortly after the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The fall of the Temple in 70 AD is a watershed moment. Healy says several factors point to writing before 70 AD:

1. Few details about the fall of the Temple in Mark 13 (Mount of Olive Discourse),
2. Details in Mark's Gospel correspond with Nero's persecution,
3. Postbiblical sources mention that Mark wrote soon after Peter's martyrdom (p. 20).

Literary Style: Mark's Gospel moves swiftly. Dr. Gray calls it the "Hollywood Gospel." Mark uses the Greek word *euthys*, "immediately," over 40 times! Mark's Greek is unrefined and clumsy (unlike Luke's) and yet, he provides eyewitness details that other gospels do not (e.g., 4:38 – Jesus sleeps on a cushion, 14:51-52 – young man flees naked, 15:21 – Simon of Cyrene was the father of Alexander and Rufus).

Structure: Prologue (1:1-13), Three Acts; Postlude (16:9-20)

- **Act I:** Ministry in Galilee: (1:14 – 8:26) – **Who is this?**
 - A. *The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry 1:14–3:12*
 - B. *From the Call of the Twelve to Their Mission 3:13–6:13*
 - C. *From Herod's Opinion to Peter's Confession 6:14–8:26*
- **Act II:** Jesus' Destiny as the Son of Man (8:27 – 10:52) – **Suffering Messiah**
 - A. *First Cycle: 8:21-9:29*
 - B. *Second Cycle: 9:30-10:31*
 - C. *Third Cycle: 10:32-10:52*
 - D. **Key:** Passion prediction, misunderstanding, teaching
- **Act III:** Ministry in Jerusalem: Passion, Death, and Resurrection (11:1 – 16:8)
 - A. *Cleansing of the Temple to the prediction of its destruction 11:1–13:37*
 - B. *The Passion and Death of Jesus 14:1–15:47*
 - C. *The Empty Tomb 16:1-8*

For us: Mark writes so that we confess and believe that Jesus is the Christ (8:29 - Peter), the Son of God (15:39 - Roman Centurion). Additionally, Mark wants us to *understand* what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus is the *suffering* Messiah who enters into His reign through the self-abasement of the cross (Healy, 24).

If you are going to follow Jesus as His disciple, you must share in intimately in His life and destiny. St. Paul and all the saints knew this well! While all of us will have our Good Fridays (physically, psychologically, spiritually), suffering never has the last word. God the Father will raise us with Christ and in Christ on Easter Sunday!