

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Mark

SB_MK1_Introduction

Author: The author of the Gospel of Mark is not identified. However, many documents from the early church unanimously point to Mark as the author.

Mark is mentioned on ten occasions in the Bible using either his Jewish name of 'John' or his Roman name of 'Mark'. He lived in Jerusalem and was a cousin of Barnabas. It is very likely that he was the youth wearing a linen cloth at Jesus' arrest (14:51-52) because only his Gospel mentions this incident which occurred after all the disciples had already fled.

You may remember that Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey from the church in Antioch (A.D. 46), but left them prior to the completion of that journey (Acts 13:13). Paul and Barnabas had a significant dispute over whether to allow Mark to re-join them (Acts 15:37-39). Later in Paul's life, he and Mark had been reconciled. By A.D. 60-62, Paul complimented Mark as a fellow worker (Col 4:10, 11; Philem 24). Paul asked for Mark's assistance while he was in prison (2 Tim 4:11).

Evidently, Mark enjoyed significant contact with the leaders of the Jerusalem church. For example, Peter announced his miraculous jail escape at the home of Mark's widowed mother, Mary (Acts 12:12). Mark also provided assistance to Peter (1 Pe 5:13).

Personally, I treasure Mark's Gospel account all the more knowing that as a young man, he made some mistakes that even the Apostle Paul could not accept. Had it not been for the gracious treatment provided by Barnabas, only God knows what would have become of Mark and whether he would have ever written this treasure.

Date of Writing: Most scholars are of the opinion that Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome under Peter's supervision. Among the evidence cited is that Peter was most likely in Rome shortly after A.D. 60 as was Paul who requested that Mark return to Jerusalem around A.D. 65 (2 Tim 4:11). This would date the writing of Mark's Gospel around A.D. 64-65 prior to Peter's death in A.D. 65.

Peter was Mark's primary source of information. An outline of the events in Mark's Gospel compares very favorably with an outline of Peter's sermon to Cornelius in Acts 10:34-43. One of the early church fathers, Justin Martyr, who wrote about A.D. 150 in Rome, confirmed that Mark recorded Peter's recollection of events.

Recipients: Mark wrote for Gentile Christians and primarily for those in Rome. A couple of key facts support this conclusion. First, Mark does not assume his readers were familiar with Jewish Scripture since there is only one quote from Hebrew Scripture (1:2-3). In addition, Mark explains Jewish practices and geography (7:2-4; 13:3; 14:12). Also, Mark purposely omits Jesus' prohibition of preaching to the Samaritans and the Gentiles (6:7-11 cf. Matt 10:5, 6).

Major Themes: The Gentile audience was facing persecution and martyrdom under the Roman emperor Nero. This is why one of the **major** themes of the book is the **nature and cost of discipleship** (e.g. 8:35; 9:35; 10:23, 44). The persecuted Christians could gain comfort by being reminded of the Lord's suffering in life and death which was followed by the glory of resurrection and eternal life.

One of the **costs of being a disciple** of Jesus is that just as Jesus was misunderstood and had to stand alone without the understanding and support of His Own, so too will a follower of Jesus. This is the subject of many passages throughout the book. For example:

- Expressions of amazement (1:22, 27; 2:12; 5:20; 9:15) even a lack of understanding by His own disciples (4:13; 6:52; 8:17, 21; 9:10, 32; 10:26)
- The disciples have a difficult time perceiving Who Jesus really is in the first half of the Gospel, e.g. (4:41; 5:31; 6:36-37, 51-52; 8:4)
- The disciples don't understand the type of Messiah that Jesus claims to present (8:31-33; 9:30-35; 10:23-43)
- The last stage of the disciples' response to Jesus is characterized by rejection and cowardice, e.g.
 - Judas plans to betray Jesus (14:10ff)
 - Apathy toward Jesus' distress by Peter, James and John in the garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42)
 - After Judas' betrayal in 14:43-46, the rest of the disciples forsake Jesus (14:50)
 - Finally, Peter completely renounces Jesus (14:66-72)
- Mark provides example after example of Jesus' rejection by Jewish leadership (His own people). Not only was there amazement as was previously noted, but there was outright opposition from Jewish leadership, e.g. 2:6, 16, 24; 3:2, 6, 22; 7:1-2; 10:2; 11:18, 28; 12:13, 18; 14:43, 55-65; and 15:1

The rejection by Jewish leadership sent Jesus to the Cross. All disciples of Jesus are to take up their cross and follow Jesus (8:34). Inevitably, this means that a disciple of Jesus who practices His faith will face rejection and perhaps even persecution. If Jesus experienced misunderstanding and even rejection from His own prior to the accomplishment of His purpose on earth, then in a similar manner, any true disciple of Jesus can expect to be misunderstood and be required to stand alone. No doubt this would have been an encouragement to the Gentile Roman believers who would have read this Gospel.

On at least nine separate occasions after performing a miracle, Jesus issued a command for the observers of the miracle to keep silent (see 1:25, 34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, 30; 9:9). This is known as the **messianic secret** in Mark's Gospel. The purpose of this motif in Mark's Gospel is most likely to demonstrate that Jesus as the Son of Man must first suffer and die and be resurrected before He would be allowed to carry out His messianic role. Jesus did not want His identity proclaimed until the entire message could be understood. Throughout Mark, there is a progressive withdrawal of the veil from His identity until He openly declared it in 14:62.

There are **other themes** that are interwoven throughout the Gospel of Mark and most of these themes derive from Mark's greater emphasis upon the cost of discipleship. They include:

- An emphasis upon Jesus as the Son of God (1:1, 11; 3:5, 11; 5:7; 6:6, 31, 34; 7:34; 8:12, 33; 9:7; 10:14; 11:12; 12:1-11; 13:32; 15:39)
- The Cross – its cause and necessity (8:31; 9:31; 10:33; 12:12; 14:1-2; 15:10)
- The Wilderness – mentioned several times in the early chapters and provides a contrast by being a place set apart from the rebellious nation of Israel (1:3, 4, 12-13, 45; 6:31, 35)

Literary Features of Particular Note: Mark is characterized by a rapid progression from one circumstance to another and an emphasis upon the deeds, and not so much the words of Jesus. Some examples include:

- Use of the adverb "immediately" (ἰα̅ϛ̅ ⬢⬢) 42 times – more than in all of the rest of the NT combined. Matthew – 6 times; Luke – 1 time; and John – 3 times.
- Use of forceful words, e.g. "impelled" or "drove" in 1:12
- Mark records 18 (out of 35) of Jesus' miracles – proportionately more than any other Gospel) but only four of His parables (4:2-20, 26-29, 30-32; 12:1-9) and one major discourse (13:3-37)
- Most of Jesus' teaching in Mark resulted from Jesus' controversies with the Jewish religious leaders (2:1-12, 13-17, 18-22, 23-27; 3:1-6, 20-21, 22-30, 31-35; 7:5-23; 10:1-12; 11:27-33; 12:10-37)
- Over a third (36%) of the narrative is devoted to the Passion Week

Passages Found Only in Mark: The following chart shows those passages found only in Mark.

Passage	Notes	Compare To
1:1	Jesus Christ, the Son of God	Matt 1:1
2:26a	Time of Abiathar, the high priest from whom David received the shewbread	Not named in the parallel accounts in Matthew 12:1-8 and Luke 6:1-5
3:20-21	Jesus accused of being mentally off balance. Mark emphasizes the unbelief of Jesus' family. Perhaps Mark had some unbelief in his family.	Not mentioned in the parallel accounts of Matthew 12:22-30 and Luke 11:14-23
4:26-29	Similar to the parable of soils in Matthew	No direct parallel account
5:4	A demon possessed man is described by Mark to have always by night and day to be in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones	The vivid description of Mark is not found in the parallel accounts in Matthew 8:28-9:1 and Luke 8:26-39
7:3-4	Mark explains Jewish traditions of washing of the hands	Not found in the parallel account of Matthew 15:1-20
8:22-26	Jesus performs a miracle in two stages. Most likely Mark wanted to illustrate the disciple's slowness to understand spiritual matters	No parallel description
9:14-16	Mark provides a more graphic description of the disciples disputing with the disciples just prior to the healing of the epileptic boy	This element of detail was not mentioned in the parallel account of Matthew 17:14-21 and Luke 9:37-42
9:21	Mark adds that this had been the boy's fate since childhood	Not in parallel accounts
9:48-49	Mark adds a quote from Isaiah 66:24 – "where 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched'" and makes the statement that everyone will be seasoned with fire	Not in the parallel accounts of Matthew 18:6-9 and Luke 17:1, 2
14:51-52	Mark adds a brief description of his activities at the time of Jesus' arrest.	Not in parallel accounts. This is Mark's cameo appearance in his own account just to prove he was there.
16:9-20	Probably not a part of the original gospel	Certain verses are close to the parallel accounts in Matthew 28:9, 10, 16-20; Luke 24:13-35, 44-53 and John 20:11-18. However, some have no parallel (e.g. Mark 16:17-18)

Assignment for next week:

1. Read the first 8 chapters of the Gospel of Mark and highlight the action words such as "immediately", "now", "it came to pass", "then, and "as soon as".
2. Compare the first 8 chapters of the Gospel of Mark to our study of Matthew. You will need to refer to your notes from Matthew. See if you can explain the meaning of the following sections of the Gospel of Mark – 1:8; 2:18-22; 2:25-28; 3:12, 29; 4:3-9; 4:11, 30-32; 6:5, 10-11; 7:9-13, 28, 36; 8:15, 33.
3. In reading the first 8 chapters of Mark, try to develop an interpretation of the following passages which have no parallel in Matthew – 4:21-25, 26-29; 8:22-26.