

Introduction: Historical Background

OVERVIEW : For this series of messages, we have chosen to focus on Jesus' piercing question to His disciples in Mark 8, where He asks, "Who do you say that I am?" This is a fundamental question that every person must ask as they consider giving themselves to His Lordship. Throughout our journey in the Gospel of Mark, we will look at the question "Who is this man?" as we find it answered in the many miracles and parables we will study along the way.

The Gospel of Mark is a book of action. It is the story of Peter's journey with Jesus as told to John Mark. It is a fast-moving story of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the cross. This is a unique book because at least forty-two times Mark uses the word "immediately", or one of its synonyms, showing Mark's passion to reveal Jesus in control and on the move. Mark records only one long teaching of Jesus, and that doesn't come until chapter 13. He also records only four parables, while describing eighteen miracles. In this little book we read a powerful story that compels the reader to get off the sidelines and get into the game!

AUTHOR: Mark (John Mark) was most likely the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) and close friend of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). The book of Mark doesn't identify anyone personally as author. Since the second century A.D., however, church leaders and scholars have accepted John Mark as the one who wrote this Gospel. (John is his Jewish name and Mark, Marcus, his Roman name.) The early

church fathers unanimously accepted Mark's authorship. Papias (A.D. 110) makes the earliest statement to this effect:

*Mark, who was the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he remembered, whether of sayings or doings of Christ, but not in order. For he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord; but afterwards, as I have said, he accompanied Peter, who adapted his instruction as necessity required, not as though he were making a compilation of the Lord's oracles. So then Mark made no mistake when he wrote down thus some things as he remembered them, for he concentrated on this alone—not to omit anything that he had heard, nor to include any false statement among them.
(Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History III, p. 39)*

Other church fathers, including Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius, confirm this assessment of Mark as the author.

Mark was most likely a young teen when Jesus died in Jerusalem. Some contend that he was the young man who ran away naked from the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested. It is most likely that he is the son of Mary, a wealthy woman who had come to believe in Jesus. The Book of Acts describes the Early Church gathering at Mary's house to pray for the release of Peter (Acts 12:12). This was most likely about fourteen

2. Read over the following passages and answer the following questions (8:31-32; 9:9-10; 9:30-32; 10:32-45; 12:1-2):

a. What is the context of each passage?

b. What does the passage say about the way Jesus died?

c. What is the purpose of Jesus' death?

3. How have you seen people shape their view of Jesus according to their preconceived agendas?

4. What are you hoping to discover in your journey through the Gospel of Mark?

years after the resurrection during a time of great persecution for believers at the hands of Herod.

In Colossians 4:10, Paul reveals that Mark is the cousin of Barnabas. Perhaps that is what motivated Barnabas and Paul to take Mark with them back to Antioch from Jerusalem (Acts 12:25). Soon thereafter, Barnabas and Paul were commissioned by the church in Antioch to begin their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3), and they included Mark as their helper (Acts 13:5). Early in the trip, however, at Perga, Mark abruptly left and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Luke gives no reason for Mark's departure (perhaps he was homesick, fearful, or ill). Later, however, when Paul and Barnabas began to plan the second journey, Mark became the cause of a sharp disagreement between the two men. Barnabas wanted to include Mark again, but Paul was strongly opposed because Mark had "deserted" them on the previous trip. So Barnabas and Paul parted company. Barnabas sailed to Cyprus with Mark, while Paul chose Silas and traveled to Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-41).

We know little else about John Mark. Evidently, he and Paul reconciled completely because later he joined Paul in Rome, during Paul's first imprisonment (A.D. 60–62) and was a comfort to him there (Colossians 4:10-11; Philemon 24). During Paul's second imprisonment and just before his death, he asked Timothy to bring Mark to Rome, "because he is helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11 NIV). Mark must have matured emotionally and spiritually through the years and under the mentoring of cousin Barnabas.

DATE AND AUDIENCE: The Gospel of Mark is the oldest of the four gospels. In fact, it is likely that Mark created the style of writing that came to be known as a Gospel since there is no record of this form of writing before his book emerges. Scholars generally believe that Matthew, Luke and John used material from Mark as a guide for their gospels as well.

The Gospel of Mark was most likely written from Rome to a largely Gentile audience. Mark goes out of his way to explain terms and customs that would have been very familiar to the Jewish believers, but not to the Gentiles. The book was probably written in the early to middle 60^s, or roughly thirty years after Jesus' death.

Mark dives right into the life of Jesus. There is no account of His birth or his childhood. There is no genealogy, no shepherds or wise men from the East. In fact, Mark's entire Gospel describes only the three years of Jesus' public ministry that culminated in His death and resurrection.

PURPOSE AND INTENT: Mark was writing to Roman Christians who were in the midst of tremendous persecution at the hands of Nero. The Gospel of Mark gave them a close and personal look at Jesus, their Savior and Lord. They could be assured that the faith they were living and for which they were giving their lives was true and reliable. Jesus, the Son of God, had lived, served (1:1–13:37), suffered, and died for them (14:1–15:47). And he had risen from the grave (16:1-8)—their triumphant Savior was alive!

4. How many miracles does Jesus perform? How many parables of Jesus are recorded in Mark?
5. Who are some of the key characters in the book?
6. What events jump out at you?
7. On the map above, familiarize yourself with some of the places Jesus went and the routes He took to get there.

FOR YOUR GROUP STUDY:

1. What observations have you made in your study of Mark this week?

TEACHING OUTLINE OF MARK:

1. The Preparation for Jesus' Public Ministry – 1:1-13
2. Jesus' Early Galilean Ministry – 1:14-3:6
3. Jesus' Later Galilean Ministry – 3:7-6:6a
4. Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem – 8:31-10:52
5. Jesus' Ministry in and Around Jerusalem – 11:1-13:37
6. Jesus' Suffering and Death in Jerusalem – 14:1-15:47
7. Jesus' Resurrection – 16:1-18

FOR YOUR PERSONAL STUDY:

1. Read the entire Gospel of Mark in several translations this week. What differences do you see in the narrative between translations?

2. Who do you say that Jesus is today?

3. What are some things you notice right off in this book?

The Life Application Bible sets the scene this way:

Like most new believers, the Romans also needed to know the cultural, social, and personal implications of their faith. How should they live in a hostile environment, in a society with values totally at odds with their own? Mark's Gospel presented Jesus, the Servant, as their model to follow.

In this gospel, Jesus is described as the Son of God and the Son of Man. Several themes emerge and are developed by Mark to show both the humanity and deity of Jesus. Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Servant of all, the performer of miracles, the master over Satan and the model for our lives as Christ-followers.

This Gospel is a fast-paced book that will challenge, encourage and inspire you. Mark clearly wants the reader to know that Jesus is where the action is. Christian singer Michael Card describes it this way:

*There is a joy in the journey
There's a light we can love on the way
There is a wonder and wildness to life
and freedom for those who obey.*



Though the shortest of the four gospels, the Gospel of Mark contains the most events; it is action-packed. Most of this action centers in Galilee, where Jesus began his ministry. Capernaum served as His base of operation (1:21; 2:1; 9:33), from which He would go out to cities like Bethsaida—where He healed a blind man (8:22ff); Gennesaret—where He performed many healings (6:53ff); Tyre and Sidon (to the far north)—where He healed many, drove out demons, and met the Syrophenician woman (3:8; 7:24ff); and Caesarea Philippi—where Peter declared Him to be the Messiah (8:27ff). After His ministry in Galilee and the surrounding regions, Jesus headed for

Jerusalem (10:1). Before going there, Jesus told His disciples three times that He would be crucified there and then come back to life (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34).

GOSPEL OUTLINE: There are many different ways to outline the Gospel of Mark. Below are four possible outlines to guide your study:

JESUS THE SERVANT:

1. The Servant is Presented – 1:1-14
2. The Servant's Ministry in Galilee – 1:14-9:50
3. The Servant's Journey to Jerusalem – Chapter 10
4. The Servant's Ministry in Jerusalem – Chapters 11-16

THEOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF MARK:

1. Galilean Ministry – Chapters 1-8
2. On to Jerusalem – Chapters 9-10
3. Jerusalem Ministry – Chapters 11-13
4. Christ's Passion – Chapters – 14-16

THE KINGDOM OUTLINE OF MARK:

1. Preaching the Kingdom of God – 1:1-8:26
2. The Cost of the Kingdom of God – 8:27-10:52
3. Bringing in the Kingdom of God – 11:1-16:20