

A. Why Study Mark?

1. I believe that Mark was the first of the four Gospels to be written down. So, as the earliest Gospel, it may provide core teachings from and about Jesus that early Christians deemed essential.
2. Mark was not always considered to be the first gospel written.
 - a) Generally, Matthew was thought to have been first, hence it is listed first in canon order.
 - b) Augustine was the first to write about the relationship of the four gospels and he maintained they were written in the order they appear in the canon.
3. Matthew and Luke follow the same general order as Mark but are much longer. Augustine disparaged Mark as an abbreviation of the larger work of Matthew.
 - a) In fact, 90% of the material in Mark has parallels in Matthew and 50% of it has parallels in Luke.
 - b) Both Matthew and Luke apparently used Mark as a basis for their works and added more to it.
 - c) The additional material in Matthew and Luke is attributed by scholars today to another unknown source called Q, which is sometimes referred to as the disciples' notebook.

B. Who is the Author of Mark?

1. You might quickly say, Mark, of course.
 - a. However, the gospel itself makes no claim to have been authored by Mark.
 - 1) There is no internal reference to any author at all, unlike Paul's epistles which identify him not only by name but by association with particular recipients.
 - 2) Mark does contain an account of a young man who fled naked in Gethsemane to escape arrest (Mk 14:51-52) which is considered an anonymous identification by the author. However, there is no corroborating evidence within Mark or any other written sources that this man was Mark.
 - b. Even the title "Gospel of Mark" is not in all manuscripts. However, the title was an early addition.
2. Peter may be the influence behind this gospel.
 - a. The writings of Papias, an early church father, which were later preserved by Eusebius, another church father, state that this gospel was written by "Mark indeed, who became the interpreter of Peter . . ."
 - b. The best candidate for Mark is John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. While Mark was a common first century name, John Mark is the only Mark who is mentioned in the New Testament writings.
 - 1) John Mark and Barnabas went with Paul on his first missionary journey until Mark turned back at Cilicia (Ac 13:13)
 - 2) Paul and Barnabas split when Paul would not allow John Mark to join them on a second journey.
 - 3) Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus (Ac 15:39).
 - 4) John Mark was later restored to association with Paul (Col 4:10, 2 Tim 4:11) and was also a close associate of Peter (1 Pe 5:13). He most likely encountered both Paul and Peter in Rome.
 - c. John Mark certainly would have had access to early gospel material from both Paul and Peter.
 - d. Church tradition considers Peter to be the ultimate source of information for Mark's gospel.
 - e. Most scholars allow for the cautious possibility of Peter as the source of this gospel and Rome as the place of its writing, but one should not make these factors essential to interpreting Mark's gospel.

C. When was Mark written?

1. Mark most likely encountered Peter in Rome near the end of Peter's life.
2. Mark would have likely committed Peter's remembrances to writing around AD 64, since Peter is believed died during the persecution of Christians at that time.
3. This date would confirm Mark as the earliest written Gospel.

D. For whom was Mark written?

1. Was the church at Rome the primary audience for Mark? Perhaps. This makes sense if Peter was the source and Rome the most likely place of writing.
2. However, most scholar believe the gospel was written for the wider Gentile audience.
3. Rome may have been the central church which circulated this early Gospel, but it is best seen as a missionary gospel to all Gentiles and not just those living in Rome.

4. There are Aramaic words and phrases preserved in Mark. Aramaic was the commonly spoken form of Hebrew used in Jesus' day.
 - a. Mark preserves these phrases but interprets them into Greek for his Gentile readers.
 - b. One of the most famous of these phrases is found in Mk 15:34, "And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, '*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')."
 - c. These Aramaisms (cf., Mk 5:41, 7:34, 9:5, 10:5, 14:36, 15:34) serve as both marks of authenticity as well as an indication of a Gentile, non-Aramaic speaking, audience.
5. There is a focus in Mark on Jesus' ministry in Galilee and other non-Jewish regions, areas considered to be Gentile rather than Jewish.
 - a. The setting of Mark 1:14-6:13 is Galilee.
 - b. The setting of Mark 6:14-8:30 are Greek regions beyond Galilee.
 - c. Only at 8:31 does Jesus begin his journey to Jerusalem where Mark 11:1-13:37 documents his ministry in Jerusalem just prior to his arrest and execution.

E. What is the Structure of Mark?

1. It is a Gospel, but what is a gospel?
 - a. "The beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the son of God" (Mk 1:1 NIV).
 - b. The gospel is literally "good news" (Gk., *euaggelion*).
 - c. Each of the Gospels present the good news that Jesus, a human being, has been revealed to be "the Messiah (Gk. *christos* – "anointed one")" who is "the son of God."
 - d. Matthew and Luke contain more information about the birth and early life of Jesus, whereas Mark, and later John, set their beginning point for sharing the good news at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry.
 - e. All of the Gospels contain introductory material about Jesus' words and actions with an ultimate, lengthy focus on a Passion narrative (the persecution and death of Jesus – Mk 14:1-15:47).
2. An Outline of Mark
 - I. The Beginning Prologue (Mk 1:1-13)
 - II. Initial Ministry in Galilee (Mk 1:14-3:6)
 - III. Later Ministry in Galilee (Mk 3:7-6:13)
 - IV. Ministry in Other Gentile Regions (Mk 6:14-8:30)
 - V. Journey to Jerusalem (Mk 8:31-10:52)
 - VI. Ministry in Jerusalem (11:1-13:37)
 - VII. Passion Narrative (Mk 14:1-15:47)
 - VIII. The Resurrection (Mk 16:1-8)
3. The hinge point of Mark is Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah in Mk 8:29. **Read Mk 8:27-30.**

F. What are some of the Major Themes in Mark?

1. Focus on Galilee – This is a Gentile gospel.
2. Signs – In Mark, especially the first half, Jesus performs miracles demonstrating his power of nature, evil spirits, and even death. These signs are given ultimately to reinforce his teaching as authoritative and to support his identify as the Messiah, the son of God.
3. The Messianic Secret – However, Jesus kept his identity as Messiah a secret until the time was right.
 - a. In the first half Mark, Jesus commands those who identify him as Messiah to keep that fact a secret.
 - b. The last time he commands this is after Peter's confession of him as Messiah in Mk 8:29-30.
 - c. Jesus explains to his disciples the meaning of him being the Messiah (Mk 8:31-38) not only for himself but also for them.
 - d. From this point Jesus moves toward Jerusalem and the Passion. He progressively reveals himself to be Messiah (e.g., The Transfiguration Mk 9:2-13; Receiving the praise of being Lord and Savior by the crowd at the Triumphal Entry Mk 11:1-11) as he moves toward the cross and resurrection.
 - e. His ultimate acceptance of this title before the Sanhedrin culminated his planned self-sacrifice. "Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus" (Mk 15:61b-62).
 - f. His calls for secrecy about his identity were motivated by his desire to complete his teaching ministry because he knew that when his identity was revealed his remaining time to complete his mission would be short.

3. Suffering – As with the other gospels, there is a significant portion of the gospel which focuses on the suffering of Jesus (Passion Mk 14:1-15:47; 10:45) and of his disciples.
- a. Three times (Mk 8:31, 9:31, 10:33) Jesus predicts his betrayal and death: “(Jesus) then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again” (Mk 10:31).
 - b. “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34)
 - c. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).