

GOSPEL OF MARK 1

Sept 24, Oct 1, Oct 8

AUTHOR

The authorship of Mark is a great mystery. Some of the earliest written traditions offered by a bishop named Papias indicate the Mark helped Peter by writing down his memories of Jesus. Mark, he went on to say, did not write them down in order but in a way that suited him in his telling of the story. This does not tell us a whole lot. In fact, there are even some ancient traditions that relate Mark's gospel not to Peter but Paul. The upshot is that we cannot say much that is definitive about the author from external evidence.

DATE

Most scholars think that Mark is our earliest surviving account of Jesus' life, written somewhere around 65 or 70 CE; that Matthew and Luke were produced ten or fifteen years after, possibly 80-85 CE; and that John was the last of the canonical accounts, written near the end of the first century, around 90 or 95 CE. Thomas, which is a non-biblical gospel, probably assumed its present form by 100 CE, although an earlier edition may have originated as early as 50 or 60 CE.

BACKGROUND

The place of writing and the community for which Mark wrote are no less easy to discern. There are, in fact, multiple theories. Many have associated the Gospel of Mark with Rome. Some commentaries argue that Mark was written in a time of persecution and that this might have coincided with Nero's treatment of Christians in Rome in the mid to late 60's of the first century.

Some relate Mark to a Syrian provenance. Here we have a community reasonably close to the turmoil of the Jewish War in the late 60's and a context where Gentile and Jewish worlds meet.

Another view locates Mark's writing in Galilee itself. The advantage here is that gives us a meaningful context for many of the distressing events that Mark describes in Jesus' apocalyptic discourse in chapter 13. It naturally links the production of Mark's gospel with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

CHARACTERISTICS

Mark is not so much a biography of Jesus as it is a character sketch. Without any introduction or infancy narrative, Jesus bursts onto the scene as a fully grown man. Three years of ministry are packed into chapters 1-10, while Jesus' final week stretches out through chapters 11-16.

NOTES: _____

OUTLINE OF MARK'S GOSPEL

I. Prologue: Events preceding the ministry of Jesus, 1:1-13

II. The early stages of the Galilean ministry, 1:14-3:6

III. The later stages of the Galilean ministry, 3:7-6:13

IV. The ministry outside Galilee, 6:14-8:26

V. The journey to Jerusalem, 8:27-10:52

VI. The ministry in Jerusalem, 11:1-13:37

VII. The death of Christ, 14:1-15:47

VIII. The resurrection, 16:1-8

IX. Epilogue: the disputed ending, 16:9-20

QUESTION: Mark is very brief. There are no birth stories or Jesus' boyhood. We jump into his ministry in the first chapter and begin the journey toward Jerusalem in chapter 8, half way through the gospel! Why do you think Mark organized his gospel this way? What seems to be important to him?

STORIES THAT ARE UNIQUE TO MARK

Over 90% of Mark is included in Matthew, and about 50% is included in Luke, so there are only very few unique passages in Mark's Gospel.

A. INTRODUCTION

Mark 1:1—The beginning of the **good news** of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

"Good news" (Gk. euagglion)—gospel; the glad tidings of the kingdom of God soon to be set up and also of Jesus the Messiah. This Greek word forms the basis for the English word "evangelism."

Mark 1:12-13—And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The detail about the wild beasts and angels is unique to Mark. Matthew and Luke are the ones who create the familiar story. (See Matt 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13)

Mark does not waste any time. John the Baptist enters the scene and baptizes Jesus who immediately goes into the desert. By verse 16, he calls his first disciples!

B. MIRACLES

Mark 7:31-37—Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." *[NRSV]*

Mark 8:22-26—They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village." *[NRSV]*

QUESTION: These two miracle stories are unique to Mark. What do we learn about Jesus from them?

Mark 9:21-24—Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” *[NRSV]*

Mark 9:26-27—After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. *[NRSV]*

Mark 9:29—He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

QUESTION: These portions of the story are unique to Mark and were not copied by Matthew or Luke. Again, what do we learn about Jesus from them?

C. OTHER INCIDENTS DURING MINISTRY

Mark 3:13-15— He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message (i.e. preach in the Greek), and to have authority to cast out demons. *[NRSV]*

Mark 3:20-21— Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” *[NRSV]*

While the first story is unremarkable, the second detail is more intriguing! Perhaps it's here to remind early Christians, who were under persecution at the time Mark was written, that if they follow in the footsteps of Jesus they, too, might be restrained and be accused of being out of their minds.

D. EYEWITNESS DETAILS

Mark 4:38— Jesus being asleep on a cushion during storm

Mark 4:39— Jesus saying, "Peace, Be still" to the storm

Mark 5:4-5—Details about the strength of the Gerasene demoniac (for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.)

Mark 5:30—Jesus being aware that power had gone from him when healing woman with bleeding

Mark 7:24—Departure to Tyre, and entering a house, not wanting anyone to know he was there

Mark 10:14—Jesus being indignant when disciples sent children away

E. PARABLES

Mark 4:26-29—He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

CONTEXT: Parable of the Sower is before it. Don't hide your lamp under a bushel basket and the Parable of the Mustard Seed is after it.

QUESTION: Given the context of this unique parable, do we have any clues regarding why Mark included it?

Mark 13:34—Analogy of man going on journey and leaving doorkeeper to be on watch

F. TEACHING AND COMMENTS

Mark 2:27-28—Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

Mark 3:17—James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder)

Mark 9:49-50—For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another. (middle section appears in other gospels)

Mark 10:30—[29] Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, [30] who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

Mark 12:32-34—(attached to the question "Which is the greatest commandment) Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

G. INCIDENTS DURING THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION

Mark 14:51-52—A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

Mark 15:44—Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time.

Mark 16:3—They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”

Mark 18:8—So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

QUESTION: What do you think of these details that are unique to Mark's telling of the passion story?

QUESTION: Mark 18:8 is the actual original ending of his gospel. What purpose might this serve? (It clearly unsettled people so much so that two different endings were attached to it.)
