

Introduction to Mark NIV Study Bible

AUTHOR

Although there is no direct internal evidence of authorship, it was the unanimous testimony of the early church that this Gospel was written by John Mark (“John, also called Mark,” Ac 12:12,25; 15:37). The most important evidence comes from Papias (c. a.d. 140), who quotes an even earlier source as saying: (1) Mark was a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things said and done by the Lord; (2) this tradition did not come to Mark as a finished, sequential account of the life of our Lord, but as the preaching of Peter—preaching directed to the needs of the early Christian communities; (3) Mark accurately preserved this material. The conclusion drawn from this tradition is that the Gospel of Mark largely consists of the preaching of Peter arranged and shaped by Mark (see note on Ac 10:37).

JOHN MARK IN THE NT

It is generally agreed that the Mark who is associated with Peter in the early non-Biblical tradition is also the John Mark of the NT. The first mention of him is in connection with his mother, Mary, who had a house in Jerusalem that served as a meeting place for believers (Ac 12:12). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem after the famine visit, Mark accompanied them (Ac 12:25). Mark next appears as a “helper” to Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Ac 13:5), but he deserted them at Perga in Pamphylia (see map, p. 2273) to return to Jerusalem (Ac 13:13). Paul must have been deeply disappointed with Mark’s actions on this occasion, because when Barnabas proposed taking Mark on the second journey, Paul flatly refused, a refusal that broke up their working relationship (Ac 15:36–39). Barnabas took Mark, who was his cousin (Col 4:10), and departed for Cyprus. No further mention is made of either of them in the book of Acts. Mark reappears in Paul’s letter to the Colossians written from Rome. Paul sends a greeting from Mark and adds: “You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him” (Col 4:10; see Phm 24, written about the same time). At this point Mark was apparently beginning to win his way back into Paul’s confidence. By the end of Paul’s life, Mark had fully regained Paul’s favor (see 2Ti 4:11 and note).

DATE OF COMPOSITION

Some, who hold that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a major source, have suggested that Mark may have been composed in the 50s or early 60s. Others have felt that the content of the Gospel and statements made about Mark by the early church fathers indicate that the book was written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. See essay and chart, p. 1943.

PLACE OF ORIGIN

According to early church tradition, Mark was written “in the regions of Italy” (Anti-Marcionite Prologue) or, more specifically, in Rome (Irenaeus; Clement of Alexandria). These same authors closely associate Mark’s writing of the Gospel with the apostle Peter. The above evidence is consistent with (1) the historical probability that Peter was in Rome during the last days of his life and was martyred there, and (2) the Biblical evidence that Mark also was in Rome about the same time and was closely associated with Peter (see 2Ti 4:11; 1Pe 5:13, where the word “Babylon” may be a cryptogram for Rome; see also Introduction to 1 Peter: Place of Writing).

RECIPIENTS

The evidence points to the church at Rome, or at least to Gentile readers. Mark explains Jewish customs (7:2–4; 15:42), translates Aramaic words (3:17; 5:41; 7:11,34; 15:22,34) and seems to have a special interest in persecution and martyrdom (8:34–38; 13:9–13)—subjects of special concern to Roman believers (and to Peter as well; cf. 1 Peter). A Roman destination would explain the almost immediate acceptance of this Gospel and its rapid dissemination.

OCCASION AND PURPOSE

Since Mark's Gospel is traditionally associated with Rome, it may have been occasioned by the persecutions of the Roman church in the period c. a.d. 64–67. The famous fire of Rome in 64—probably set by Nero himself but blamed on Christians—resulted in widespread persecution. Even martyrdom was not unknown among Roman believers. Mark may be writing to prepare his readers for such suffering by placing before them the life of our Lord. There are many references, both explicit and veiled, to suffering and discipleship throughout his Gospel (see 1:12–13; 3:22,30; 8:34–38; 10:30,33–34,45; 13:8–13).

EMPHASES

1. *The cross.* Both the human cause (12:12; 14:1–2; 15:10) and the divine necessity (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34) of the cross are emphasized by Mark.
2. *Discipleship.* Special attention should be paid to the passages on discipleship that arise from Jesus' predictions of his passion (8:34–9:1; 9:35–10:31; 10:42–45).
3. *The teachings of Jesus.* Although Mark records far fewer actual teachings of Jesus than the other Gospel writers, there is a remarkable emphasis on Jesus as teacher. The words “teacher,” “teach” or “teaching,” and “Rabbi” are applied to Jesus in Mark 39 times.
4. *The Messianic secret.* On several occasions Jesus warns his disciples or others to keep silent about who he is or what he has done (see 1:34,44 and notes; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9).
5. *Son of God.* Although Mark emphasizes the humanity of Jesus (see 3:5; 6:6,31,34; 7:34; 8:12; 10:14,11:12), he does not neglect his deity (see 1:1,11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:1–11; 13:32; 15:39).

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Mark's Gospel is a simple, succinct, unadorned, yet vivid account of Jesus' ministry, emphasizing more what Jesus did than what he said. Mark moves quickly from one episode in Jesus' life and ministry to another, often using the adverb “immediately” (see note on 1:12). The book as a whole is characterized as “The beginning of the gospel” (1:1). The life, death and resurrection of Christ comprise the “beginning,” of which the apostolic preaching in Acts is the continuation.

OUTLINE

- The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry (1:1–13)
 - His Forerunner (1:1–8)
 - His Baptism (1:9–11)

- His Temptation (1:12–13)
- Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (1:14—6:29)
 - Early Galilean Ministry (1:14—3:12)
 1. Call of the first disciples (1:14–20)
 2. Miracles in Capernaum (1:21–34)
 3. Preaching and healing in Galilee (1:35–45)
 4. Ministry in Capernaum (2:1–22)
 5. Sabbath controversy (2:23—3:12)
 - Later Galilean Ministry (3:13—6:29)
 1. Choosing the 12 apostles (3:13–19)
 2. Teachings in Capernaum (3:20–35)
 3. Parables of the kingdom (4:1–34)
 4. Calming the Sea of Galilee (4:35–41)
 5. Healing a demon-possessed man (5:1–20)
 6. More Galilean miracles (5:21–43)
 7. Unbelief in Jesus' hometown (6:1–6)
 8. Six apostolic teams preach and heal in Galilee (6:7–13)
 9. King Herod's reaction to Jesus' ministry (6:14–29)
- Strategic Withdrawals from Galilee (6:30—9:29)
 - To the Eastern Shore of the Sea of Galilee (6:30–52)
 - To the Western Shore of the Sea (6:53—7:23)
 - To Syrian Phoenicia (7:24–30)
 - To the Region of the Decapolis (7:31—8:10)
 - To the Vicinity of Caesarea Philippi (8:11–30)
 - To the Mount of Transfiguration (8:31—9:29)
- Final Ministry in Galilee (9:30–50)
- Jesus' Ministry in Judea and Perea (ch. 10)
 - Teaching concerning Divorce (10:1–12)
 - Teaching concerning Children (10:13–16)
 - The Rich Young Man (10:17–31)
 - A Request of Two Brothers (10:32–45)
 - Restoration of Bartimaeus's Sight (10:46–52)
- The Passion of Jesus (chs. 11–15)
 - The Triumphal Entry (11:1–11)
 - The Clearing of the Temple (11:12–19)
 - Concluding Controversies with Jewish Leaders (11:20—12:44)
 - Signs of the End of the Age (ch. 13)
 - The Anointing of Jesus (14:1–11)
 - The Lord's Supper (14:12–26)
 - The Arrest, Trial and Death of Jesus (14:27—15:47)
- The Resurrection of Jesus (ch. 16)