



Mark

Mark's Gospel, like all of the gospels, tells the story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Mark's Gospel places a particular emphasis both on discipleship and on walking the way of the cross in the footsteps of Jesus. Strikingly it neither has any birth narratives (it begins abruptly with the message of John the Baptist) nor any real resurrection narratives – since the women, arriving at the tomb, find it empty and are asked to go and proclaim Jesus' resurrection to the disciples in Galilee but instead they ran away afraid.

Mark's Gospel has a few alternative endings. The original manuscripts end at 16.8 but later manuscripts provide both an extra shorter and an extra longer ending. Their style is so different, however, that it seems unlikely that they are original.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 1½ hours
Short of time? Just read 1.1-20; 4.1-41;
 8.1-9.8; 15.21-16.8



Genre

Gospel – accounts that tell the story of the life of Jesus Christ and the good news he came to bring



Anything tricky?

Not really, the trickiest part is the ending and the question of whether Mark could have intended to leave the Gospel with the women running away afraid.



Inspiring quotes

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."
(Mark 1.14-15)

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
(Mark 12.28-31)

...whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."
(Mark 10.44-45)



About the Author

This Gospel, like the other three, is anonymous. The name Mark was only associated with it by later Christian tradition. Some think that Mark the evangelist was John Mark, Barnabas' cousin (Acts 12.12; 25; and 15.37). Some also think that he was the young man mentioned in Mark 14.51 who ran away naked from Jesus' arrest.

The early church historian Eusebius believed that Peter met Mark as he travelled from imprisonment in Judea to Rome, and that he passed on his eye witness testimony to Mark who then wrote it down.

Many scholars think that, in addition to his own material, Mark had a document in front of him a hypothetical document they call Q which may have contained the earliest traditions about Jesus, his life and ministry.

What do we know about him?

All we know about the author of Mark comes from Christian tradition and subsequent speculation. The early church tradition could be true but it is impossible to prove.



About the times

Most scholars would date mark's Gospel either to just before or just after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 ad.

What were people feeling?

If the proposed dating for Mark is correct then Mark's Gospel was written has a time of global turmoil. Some think it was most likely that the Gospel was completed in Rome. If so then the ripples caused by the Jewish War (ad 66-73) may have felt less strong to Mark's audience, though the chaos in Rome following the Emperor Nero's suicide in 68 ad would have been felt very strongly.

Other books set around this time

Roughly speaking Matthew and Luke (though both are thought to have been written later than Mark), and a range of other New Testament letters (not written by Paul, most of which are a bit earlier than this) including possibly Hebrews, James, 1 Peter and Jude.

The reality is that the dating of the New Testament is so heavily disputed and so hard to prove that it is difficult to be confident about it.



What kind of Book is it?

It's a Gospel – a story about the life of Jesus with the intended aim of persuading its readers of who he was.

Mark's purpose seems to have been to communicate the power of who Jesus was in as vivid a style as possible so that Mark's audience could understand the urgency and power of the call to 'come and follow'.



How is it structured?

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 1.1 | The Beginning |
| 1.2-4.34 | An introduction to the Ministry of Jesus |
| 4.35-8.25 | 'Come and follow me' – the challenge of discipleship |
| 8.26-10.52 | The way of the cross – the cost of discipleship |
| 11.1-16.8 | The final week of Jesus' life. |



Look out for...

One of Mark's favourite words is 'immediately' or however it is translated in your version. Check Mark 1.12 and notice what word is used – then look out for it as you read through the Gospel. Another theme, for Mark, is discipleship. What do you think of the disciples in Mark's Gospel, would you have done better?

From chapter 8 onwards the shadow of the cross begins to fall ever strongly over Jesus' life, keep an eye open for this and notice how it makes you feel (if anything!)



What could this mean for me?

One of Mark's messages seems to be to raise the question of what a good disciple of Jesus might be. Reflect on this as you read and see if you can discern hints for good discipleship.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Talk about Mark's portrayal of the disciples. Do you think he was fair about them? Which of them, if any, did you feel the strongest relationship with?
- What did you learn about following Jesus from reading Mark's Gospel?
- What did you think about the ending of Mark? Do you think it should stop at 16.8 or did you prefer one of the other endings?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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