

# The Gospel of Mark (1)

## Background to Mark's Gospel

### What is a Gospel?

A Gospel is not a biography. A biography tells you about what happened in someone's life in an historical context. A Gospel on the other hand is a statement of the faith of the writer. In many ways a Gospel tells us as much about the belief of the writer as about Jesus himself. The word "Gospel" is the Anglo-Saxon translation of the Greek word "Evangel". Both mean Good News. The writers believed they had Good News to tell. That Good News was about what they believed the death and resurrection of Jesus meant.

### Who was Mark?

We believe that Mark was a companion of Peter, one of the closest friends of Jesus. An early Christian called Papias, himself a follower of someone called "The Elder" wrote around the year AD 100:

*"The Elder used to say that Mark, who had been an interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that Peter remembered of what the Lord said and did, though not in order".*

This is probably the Mark that Paul and Peter refer to in their letters and also who Luke refers to as John Mark in Acts of the Apostles. There he's the son of a woman called Mary, to whose home Peter flees when escaping prison (Acts Chap 12 .verses 12-17). Peter probably baptises Mark because he calls him "son" (1 Peter 5 .v13). Mark then accompanies Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12 v25 and 13 v5 and v13). Paul and Mark argue and split up for a while (Acts 15 v37-39) before joining up again (Philemon 24; Colossians 4 v10; Timothy 4 v11).

Later Christian tradition is that Mark worked in Rome, then Alexandria in Egypt where he was martyred (killed because of his faith). Hundreds of years later, in the Ninth Century, his body was taken to Venice where it is buried in St Mark's Cathedral.

### When was Mark's Gospel written?

Mark's Gospel was written about AD 65. That was about thirty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. That makes it the earliest Gospel, although all of Paul's letters were written earlier. Matthew (written about AD 75) and Luke (written about AD 85) copied most of Mark's Gospel, put it a different order and added some material of their own including two very different nativity stories. John's Gospel (written AD 95 or later) is very different.

### What language was Mark's Gospel written in?

Mark's Gospel, like all of the New Testament, was written in Koine (or Common) Greek. It was the language of everyday life in the Roman Empire. Mark's Greek is often clumsy and sentence construction is often poor. Mark is writing in a foreign language but often includes Aramaic words in the Gospel. Aramaic is the language that, as a Jew, Mark would usually speak – it was the language of Jesus too.

### Where was Mark's Gospel written?

Mark's Gospel was written in Rome during very troubled times. In AD 64 much of Rome was destroyed in a fire. To deflect blame away from the failings of his rule the Emperor Nero looked for someone else to hold responsible. He chose a new religious group, the

followers of "The Way" - or "Christians" as they had been nicknamed – and blamed them. This led to a persecution and many were killed. In AD 65 one of Peter, an original follower of Jesus, was crucified. In AD 67 Paul, another leader of the Christians, was beheaded. They were hard times to be a follower of Jesus and his teachings.

### **How did Mark write his Gospel?**

Mark gathered some of the accounts that were circulating among Christians about the life of Jesus. Among these were some that Peter himself had told Mark. Mark put them together to form a narrative introducing his description of Jesus' death on the cross. He did so in a way that spoke of what he saw around him, a suffering and persecuted community, and what he thought being a Christian involved.

### **Why did Mark write his Gospel?**

The Christians Mark wrote for believed that Jesus was the Messiah, or Christ, the anointed one who would bring about God's rule over all the world. They believed that Jesus had risen from the dead and was active among them. Their problem was that God's Kingdom seemed as far away as ever. Life was hard and they were persecuted. Mark wrote his Gospel to explain how he experienced God working in the midst of so much suffering. We see this background in the main theme of Mark's Gospel.

### **What is Mark's main theme?**

Mark's underlying theme is that of a "Messianic Secret". In his Gospel he shows the truth of who Jesus is unfolding only gradually. From the beginning of the Gospel Jesus' keeps hiding his identity. When the disciples, or others, realise who Jesus is he forbids them from telling anyone. Jesus does that no less than twenty-one times. Throughout the Gospel people, even Jesus disciples, misunderstand him. That happens nineteen times. Jesus words and actions are shown as arousing amazement and fear twenty-seven times.

## ***Outline of Mark's Gospel***

<b>A</b>	<b>Prologue</b>	<b>Chapter 1 vv1 – 13</b>	<i>Jesus the Messiah-Christ, Son of God</i>
<b>B</b>	<b>Galilean Ministry</b>	<b>Chapter 1 v13 – Chapter 8 v30</b>	
	Chapter 1		Summary of what Jesus did and said
	Chapter 2–3		Five stories of controversy
	Chapter 4		Parables
	Chapter 5–8		Miracles
	<i>Chapter 8 v30</i>		<i>Peter acknowledges Jesus as Messiah-Christ</i>
<b>C</b>	<b>To Jerusalem</b>	<b>Chapter 8 v31 – Chapter 13 v37</b>	
	Chapter 8, 9, 10	The Passion foretold	Discipleship
	Chapter 9	The Transfiguration	Discipleship
	Chapter 10	Journey to Jerusalem	Discipleship
	Chapter 11 – 12	Six controversy stories	
	Chapter 13	Jesus foretells the end	
<b>D</b>	<b>Death and Resurrection</b>	<b>Chapter 14 v1 – Chapter 16 v8</b>	
	Chapter 14	The Last Supper	
	Chapter 15	Passion and Death	
	<i>Chapter 15 v39</i>	<i>The centurion acknowledges Jesus as Son of God</i>	
	Chapter 16	Resurrection	