



OTT

Operation Teaching Tools

OTT Sunday School Lesson

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Gospel of Mark

Lesson 1: Introduction

Lesson Introduction:

Today we will begin a study of the Gospel According to the Mark. This is the shortest Gospel in the Bible but by no means is it the least important. In fact, Mark records several details about the ministry of Jesus that no other Gospel includes. Mark's Gospel is short not because he had less information to write but because he was hurriedly writing what people needed to hear concerning the good news of Christ. Mark rushed to record the messages of Christ for others. His Gospel is not inferior because it is short. His brevity is an indication of the urgency Mark felt in proclaiming the Gospel in written form. Many believe Mark was the first written Gospel to be completed making it very important to the early church. The other Gospels do not refute Mark's Gospel but rather supplement his initial writing with additional, helpful information and truth. It is often suggested that even Matthew and Luke used Mark's Gospel as one source or support for their own writings.

Read: Mark 1:1

Mark's Introduction:

The writers of the Gospels do not clearly identify themselves. They chose to focus immediately on the Gospel message and Christ Jesus. Each has an introduction but Mark's is the shortest with just one sentence in Mark 1:1. Here he informs the readers about what they are reading.

However, before we begin to study what Mark wrote, we need to examine some background information called context. This context will help us to better understand what Mark has written. The context we will study is:

- 1) Who wrote this book?
- 2) Why did he write this book?
- 3) Where and when did he write this book?
- 4) What is this book?

Who Wrote This Book:

Even though the writer of this Gospel never gives us his name, early church history reports that the author was Mark, also known as John Mark. Papias, an early church leader who died only 100 years after Jesus, testified that Mark was the author. Eusebius, who lived just 200 years after Christ, tells us that Mark was Apostle Peter's assistant and interpreter. Origen, who also lived about 200 years after Christ, tells us that Mark wrote based on Peter's eyewitness testimony. Most scholars agree that it was quite clear in the early church that Mark, Peter's helper, wrote this Gospel.¹

John Mark (usually called "Mark") is seen in the New Testament. Let's read these passages where Mark is mentioned.

- 1) Acts 12:12; Acts 13:13; Act 15:36-40
- 2) 1 Peter 5:13
- 3) Colossians 4:10

¹ Robert H. Stein, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 1.

Based on these texts, we can determine that Mark was part of a leading Christian family in Jerusalem where he most likely received a very good education that prepared him to write well. He was a cousin of Barnabas and worked with Barnabas and Paul in ministry. He abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. Barnabas chose to travel with John Mark on a second missionary journey after Paul objected to using him again. Mark also worked closely with Peter and eventually traveled to Rome to help Peter and Paul. The orthodox church in Egypt claims that Mark brought the Gospel to Egypt and founded the first churches in Africa. Mark's death is debated with some saying he was killed in Rome and others saying he was killed in Egypt around 68 AD.

Why Did He Write This Book:

Mark wrote the first and shortest Gospel. This may indicate that he wanted to record the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles before they died. Until the gospels were written, the only way of sharing the stories and message of Jesus was by speaking. The Gospel was preached and taught by the original Apostles and their followers but none of it was written until at least 30 years after Christ ascended to heaven. Mark saw the persecution of the church and knew the Apostles may soon die. He rushed to record their stories in writing to be preserved and passed on.

Mark was also an evangelist and his writing indicated that he wanted to share the Gospel with the Gentiles as well. Mark's ministry in Rome (Colossians 4:10) shows he participated in Paul's outreach to Gentile communities. Though Mark was Jewish, he joined in the work of the early Apostles to get the message of salvation to the whole world. Mark even seems to target Gentile believers with this Gospel.

Mark sought to provide an accurate account of Christ Jesus and his Gospel, witness to the Gentiles, and encourage the church with a written record of the victory of the Kingdom of God. Describing God's Kingdom is a key theme found in Mark's Gospel and it was helpful to the persecuted church of his time.

Where and When Did He Write This Book:

Mark most likely wrote this Gospel between 61 – 68 AD, about 30 years after Jesus ascended to heaven and near the end of Paul and Peter's life. Church history indicates that Mark wrote from Rome.²

What Is This Book:

Mark wrote a Gospel. The word for Gospel comes from the Greek language and simply means "Good News." The word was originally used in the Greek military as a proclamation of the winning of a battle or victory in a war. A Gospel was a good news report brought by a messenger that the battle is won and victory has come.³ Christians found this to be a good way to describe the message and victory of Jesus.

The literary definition of "Gospel" is a collection of narratives (stories) about Jesus including his famous sayings and actions. The Gospels are written in the style of ancient Greek and Roman biographies where the majority of the focus was on the person's later life and death.⁴ Mark's Gospel actually skips all of Jesus' childhood and begins with Jesus as a grown man ready to begin his ministry. That would be unusual for modern biographies but not for ancient biographies.

Prepare for Next Week:

Now that we have a basic understanding of context of Mark's Gospel, we will begin to study the content of Mark's Gospel. Read Mark 1:2-13 in preparation for the next lesson.

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² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 126.

³ Kenneth L. Schenck, Gospel: Good News, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 343.

⁴ Richard A. Burridge, Gospel: Genre, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 337-338.