

Mark

Authorship

Traditionally the second Gospel has been attributed to the John Mark of Acts who was the cousin of Barnabas, twice the associate of Paul, and the one who had a special relationship with Peter as his *hermēneutēs* (“interpreter”).¹ Neither the external nor internal evidence demand an outright dismissal of John Mark as the author. The fact that he was an associate of both Paul and Peter puts him in a unique position to write an account of the story of Jesus for a Roman audience.

Date

Earliest tradition holds that Mark wrote after Peter’s death in Rome (c. A.D. 64-67). Some hold that he wrote during Peter’s time in Rome, as early as A.D. 45.² The supposition that Mark could only have been written following a 20 year period of oral tradition is questionable on both cultural and literary grounds. The hypothesis that Mark is the earliest Gospel because it is the shortest has been seriously challenged in recent synoptic studies.³ Mark may well have been the third Gospel written, but certainly before A.D. 70, which accounts best for the futuristic cast of the apocalyptic discourse in chapter 13, as well as other features.

Historical Setting

The book concerns the story of Jesus of Nazareth and reflects eyewitness accounts and details of Jesus’ ministries. While Mark does not claim to have been an eyewitness, it is evidently based on the testimony of such a witness, namely, Peter.

Original Readers

Evidence that Mark wrote for Gentile readers includes (1) explanation of Jewish customs (2) interpretation of Aramaic expressions and (3) the use of Latinisms. Historical traditions agree that Rome was the place of writing. The reference to Mark in 1 Peter 5:13 which mentions “Babylon” (likely a code word for Rome) supports a Roman origin.⁴

¹ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. revised (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 81-84. For an evaluation of the external evidence see Bernard Orchard and Harold Riley, *The Order of the Synoptics: Why Three Synoptic Gospels* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 111-22.

² For a recent defense of this date see John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 136-82.

³ Cf., e.g., Orchard and Riley, *Order*.

⁴ Cf. Guthrie, *Introduction*, 71-75.

Occasion

Orchard and Riley state that “in the most ancient text to discuss expressly the order of composition of the four gospels . . . Clement of Alexandria is quoted as stating that the Gospel of Mark came after the two gospels with genealogies, and that it resulted from *didaskalía*, that is, public discourses or lectures given by Peter himself to a Roman audience . . .”.⁵ The Gospel of Mark may well have been the result of a comparative activity between Matthew and Luke, which would have had the effect of validating Luke’s Gospel for the Gentile world since it would be seen to comply with Matthew, the Gospel of the Church at Jerusalem.⁶

Special Issues

Mark’s relationship to Matthew and Luke. The majority opinion in modern synoptic studies is that Mark is the earliest Gospel, based on oral tradition and perhaps other sources, and that Matthew and Luke are dependent upon Mark for pattern and order supplemented by other documentary sources.⁷ Due to the many instances of exact wording and editorial comments among the three works it is apparent that some literary dependence must be involved. The question is open though as to who is dependent upon whom. The common assumption of Markan priority seems to be that the shorter must necessarily be the earlier (a common fallacy with biological evolutionary theories). In fact, other factors may well account for the difference in the lengths of these three Gospels. In addition, in the actual parallel pericopes Mark is usually the longest of the three. Recent scholarship has raised serious objections to Markan priority on the basis of the evidence, both external and internal.⁸

The “long” ending. Manuscript evidence reveals no less than four endings to the Gospel of Mark: (1) conclusion at v.8 (2) the conclusion of vv. 9-20 (3) an addition to the longer ending

⁵ Orchard and Riley, *Order*, 263.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 263-77.

⁷ For a summary of the synoptic problem see R. H. Stein, “Synoptic Problem,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 784-92.

⁸ Orchard and Riley envision the production of Mark in this way: “The internal evidence is consistent with the tradition that Mark set out to make a collection of the kind of *chreiai* [a word used by Papias and likely meaning “episodes” or “memoranda,” cf. 91-92] on which Peter had based his teaching. Since Peter had not arranged them in order, Mark made use of Matthew as his principal guide, but also used Luke, and in consequence followed an order that alternated with the sequences of those Gospels, adding some further material, notably two miracle stories and a parable, which they did not contain. There are incidental details which may reflect Mark’s recollection of Peter’s own words when he used his *chreiai*. When Mark was following Matthew’s order, he naturally tended to follow Matthew’s wording more closely; when following Luke’s, to be closer to Luke’s text,” *Order*, 97.

after v. 14 and (3) a shorter ending after v. 8.⁹ Only the first two have any real claim to authenticity. Appeal is made to the obvious confusion of the manuscript tradition in support of the short ending. In addition it is contended that literary structure, vocabulary and grammar rule against the longer version as being from the hand of Mark.¹⁰ A serious objection to the shorter ending is that it leaves the Gospel without a “proper” conclusion. It seems unnatural and abrupt. It leaves the reader without a “commission” statement, without record of any appearances of the resurrected Messiah, without a sequel to the command to the disciples to go to Galilee (v. 7), and without an ascension statement. It also leaves the disciples in fear and amazement. In other words the “shorter” ending begs for a conclusion. The longer ending is not without its supporters.¹¹ Orchard and Riley have a more balanced view of the weight of the internal evidence. They also note that material in the longer ending has affinities with tradition only recorded in John’s Gospel. If Mark is writing with reference to Matthew and Luke, it may be that he departs from what has worked for that schema up to that point and incorporates other apostolic tradition.¹² The long ending of Mark may be accepted as original on the basis of external and internal considerations.

Theme Statement

Mark’s story of the ministry of Jesus reveals that servanthood is the essence of discipleship to Jesus–Messiah of Israel and Son of God for the world—who performed the service of our redemption.

Outline

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A. Introduction by the forerunner	1:9
B. Attestation by the Father	1:10-11
C. Preparation by the forerunner	1:1-8
D. Authentication by the Spirit	1:12-13

⁹ See Guthrie, *Introduction*, 89-93 for a discussion of the external and internal evidence.

¹⁰ Cf. Henry B. Sweete, *Commentary on Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1913. Reprint Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977),

¹¹ E.g., J. W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to St. Mark* (Oxford: 1871). See also W. R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

¹² Cf. Orchard and Riley, *Order*, 93-97.

Part I: The Gospel of Messiah and the kingdom of God.....	1:14–8:30
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Theme Statement

Mark’s story of the ministry of Jesus reveals that servanthood is the essence of discipleship to Jesus–Messiah of Israel and Son of God for the world—who performed the service of our redemption.

Theme Development

The two descriptions of Jesus in the opening statement, namely, Christ (Messiah) and Son of God, are the great themes of the book. Part one (1:14–8:30) centers on Jesus’ demonstration of his Davidic role and hence on his identity as the promised Messiah. The climactic confession at 8:29, “You are the Christ (Messiah)” supports this division. At this point Mark says that Jesus “began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer . . . and be rejected . . . and after three days rise again” (8:31). The climactic confession in Part Two comes

from the lips of a Gentile centurion; “Truly this Man was the Son of God” (15:39). The first part focuses on Messiah’s offer of the Davidic Kingdom and its rejection. The second part focuses on the Gospel of Salvation on the basis of the Son’s approaching death. Mark creates a unique blending of Jesus’ initial ministry to Israel, emphasized in Matthew’s Gospel, and the subsequent ministry to the Gentile world, emphasized by Luke.

Prologue: The Gospel of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God (1:1-13).

Mark begins where Matthew and Luke first coincide, that is, with the ministry of John the Baptist. Though Mark does not contain a lot of Old Testament quotation and allusion, the introduction of the forerunner is crucial in setting the historical and theological context for the ministry of Jesus. Jesus’ baptism, the Father’s approval, and the empowerment of the Spirit are summarized as the prelude to a recounting of Jesus’ ministry.

Part I: The Gospel of Messiah and the Kingdom of God (1:14–8:30).

The message of the Gospel of the Kingdom is essentially the same as that of Matthew. Jesus was presenting himself as King so that Israel could receive her promised kingdom (1:14-15). Jesus’ authentication as Davidic King occupies center stage in this section along with Israel’s rejection of him in that role.

I. Jesus trains disciples regarding the forces hostile to the Kingdom of God (1:16–3:12).

Discipleship training is at the heart of Mark’s Gospel, as seen by the way he regularly inserts notices about their calling, sending, instruction, and commissioning (1:16-20).¹³ Jesus is seen overcoming those forces which oppose the kingdom’s establishment. There are external universal forces like demonic spirits and physical illness (1:21-39) as well as inner forces like man’s innate inferiority to God, symbolized by the defilement of leprosy (1:40-45) and his acquired sinfulness (2:1-12). Jesus alone has the power to deliver from these obstructive forces.

The calling of Matthew as a disciple (2:13-17) introduces another set of forces hindering the coming of the kingdom, namely some traditional taboos of the Jewish nation (2:15–3:6). Jesus confronts these when they obscure the truth of the kingdom or otherwise hinder people from entering it. The summary notice of 3:7-10 shows that Jesus carried on a convincing ministry of Kingdom proclamation as witnessed by the response of the multitudes. Even the spirits testified to his divine identity, though the nation was not yet able to receive such a revelation (3:11-12).

¹³ Cf. 2:13-17; 3:13-19; 6:7-13; 8:27-30; 9:2-13; 16:19-20.

II. Jesus trains certain disciples in a ministry of kingdom proclamation (3:13–8:30).

Having observed Jesus' confrontation of and victory over the forces hostile to the kingdom, twelve disciples are selected for training as special representatives of the message of the kingdom (3:13-19), though Mark does not have them actually sent out until later (6:7). This marks an advance in discipleship training from demonstration and instruction (3:13–6:6) and to demonstration and personal involvement (6:7–8:30).

A. Jesus trains disciples through demonstration and instruction (3:13–6:6).

Once the twelve have become attached to Jesus in a special capacity their training begins to involve the element of opposition. Jesus is immediately accused of healing by the power of Beelzebul which marks the watershed of the nation's failure to respond to his ministry (3:20-29). All relationships will take on a radically new meaning (3:31-35). In light of this rejection Jesus begins to instruct the disciples in new facets of kingdom ministry by means of parables. Parables were designed to reveal the truth to those who are responsive while concealing it from those who are in opposition (4:1-12). In these parables Jesus reveals to the twelve that they will end up serving a different manifestation of the kingdom than what had been generally expected on the basis of Old Testament prophecy. Subjects would be determined by their response to Jesus' message (Soils 4:13-20). It might be concealed but shouldn't be (Lamp 4:21-25). It will grow mysteriously (Seed 4:26-29) and mightily (Mustard Seed 4:30-32). It will be unlike the restored kingdom of David and need much explanation (4:33-34). Such a kingdom was outside the conceptual realm of the disciples but not for the One who could command even the wind and sea (4:35-41). The power to effect such a realm is demonstrated to reside in Jesus by his freeing of a demon-possessed man of Gadara (5:1-20), his healing of a woman with a chronic disability (5:25-34), and his raising a little girl from death (5:21-43). The fact that these miracles occur both in Gentile and Jewish settings sheds light on the unique nature of the new kingdom program for which the disciples were now being trained. The only thing that could curtail experiencing Jesus' power was unbelief such as was manifested in Jesus' own country (6:1-6).

B. Jesus trains disciples through demonstration and experience (6:7–8:30).

On the basis of a demonstration of the power requisite for such a kingdom program, the twelve are sent out to preach, heal and exorcise demons in complete dependence upon the Lord (6:7-13). The inclusion of the report of John's death at this point underscores the fact that any

success in the recruitment of subjects for the kingdom was nonetheless under the shadow of such opposition as could lead even to death (6:14-29).

In the same way that the Twelve had observed Jesus' power both in Gentile and Jewish contexts, they now become personally involved in ministry in both settings, the feeding of the five thousand most likely being in Jewish environs (6:30-44) and the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10) in a Gentile area. Associated with the Jewish feeding miracle are another manifestation of Jesus' power over nature (6:45-52), an extensive healing ministry (6:53-56), and instruction about the true source of defilement (7:1-23).

The Gentile feeding miracle is preceded by Jesus granting the request of a Syro-Phoenician woman from Tyre to cast a demon out of her daughter (7:24-30) and his healing of a deaf man in the region of Decapolis (7:31-37). The repeated juxtaposition of Gentile and Jewish ministry in Mark serves to combine the emphases of Matthew and Luke as a means of validating Jesus' mission to both Jew and Gentile.¹⁴

C. Mark summarizes Jesus' training of disciples for kingdom proclamation (8:11-30).

The final section of Part One summarizes the initial training of the disciples for a ministry in kingdom proclamation. Rejection is now their ministry context (8:11-12) and the state of an individual's spirit their ministry concern (8:13-21). Through the disciples Jesus will continue to bring light to a dark world (8:22-26). As Messiah, Jesus has powerfully demonstrated his intent to establish a representation of the heavenly kingdom on earth despite Israel's tacit rejection of its offer (8:27-30). The disciples have witnessed this and have become committed to its proclamation (8:29).

Part II: The Gospel of Redemption through the Son of God (8:31-16:20).

While the idea of kingdom remains as an important aspect of Jesus' ministry, the emphasis shifts towards Jesus' work of redemption as the Servant-Son. This fact is evident from the repeated references to his impending death (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34), from the clear redemption statement in 10:45, and from the attention given to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Discipleship is still in the forefront (cf. 8:34-38) but its context is shifting from the immediate hope originally associated with the kingdom mission to the immediate prospect of suffering and

¹⁴ This feature may be much more helpful in explaining the similarities and differences in the synoptic Gospels than the hypothesis of an evolutionary model of literary dependence based on the assumption of Markan priority.

a delayed kingdom. Jesus' transfiguration shows that the kingdom hope is still alive but that some alteration in its original form is at hand (9:2-13).

I. Prediction and Preparation: The Son of Man prepares the disciples for their future ministry in light of his coming death (9:14-10:52).

The first miracle of this section revolves around the failure of the disciples to exorcise a spirit (9:14-29). They had been given power for such a ministry (cf. 6:7) and were surprised that in this instance the spirit did not yield until in the presence of Jesus himself (9:25-28). Perhaps this was to show that a time was coming when the full manifestation of Jesus' power would come only by prayer and fasting since he would no longer be physically present with them (9:29). Mark records Jesus' prediction of his "departure" in the very next statement (9:30-32). At any rate, it is clear that certain things are different for the disciples.

An extended section on the true nature of greatness serves to prepare the disciples for ministry in light of the kingdom's delay (9:33-10:45).¹⁵ Servanthood is the key concept in this regard, forming a double *inclusio* (cf. 9:35 and 10:43). Everything in this section may be related to the Lord's estimation of true greatness as it pertains to the attitudes and activities of the disciple. A disciple must avoid a sectarian spirit (9:38-41) and spiritually destructive offense (9:42-48). In other words, he or she should act like salt in the world (9:49-50). Marriage is one example of the sort of commitment by which God will measure greatness in a disciple (10:1-12). No one is insignificant in the kingdom, as illustrated by Jesus' welcoming of children (10:13-16).

A rich young ruler wants to know how to have treasure in the kingdom, a sure mark of greatness (10:17-31). Jesus reveals to him that treasure in the coming age can only be gained at the expense of the treasure of the present one (10:17-22; cf. vv. 28-31). The rich man's reaction reveals that he lacked what was needed for mere entrance into the kingdom, faith (10:22-27). The content of that faith is contained in the third prediction of Jesus' impending death and resurrection, namely the finished work of redemption by the Son of Man (10:32-34). The twin themes of greatness through servanthood and Jesus' service of redemption come together in the final pericope of this section, punctuated by the quintessential salvation text of Mark's Gospel; "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (10:35-45).

¹⁵ The theme of greatness forms an *inclusio* from 9:34 to 10:43 with many clear references to reward and such in between. The issue of divorce should be interpreted in this context since it has to do with steadfastness in relationship commitments, clearly an important part of discipleship.

II. Presentation and Pronouncement: The Son of Man presents himself as the Davidic King and pronounces judgment upon unbelieving Israel (10:46–13:37).

This section revolves around Jesus' formal presentation of himself as the Son of David and Israel's formal rejection of the same. It had been predicted and was actually already guaranteed. However, it had to be made "official" and Jesus needed to die as a ransom.

A. Faith in Jesus as Messiah results in sight and commitment (10:46-52).

In order to highlight Jerusalem's unbelief, the believing response to Jesus as Son of David by a blind beggar from Jericho introduces the section (10:46-52). Discipleship is kept in view via Bartimaeus' following of Jesus to Jerusalem, the place of suffering.

B. Rejection of Jesus as Davidic King will bring judgment (11:1-26).

In accordance with Old Testament prediction and precedent, Jesus formally presents himself as Messiah, Son of David (11:1-11). Jesus' symbolic actions of cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple indicated that Israel was about to experience judgment, being devoid of the fruit of repentance (11:12-19; cf. 1:15). The fig tree also contained a lesson in believing prayer for the disciples, namely that the Father's power was available for accomplishing the Father's will in line with the Father's character (11:20-26).

C. Rejection of Jesus is revealed in the leaders' responses to him (11:27–12:44).

Jesus' dialogue with various leadership groups confirmed that, nationally, Israel was rejecting Jesus' messianic claims. At the heart of their reaction was a repudiation of Jesus' authority, though it had been abundantly demonstrated in his words and works (11:27-33). The parable of the vinedressers summarized the leaders' rejection (12:1-12). Every major leadership group falls under Jesus' condemnation for their rejection of him, though his judgment is not without hope (12:13-40; cf. 12:34). The pericope of the widow's mites revealed that there were those within the nation who had not been completely corrupted by the spiritually bankrupt leadership (12:41-44).

D. Jesus' apocalyptic discourse reveals that rejection and judgment are not without hope (13:1-37).

Jesus' plain prediction of the destruction of the Temple prompts the disciples to seek information on the events of the end-time, apparently associating a destruction of the Temple with the advent of Messiah. Jesus' response to the disciples' questions confirmed that the kingdom envisioned in Daniel's predictions was still a future hope and that the Son of Man would appear and reign on the earth (13:1-31). However, their natural desire to know just when

this would happen was not satisfied. Instead Jesus admonished his servants to continue in their service with expectancy (13:32-37). Jesus' pronouncement of judgment was not without hope.

III. Presentation and Passion: The Son of Man presents himself as the Shepherd Savior and dies for the world's sin (14:1-15:47).

Having presented himself as Messiah and having been rejected, Jesus now presents himself as Savior. Through the instrumentality of the unbelieving nation, Jesus is delivered to death, a death which is accepted by the Father as a ransom for sin (cf. 10:45).

Though there is continual plot and intrigue to bring about Jesus' death (14:1-2; 10-11), it is clear that his execution will not be an accident of history. It will become the center of a world-wide proclamation (14:3-9). Jesus is in control of the events surrounding his death, as the preparations for the Passover show (14:12-16). It will all transpire according to the prophetic Scriptures (14:17-21). The Lord's Supper will become the new memorial of redemption, replacing the Passover, at least until the realization of Israel's kingdom (14:22-25). Even his own disciples' abandonment has been foreseen (14:27-31).

Jesus is not merely resigning to his fate; he is positively presenting himself for the work of redemption as predetermined by the Father. From his agonizing commitment in the garden to follow God's complete will (14:32-42), to his arrest (14:43-50) and trial, Jesus maintains his steadfast composure and sure resolve. Not even the flight of his friends deters him from his course (14:66-72).

Jesus is tried for blasphemy by the Sanhedrin; he is held at fault for claiming to be "the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed" (14:53-65). It is not that Israel somehow mistook what Jesus was saying about his identity, it was that they failed to accept it, even with all the miraculous attestation! Since only the civil authority could pronounce death, Jesus was sent to Pilate on the charge of sedition, that is, that he was a threat to Imperial Rome in his claim to be a king (15:1-15). The release of the insurrectionist Barabbas revealed that what was really afoot was Jesus' offering of himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for man's sin.

Jesus is severely mistreated by both Jew and Gentile (the Roman soldiers physically abused him; the Jews taunted and heaped emotional abuse on him) and then crucified as "The King of the Jews" (15:16-32). Mark points out that this was in fulfillment of Scripture (15:28), one of the relatively few such references in his Gospel. The manner of Jesus' death and the accompanying events lend further attestation to Jesus' claims, which are acknowledged by the Roman centurion overseeing his execution (15:33-41). His confession—"truly this Man was the

Son of God”—marks the climax of the second part of the book, beginning at 8:31, which has developed Jesus’ divine identity and redemptive role (15:39). The centurion’s testimony, coupled with the presence of Jewish disciples, as represented by certain women, fittingly summarizes part of Mark’s strategy in the crafting of his Gospel account (15:40-41). The themes of discipleship and the kingdom of God are carried forward through the action of Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus’ body (15:42-47).

IV. Resurrection and Commission: Jesus appears to the disciples and commissions them to preach the gospel of salvation to everyone (16:1-19).

As Jesus had predicted all along, his death would not be the end. The resurrection was a vindication of all that he had said and done. This section is crafted so as to demonstrate that the resurrection was integral to the disciples’ faith. Twice, disciples refuse to believe the accounts of those who had seen the risen Lord (16:11; 13). When once they had seen him, and been rebuked for their failure to receive resurrection testimony, they became steadfast in their commissioned ministry of gospel proclamation (16:14-20). In light of the nature of man to disbelieve such witnesses, Jesus promises that certain signs will attend that first wave of gospel response (16:17; 20). These signs will serve as divine authorization for the new gospel commission both initially and throughout the intervening centuries as believers are appraised of them through inspired Scripture.

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