

MARK'S GOSPEL

An overview

Although Mark did not write as an eyewitness of Christ's public ministry he relied on Peter who was his primary source of information for the Gospel. Peter refers to him as "my son Mark" in 1 Peter 5:13. Several Church Fathers state that Peter's authority stands behind the second Gospel.

Mark was the cousin of Barnabas, Paul's missionary companion. Barnabas accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts13:5). Mark, at some early stage seems to have had some disagreement with Paul (Acts15:36-41) but was later reconciled with him. We find him with Paul in Rome who described him as "very useful in serving me" (2Tim 4:11). Mark was also credited with founding Churches in Alexandria, Northern Egypt.

DATE

Prominent tradition in the early church date Mark's gospel in the 60's AD or even earlier. Irenaeus (180AD) states that Mark wrote soon after Peter's martyrdom (c 67AD). Other prominent Church Fathers, however, think he wrote his Gospel before Peter's martyrdom.

DESTINATION

The Gospel was written primarily for gentile believers in Imperial Rome from the following:

- He explains Jewish customs unfamiliar to his readers.
- He translates Aramaic words and phrases.
- The gospel climaxes with the confession of faith by the Roman centurion ("truly this man was a son of God")

When the gospel was been written in Rome it was a time of severe church persecution under the emperor Nero. The great fire in Rome during the reign of Nero was blamed on the Christians. So the gospel stresses the suffering Christ in order to encourage the early Christians to remain faithful.

THEMES

Mark paints a portrait of Jesus which is vivid and dynamic focussing on Jesus's mighty works. Jesus is seen as a dynamic healer and exorcist continually on the move. He uses the word 'immediately' over 40 times in his Gospel to bring home the point. Mark engages the reader with a number of rhetorical questions made by the crowd such as:

- What is this – a new teaching?
- Who can forgive sins but god alone?
- Who is this – even the wind and sea obey him?

- Who do you say that I am?

The reader is encouraged to ask himself the same questions.

Mark's story revolves around the identity of Jesus. In Mark Jesus tends to conceal his identity as the Messiah (messianic secret) because his contemporaries were prone to misunderstand His mission. They awaited a royal military figure who would liberate them from Roman rule which tended to be anything but benign. Jesus even silences the unclean spirits who attempt to publicise his identity. The identity of Jesus is centred on his servanthood and suffering. Christ became last of all and servant of all. He liberates people from the power of sin and Satan not from foreign rulers.

SONSHIP

Divine Sonship is the leading theme of Mark – it's at the heart of His gospel. The opening words of the gospel introduces Jesus as 'the Son of God'. Even the demons are aware of it and God the Father twice proclaims the Sonship of Jesus before the crowd. Jesus himself affirms it in 14:61-62.

On Calvary he finally surrenders his life to his Father and the Roman centurion confesses him as Son of God as he gazes at him on the Cross (15:39).