

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

MARK

THEME

Author and Title

Widespread evidence from the early church fathers affirms that Peter passed on reports of the words and deeds of Jesus to his attendant and writer, John Mark. Of particular significance in this regard are the brief statements by Papias (Bishop of Hierapolis; c. A.D. 120), preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea (260–340). Papias states that he received oral tradition from John the elder and apostle, and he passes on the following regarding Mark: (1) he was the writer for Peter; (2) he wrote down accurately as much as he could remember of Peter's words, which the latter had adapted to the needs of the moment; (3) he was not an eyewitness of Jesus, nor a disciple (but see note on [Mark 14:52](#)); and (4) it was his desire not to omit or misrepresent anything. Papias concluded that the Gospel of Mark gains its apostolic and reliable character from its Petrine origin (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.15.1–2; 3.39.14–16).

Internal evidence also supports the Patristic testimony that Peter stands behind Mark's Gospel. Mark's account is especially vivid when recounting incidents involving Peter. It presents the weaknesses of Peter, as well as the disciples as a whole, and omits praiseworthy or noticeable references to Peter reported in Matthew and Luke. It has also been observed that there exists a certain structural proximity between Peter's Caesarea speech ([Acts 10:34–43](#)) and the Gospel of Mark.

Date and Location

The external and internal data most convincingly point to Rome as the place of composition and a date for Mark in the mid- to late-50s A.D. (but some scholars date it in the mid- or late-60s; see below). The argument in favor of the mid- to late-50s is that the book of Acts ends with Paul in prison c. A.D. 62, leading many scholars to believe that Acts was written around that time. (Others suggest that Acts does not end at the point it was written because the key point of Acts is that the gospel had made it to Rome.) If Acts was written in the early 60s, then Luke's Gospel was written before Acts (cf. [Luke 1:3](#) with [Acts 1:1](#)), sometime in the early 60s. And if Luke depends on Mark's Gospel for much of his material and overall structure (the clear majority view

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among scholars today), then Mark was written before Luke. This would place Mark in the mid- to late-50s. In fact, such a date fits with an early church tradition that Peter was in Rome in the early- to mid-50s. Eusebius (writing c. A.D. 325) says, “in the same reign of Claudius [who died in A.D. 54] the Providence of the universe ... guided to Rome the great and mighty Peter ... preaching the gospel. ... But ... the hearers of Peter ... were not satisfied with a single hearing ... but with every kind of exhortation besought Mark ... seeing that he was Peter’s follower, to leave them a written statement of the teaching given them verbally, nor did they cease until they had persuaded him, and so became the cause of the Scripture called the Gospel of Mark” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.14.6–2.15.1; cf. a similar tradition in 6.14.6–7, quoting Clement of Alexandria, who lived c. 155–220). The *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* to Mark (late 2nd century A.D.) also places the writing during Peter’s lifetime, for it says that Mark “wrote this gospel in parts of Italy. When Peter heard this, he approved and affirmed it by his own authority for the reading of the church.”

However, if a somewhat later date for Luke–Acts is adopted, or if the similarities between Mark and Luke do not demonstrate that Luke used a completed written copy of Mark, then a date for Mark in the mid- to late-60s is possible. Some find support for this in a statement from Irenaeus (d. c. A.D. 195) that, “After their [Peter and Paul’s] departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter” (*Against Heresies* 3.1.2). If Peter’s “departure” refers to his death, and Peter died in A.D. 64, then the Gospel of Mark would have been written after 64, the year Peter died. On the other hand, this may refer not to the writing but to the publication of Mark, or may speak of Peter and Paul’s “departure” from Rome, not their death. So a date in the mid- to late-50s is most likely, but a date in the mid-60s is possible.

Theme

The ultimate purpose and theme of Mark is *to present and defend Jesus’ universal call to discipleship*. Mark returns often to this theme, and as the narrative unfolds he categorizes his main audience as either followers or opponents of Jesus. [The outline](#) demonstrates that Mark’s central effort in presenting and supporting this call is *to narrate the identity and teaching of Jesus*. This fact implies that discipleship for Mark is essentially a relationship with Jesus, not merely following a certain code of conduct. Fellowship with Jesus marks the heart of the disciple’s life, and this fellowship includes trusting him, confessing him, taking note of his conduct, following his teaching, and being shaped by a relationship to him. Discipleship also means being prepared to face the kind of rejection that Jesus faced.

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Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Though Mark wrote from Rome, the Gospel of Mark was composed for the wider church as the record of the apostolic testimony of Peter. Even during the early Patristic period, Gentile Christians were frequently mentioned as the recipients of this Gospel. Mark addresses an audience that is largely unfamiliar with Jewish customs. He intends to familiarize them with those customs, because only then will they understand the coming of Jesus as the culmination of God's work with Israel and the entire world.

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Key Themes

1. Jesus seeks to correct messianic expectations and misunderstandings.	1:25, 34, 44; 3:12; 4:10–12; 5:18–19, 43; 8:30; 9:9
2. Jesus is man.	3:5; 4:38; 6:6; 7:34; 8:12, 33; 10:14; 11:12; 14:33–42
3. Jesus is the Son of God.	1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 8:38; 9:7; 12:6–8; 13:32; 14:36, 61; 15:39
4. Jesus is the Son of Man with all power and authority.	1:16–34; 2:3–12, 23–28; 3:11; 4:35–41; 6:45–52; 7:1–23; 10:1–12
5. Jesus as the Son of Man must suffer.	8:31; 10:45; 14:21, 36
6. Jesus is Lord.	2:28; 12:35–37; 14:62
7. Jesus calls his followers to imitate him in humble service, self-denial, and suffering.	8:34–38; 9:35–37; 10:35–45
8. Jesus teaches on the kingdom of God, and implies that God continues to call a people to himself.	ch. 4; cf. 1:15; 9:1; 14:25; 15:43

History of Salvation Summary

Mark tells of Jesus' coming to bring everlasting salvation, as prophesied in the OT, and to triumph over sin and Satan. The ultimate fulfillment comes with his crucifixion and resurrection. (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the [Overview of the Bible](#).)

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Literary Features

Of the four Gospels, Mark is most overtly a “docudrama,” consisting of noteworthy “clips” as well as typical or representative events; snatches of speeches or dialogues; and commentary by the narrator. Mark’s approach to the biographical data is that of a careful recorder. Mark’s Gospel, however, is not a biography in the modern sense, as there is no attempt to describe Jesus physically, treat his family origins, or portray Jesus’ inner life. Rather, like other ancient biographies (which were called a *bios* or “life”), Mark’s purpose is to speak about the actions and teachings of Jesus that present his ministry and mission. Of course, the book is at the same time an implied proclamation and apologetic work that hints at the redemptive meaning of the events recorded. All of the Gospels are hero stories. Additionally, Mark’s Gospel is made up of the usual array of subgenres found in the NT Gospels, including calling stories, recognition stories, witness/testimony stories, encounter stories, conflict or controversy stories, pronouncement stories, miracle stories, parables, discourses and sermons, proverbs or sayings, passion stories, and resurrection stories.

Even though the overall format of Mark’s Gospel is narrative, it does not possess a continuous story line but is a collection of discrete units. There are crowd scenes, small-group scenes, public scenes, and private scenes. The resulting book is a collage or mosaic of the life of Jesus. The best way to negotiate this format is to regard oneself as Mark’s traveling companion as he assembles his documentary on the life of Christ. The main unifying element in the mosaic is the protagonist, Christ himself.

Mark’s Gospel (the shortest of the four) is a fast-paced narrative. Mark tends to include vivid descriptive details, and he prefers Greek verbs that portray an action in process. He often records people’s responses to what Jesus did and said. Like all storytellers, Mark selected his material by two criteria: he chose events that were *typical* or representative in the life of Jesus (such as miracles of healing and the telling of parables), and *unique*, once-only events (esp. those connected with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus).

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Timeline

	10 B.C.	1 A.D.	10	20	30	40	50	60	70
John the Baptist is born (6 B.C.)*	●								
Jesus is born (5 B.C.)*	●								
Jesus' family flees to Egypt; Herod the Great dies; Jesus' family goes to Nazareth (4 B.C.)*	●								
Jesus (age 12) talks with teachers in the temple (A.D. 8*)		●							
Jesus works as a carpenter in Nazareth (8*–28/30)			■	■	■	■	■	■	■
John the Baptist begins his ministry (28/29)					●				
Jesus begins his ministry; Peter becomes a disciple of Jesus (28/30)					●				
Jesus is crucified and resurrected (33 [or 30])†					■				
"John, whose other name was Mark" joins Paul and Barnabas's party for their famine-relief visit to Jerusalem; Mark accompanies Barnabas and Paul on part of the first missionary journey (44–47*)						■	■		
Barnabas takes John Mark to Cyprus (48/49–51*)							■	■	
John Mark meets with Peter in Rome (50–54)							■	■	
Gospel according to Mark written (53–55*)							■	■	
Paul, under house arrest in Rome, summons Mark, who serves as his delegate to Asia Minor (60–62*)								■	■
Peter, in Rome, writes 1 Peter; Mark is with him (62–63*)								■	■
Peter is martyred in Rome (64–67*)								■	■
The church in Jerusalem flees to Pella (67*)									●
Destruction of Jerusalem temple (70)									●

* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

The Setting of Mark

The events in the book of Mark take place almost entirely within the vicinity of Palestine, an area extending roughly from Caesarea Philippi in the north to Beersheba in the south. During this time it was ruled by the Roman Empire. The book opens with Jesus' baptism by John during the rule of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs Antipas and Philip, and it closes with Jesus' death and resurrection about three years later.

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Outline

- I. Introduction ([1:1-15](#))
- II. Demonstration of Jesus' Authority ([1:16-8:26](#))
 - A. Jesus' early Galilean ministry ([1:16-3:12](#))

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- B. Jesus' later Galilean ministry ([3:13–6:6](#))
 - 1. Calling of the Twelve ([3:13–35](#))
 - 2. Parables ([4:1–34](#))
 - 3. Nature miracle, exorcism, and healing ([4:35–5:43](#))
 - 4. Rejection at Nazareth ([6:1–6](#))
- C. Work beyond Galilee ([6:7–8:26](#))
 - 1. Sending of the Twelve ([6:7–13](#))
 - 2. Death of John the Baptist ([6:14–56](#))
 - 3. Teachings on moral defilement ([7:1–23](#))
 - 4. Opening to Gentiles ([7:24–30](#))
 - 5. Additional miracles in Decapolis and Bethsaida ([7:31–8:26](#))
- III. Testing Jesus' Authority in Suffering ([8:27–16:8](#))
 - A. Journey to Jerusalem ([8:27–10:52](#))
 - 1. Peter's confession ([8:27–33](#))
 - 2. Call to discipleship ([8:34–9:1](#))
 - 3. Transfiguration and healing ([9:2–29](#))
 - 4. Instruction on discipleship: putting others first ([9:30–50](#))
 - 5. Instruction on discipleship: divorce, wealth, humility ([10:1–52](#))
 - B. Entering and judging Jerusalem ([11:1–13:37](#))
 - 1. Triumphal entry to Jerusalem ([11:1–11](#))
 - 2. Jesus' judgment on religious leaders ([11:12–12:44](#))
 - 3. Jesus and the coming judgment ([13:1–37](#))
 - C. Death and resurrection in Jerusalem ([14:1–16:8](#))
 - 1. Betrayal ([14:1–52](#))
 - 2. Trial ([14:53–15:20](#))
 - 3. Crucifixion and resurrection ([15:21–16:8](#))

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4. [4. "Longer ending of Mark" ([16:9-20](#); see note)]²

¹ Some manuscripts end the book with 16:8; others include verses 9–20 immediately after verse 8. At least one manuscript inserts additional material after verse 14; some manuscripts include after verse 8 the following: *But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.* These manuscripts then continue with verses 9–20.

² Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 1889-1892). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.