



The Anglican Parishes of Whittington, Weeford and Hints

*What the Lord requires of you is to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with
your God*

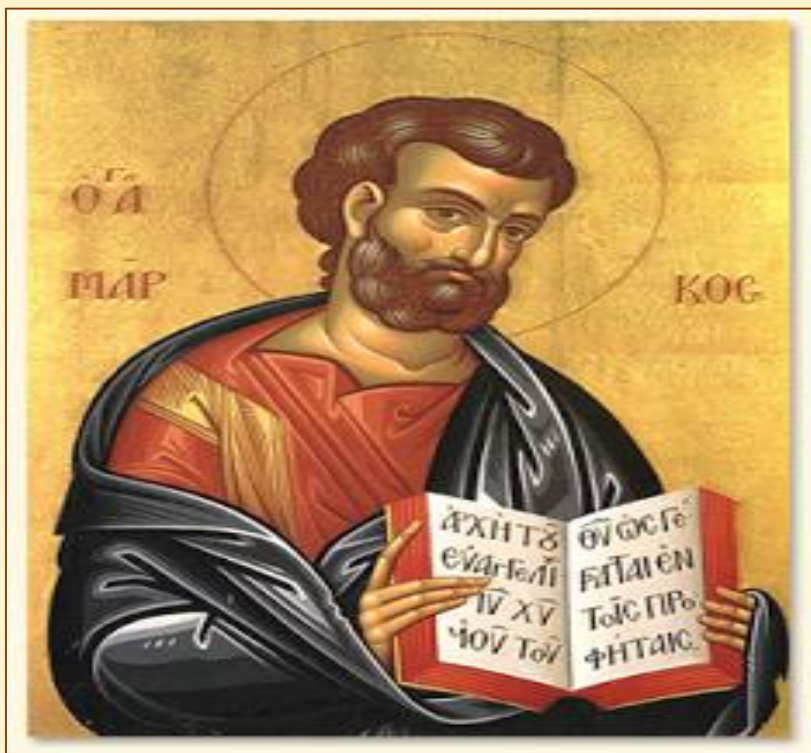
The Gospel of Saint Mark

An Introduction to this sacred text



*Keep the Word of God and the Word of God
shall keep you*

Why Did St. Mark Write His Gospel?



The Gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four records of Jesus' life. On the first page, Mark jumps into the action, with John the Baptist's preaching and the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Then, moving swiftly through Jesus' baptism, temptation in the desert, and call of the disciples. He is interested in Christ's works, not just his words. In fact, Mark records eighteen of Jesus' miracles and only four of his parables.

Mark gives little historical linkage between the events. And to keep things moving and heighten the sense of action, Mark continually uses the phrase "straightway" or "immediately." Readers feel, "Jesus is on the move; we'd better stay alert, or we'll miss something!"

Who is St. Mark?

Mark or John Mark (John is his Jewish name and Mark, Marcus, his Roman name.): cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) and close friend of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Since the second century A.D., the early church fathers unanimously accepted Mark's authorship. Papias (A.D. 110) makes the earliest statement to this effect: "Mark, who was the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he remembered, whether of sayings or doings of Christ, but not in order."



(Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History III, p. 39).

Mark was young, perhaps in his teens, at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. Evidently his mother, Mary, was a well-to-do widow who had come to faith in Christ. Many surmise that Mary's house was the site of the Last Supper (14:12-26) and the home where the disciples gathered at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4); some believe that Mark was the young man who ran away naked when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:51-52), although equally scholars consider St John to have been the candidate.

Scripture clearly states that fourteen years after the tumultuous events leading to the Crucifixion, in about A.D. 44, the church gathered at Mary's house to pray. King Herod had begun to persecute believers; he had executed James, the brother of John, and was holding Peter in prison. The church was praying for Peter's release. Luke explains that after Peter had been miraculously released from prison, "he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark" (Acts 12:12). Mark was deeply involved in the drama of the Jerusalem church and was well-known to Peter and the other disciples.

Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. Perhaps that is what motivated Barnabas and Paul to take Mark with them back to Antioch from Jerusalem (Acts 12:25). Soon thereafter, Barnabas and Paul were commissioned by the church in Antioch to begin their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3), and they included Mark as their helper (Acts 13:5). Early in

the trip, however, at Perga, Mark abruptly left and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Luke gives no reason for Mark's departure (perhaps he was homesick, fearful, or ill). Later, however, when Paul and Barnabas began to plan the second journey, Mark became the cause of a sharp disagreement between the two men. Barnabas wanted to include Mark again, but Paul was strongly opposed because Mark had "deserted" them on the previous trip. So Barnabas and Paul parted company. Barnabas sailed to Cyprus with Mark, while Paul chose Silas and travelled to Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-41). Evidently, Mark and Paul reconciled completely because later he joined Paul in Rome, during Paul's first imprisonment (A.D. 60–62) and was a comfort to him there (Colossians 4:10-11; Philemon 24). During Paul's second imprisonment and just before his death, he asked Timothy to bring Mark to Rome, "because he is helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11 NIV). Mark must have matured emotionally and spiritually through the years and under the mentoring of cousin Barnabas. Mark also enjoyed a very close relationship with Peter. In fact, Peter may have led Mark to Christ because he calls Mark "my son" (1 Peter 5:13). After Paul's release from prison in A.D. 62, Mark may have stayed in Rome (also called "Babylon"—1 Peter 5:13) to work closely with Peter. Mark probably left Rome in about A.D. 65 or 66, during Nero's intense persecution. Both Paul and Peter were executed by Nero in about A.D. 67 or 68. According to tradition, Mark died soon after.

Importance for Today: John Mark provides a sterling example of how a young Christian can grow and mature. Perhaps basking in the attention of the spiritual giants Paul and Barnabas. Do you know any “Marks”—young, Christian diamonds in the rough? What can you do to be their “Barnabas”?



When Did he Write His Gospel?

Scholars consider Mark to be the first Gospel written and used as a source by Matthew and Luke. So, Mark's gospel had to have been written in approximately A.D. 55–60, prior to A.D. 60–65, the proposed time period for Matthew and Luke. It was written in Rome before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. which had been predicted by Jesus (13:1-23). (Jerusalem was destroyed by Roman armies under the leadership of Titus, after a siege of 143 days. During this battle, 600,000 Jews were killed and thousands more taken captive.)



The Prosecuted Church At Rome

Reading between the lines of the Letter to the Romans, the church in Rome seems to have been strong, unified in worship and outreach, with no factions or divisions such as those that were plaguing other churches. Certainly the Roman church was strengthened even further through the ministry of Paul as he boldly taught for two years during his first imprisonment (Acts 28:16-31). Nero, the fifth Roman emperor, began to reign in A.D. 54 at sixteen years of age. The first few years of his reign were peaceful. During that time, Paul had appealed to Caesar at his trial in Caesarea (Acts 25:10-11) and thus had been taken to Rome to make his appeal (A.D. 60). Even as a prisoner, Paul was allowed to debate with Jewish leaders (Acts 28:17-28) and to preach and teach about Christ to all who came to see him (Acts 28:30-31). Evidently, after these two years, Paul was released. Soon, however, the tolerance for Christians would take a terrible turn.

After marrying Poppaea in A.D. 62, Nero became brutal and ruthless, killing his own mother, his chief advisers Seneca and Burrus, and many of the nobility in order to seize their fortunes and solidify his power. Eventually, Nero's thirst for publicity in the arts and sports pushed

him into excessive acts of decadence, including chariot races, combat between gladiators, and the gory spectacle of prisoners thrown to wild beasts. In A.D. 64, fire destroyed a large part of Rome. Nero probably ordered the fire himself to make room for a new palace, but he deflected blame by accusing the Christians. Thus began the terrible persecution of the church, with torture, executions, and Coliseum entertainment. Some followers of Christ were covered in animal skins and torn to pieces by dogs. Others were fastened to crosses and set on fire, serving as torches at night for the city.

During this reign of terror for Christians, Paul was taken prisoner again, apparently at Nicopolis, where he had intended to spend the winter (Titus 3:12). Transported to Rome, Paul was



imprisoned in the Mamertine dungeon, in the centre of Rome near the forum. There Paul wrote his final words. We know that Mark was not in Rome at this time because in 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark with him. If Timothy obliged, then Mark may have been in Rome when both Paul and Peter were martyred. According to tradition, soon after writing 2 Timothy, Paul

was executed by beheading on the Ostian Way outside Rome, shortly before Nero's own death, by suicide, in A.D. 68. Peter also was martyred at this time.

***Importance for Today.** What would cause Mark to return to Rome where Christians were hunted and killed like animals? What would strengthen Mark to courageously face his own death at the hands of the Romans? What would motivate Mark to write the story of Jesus? He knew the Truth, and the Truth had set him free (John 8:32). What keeps you from obeying God and living for Christ?*

Who Did He Write To?



It is fairly certain that Mark directed his Gospel to Persecuted Christians in Rome. One reason for this conclusion is that he took time to explain Jewish terms for his readers; for example, “He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha koum!’ (which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’)” (5:41). Mark also explained Jewish customs: For example, he wrote parenthetically that “the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders...” (7:3-4). (See also 3:17; 7:11, 34; 14:12; 15:22, 34, 42.) He also used several Latin words (5:9; 12:15, 42; 15:16, 39.) He referred to the Old Testament less than the other Gospel writers; he did not use the word “law,” which was mentioned often by Matthew, Luke, and John; he used the Roman way of telling time (6:48; 13:35). All of this evidence points to a Roman audience.

So who were these Roman Christians to whom Mark directed his Gospel? At first the church at Rome was Jewish. But over the years, many Christians from all parts of the Roman Empire had migrated to Rome, some of them Paul's converts and many of them Gentiles. In addition, many citizens of Rome had come to faith in Christ through the ministry of other believers and Paul while he was in prison. Eventually the church had a majority of Gentiles, with an influential Jewish minority.

***Importance for Today.** In many ways, Roman culture resembles ours today. Certainly we live in an almost pagan society, filled with a wide variety of gods, both secular and religious, with true followers of Christ a distinct minority. In addition, ours is a Gentile church, with believers from all races, nationalities, and walks of life. So Mark's Gospel translates easily to us today and provides a clear picture of Jesus.*

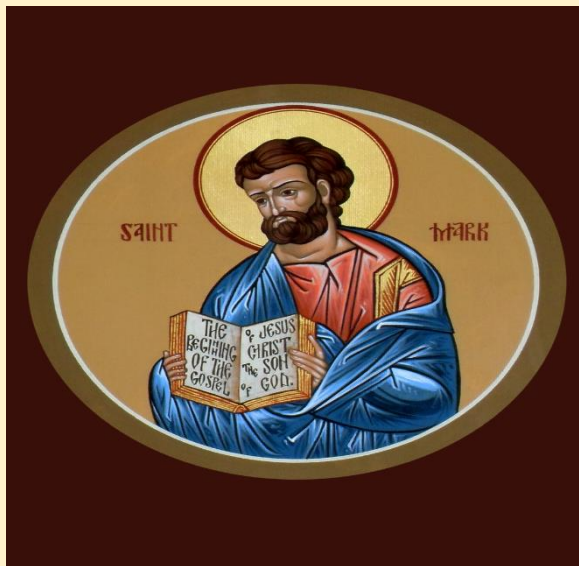


Why Did He Write His Gospel?

To present a clear picture of Christ to Roman believers who were experiencing increased persecution. Mark rushes to reach Jerusalem and tell his audience the dispensations of Jesus' sufferings.

1. So, Mark explained to them that like Jesus, they should submit their will to the Father who will eventually glorify their sufferings.

2. Jesus did not reveal that he is the Messiah until he reached Jerusalem. So, Christians at Rome can only know Jesus through his/their suffering. Jesus is the Suffering Servant, the model they should follow.



What Messages Did He Want To Convey?

JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD

Jesus demonstrated this truth by forgiving sins (see 2:5-12), controlling the forces of nature (see 4:35-41), and overcoming disease, demons, and death (see 5:1-43). In addition, Mark affirmed the divinity of Jesus by reporting the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (1:11), the Transfiguration (9:2-10), and the Resurrection (16:1-8). Truly Jesus was and is the Son of God.

Importance for Today. The truth that Jesus, the man, is also God means that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins and to change lives. Do you know him as Saviour? Do you follow him as Lord?

JESUS CHRIST, SERVANT

Jesus did not come as the conquering king that the people expected, but as a servant. Eventually Jesus would reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, but first he would reveal himself as the suffering Servant. Jesus served by telling people about God, healing them, and giving his life as the atoning sacrifice for their sins. Jesus suffered by being born into a poor family and by being tempted, questioned, rejected, falsely accused and convicted, beaten, hit, spat upon, tortured, mocked, and crucified.

Importance for Today. Real greatness in Christ's kingdom is shown by service and sacrifice. Instead of being motivated by ambition or love of power or position, we should do God's work because we love him and his creation. What does it mean for you to be a servant? To whom in your home, neighbourhood, school, place of employment, or church can you give a "cup of water" in his name (9:41)?

DISCIPLESHIP

Through the eyes of one of Jesus' closest followers, Peter, Mark described the disciples' difficulty in understanding Jesus' true identity. They didn't understand Jesus' parables (see 4:13, 34; 7:18), his miracles (see 4:35-41; 6:45-52), his teaching on divorce (10:10-12), and his predictions of his approaching death and resurrection (8:32-33; 9:9-13, 32). In fact, in this Gospel they never did fully grasp who Jesus really was (see Peter's response to Jesus in 8:31-32) and why he had come to earth. Yet he continued to teach the disciples about the cost of following him (8:34-38), about humility and kingdom living (9:33-10:31), and about the importance of serving others (10:35-45).



Importance for Today. Do we realize the cost of being his disciple? Following Jesus means dying to self, obeying him, and serving others (8:34-35). What kind of disciple are you?

MIRACLES

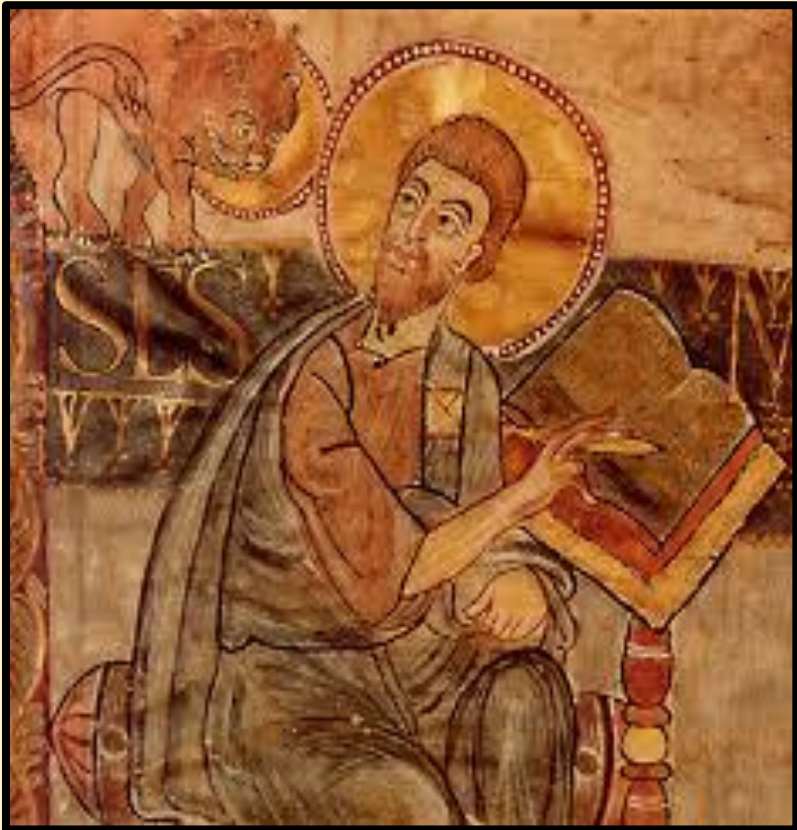
Mark records more of Jesus' miracles than sermons; in fact, every chapter until his final ministry in Jerusalem (chapter 11) and subsequent capture, trial, and execution contains at least one miracle. Mark's Roman readers could clearly see that Jesus was a man of power and action, not just words. Jesus performed miracles out of his compassion for people who were suffering (see 1:41-42), to convince the people who he was (see 2:1-12, 8:14-21).

Importance for Today. Nothing is too big or too difficult for Christ to handle. We can give him all our needs and tell him all our problems. Are you struggling with doubts and fears? Trust Jesus. Are you hurting or suffering? Tell Jesus. But know this: you must love Jesus for who he is for you not for his miracles. Love the giver more than the gift

EVANGELISM

Jesus directed his public ministry to the Jews first (1:21-28, 38-39), but he also went healing and preaching to the non-Jewish world. Syrians (7:24-30) and other Gentiles (5:1-20; 7:31-37) were given the Good News. Jesus challenged his followers to take his message into all the world (6:7-13), preaching the gospel of salvation.

Importance for Today. Jesus crossed national, racial, social, and economic barriers to spread the gospel. We must reach beyond our own people and needs to fulfil Christ's worldwide vision that people everywhere might hear this great message and be forgiven of their sins and receive eternal life.



Other Books You May Want to Read

Rowan Williams (2014) [Meeting God in Mark](#)



Peter John Cameron (2012) [Praying with Saint Mark's Gospel](#)

Francis J. Moloney (2012) [The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary](#)

William Barclay (2011) [New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark](#)

Marcus J Borg (2011) [Meeting Jesus in Mark: Conversations with Scripture](#)

Christoph Cardinal Schonborn (2007) [Behold, God's Son!: Encountering Christ in the Gospel of Mark](#)

Christopher Bryan (1 Jan 1997) [A Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel in Its Literary and Cultural Settings](#)



© Source for this booklet Syriac bible. (F Abdulahad)

