

Mark

Mark, the shortest and simplest of the four Gospels, gives us a crisp and fast-moving account of the life of Christ. Mark lets the narrative speak for itself as he tells the story of the Servant who is constantly on the move preaching, healing, teaching, and finally dying for sinful men. A ministry that begins with the masses soon narrows to the 12 disciples, and finally culminates on the cross. The Servant who “came not to be served but to serve” makes the supreme sacrifice of servanthood by “giving his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). This pattern of selfless service becomes the model for those who follow in the Servant’s steps.

INTRODUCTION

The message of Mark’s gospel is captured in a single verse: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (10:45). Chapter by chapter the book unfolds the dual focus of Christ’ life: service and sacrifice.

Mark portrays Jesus as a servant on the move, instantly responsive to the will of the Father. Through preaching, teaching, and healing He ministers to the needs of others even to the point of death. After the resurrection, He commissions His followers to continue His work in His power - servants following in the steps of the Perfect Servant. Mark traces the steady building of hostility and opposition to Jesus as He moves toward the fulfillment of his earthly mission with determination.

Almost 40% of this gospel is devoted to a detailed account of the last eight days of Jesus’ life, climaxing in His resurrection. The Lord is vividly portrayed in this book in 2 parts: “to serve” (chapters 1 -10) and “to sacrifice” (chapters 11 - 16).

AUTHOR

John Mark. The author is best known by his Latin name *Marcus*, but in Jewish circles he was called by his Hebrew name *John*. Acts 12:12, 12:25, and 15:37 refer to him as “John, whose other name was Mark.”

According to Acts 12:12, Mark’s mother Mary had a large house that was used as a meeting place for believers in Jerusalem. Peter apparently went to this house often (Acts 12:13-16) and is most likely the person who led him to Christ (Peter called him “Mark, my son” 1 Peter 5:13). In view of the fact that Simon Peter brought Mark to a saving knowledge of Christ, it is natural to suppose that he had great influence in Mark’s life. It was this close association with Peter that gave apostolic authority to Mark’s gospel.

DATE & SETTING

Many scholars believe that Mark was the first of the four Gospels, but there is uncertainty over its date. Because of the prophecy about the destruction of the temple (13:2), it should be dated before A.D. 70, but early traditions disagree as to whether it was written before or after the martyrdom of Peter (~A.D. 64). The probable range for this book is A.D. 55 - 63.

Mark appears to be written to a Roman audience and early tradition indicates that it was most likely written from Rome. This may be why Mark omitted a number of items that would not have been meaningful to a Gentile audience, such as the genealogy of Christ, fulfilled prophecy, references to the Law, and certain Jewish customs that are found in other gospels.