Mark

Mark
MSB41

Title

Mark, for whom this gospel is named, was a close companion of the Apostle Peter and a recurring character in the book of Acts, where he is known as “John whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 39). It was to John Mark’s mother’s home in Jerusalem that Peter went when released from prison (Acts 12:12).

John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5). But he deserted them along the way in Perga and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). When Barnabas wanted Paul to take John Mark on the second missionary journey, Paul refused. The friction which resulted between Paul and Barnabas led to their separation (Acts 15:38–40).

But John Mark’s earlier vacillation evidently gave way to great strength and maturity, and in time he proved himself even to the Apostle Paul. When Paul wrote the Colossians, he instructed them that if John Mark came, they were to welcome him (Col. 4:10). Paul even listed Mark as a fellow worker (Philem. 24). Later, Paul told Timothy to “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

John Mark’s restoration to useful ministry may have been, in part, due to the ministry of Peter. Peter’s close relationship with Mark is evident from his description of him as “Mark my son” (1 Pet. 5:13). Peter, of course, was no stranger to failure himself, and his influence on the younger man was no doubt instrumental in helping him out of the instability of his youth and into the strength and maturity he would need for the work to which God had called him.

Author and Date

Unlike the epistles, the gospels do not name their authors. The early church fathers, however, unanimously affirm that Mark wrote this second gospel. Papias, bishop of Hieropolis, writing about A.D. 140, noted:

And the presbyter [the Apostle John] said this: Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord’s sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care,

not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements. [*From the Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord* (6)]

Justin Martyr, writing about A.D. 150, referred to the Gospel of Mark as “the memoirs of Peter,” and suggested that Mark committed his gospel to writing while in Italy. This agrees with the uniform voice of early tradition, which regarded this gospel as having been written in Rome, for the benefit of Roman Christians. Irenaeus, writing about A.D. 185, called Mark “the disciple and interpreter of Peter,” and recorded that the second gospel consisted of what Peter preached about Christ. The testimony of the church fathers differs as to whether this gospel was written before or after Peter’s death (ca. A.D. 67–68).

Evangelical scholars have suggested dates for the writing of Mark’s gospel ranging from A.D. 50 to 70. A date before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70 is required by the comment of Jesus in 13:2. Luke’s gospel was clearly written before Acts (Acts 1:1–3). The date of the writing of Acts can probably be fixed at about A.D. 63, because that is shortly after the narrative ends (see Introduction to Acts: Author and Date). It is therefore likely, though not certain, that Mark was written at an early date, probably sometime in the 50s.

Background and Setting

Whereas Matthew was written to a Jewish audience, Mark seems to have targeted Roman believers, particularly Gentiles. When employing Aramaic terms, Mark translated them for his readers (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34). On the other hand, in some places he used Latin expressions instead of their Greek equivalents (5:9; 6:27; 12:15, 42; 15:16, 39). He also reckoned time according to the Roman system (6:48; 13:35) and carefully explained Jewish customs (7:3, 4; 14:12; 15:42). Mark omitted Jewish elements, such as the genealogies found in Matthew and Luke. This gospel also makes fewer references to the OT, and includes less material that would be of particular interest to Jewish readers—such as that which is critical of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Sadducees are mentioned only once, in 12:18). When mentioning Simon the Cyrene (15:21), Mark identifies him as the father of Rufus, a prominent member of the church at Rome (Rom. 16:13). All of this supports the traditional view that Mark was written for a Gentile audience initially at Rome.

Historical and Theological Themes

Mark presents Jesus as the suffering Servant of the Lord (10:45). His focus is on the deeds of Jesus more than His teaching, particularly emphasizing service and sacrifice. Mark omits the lengthy discourses found in the other gospels, often relating only brief excerpts to give the gist of Jesus’ teaching. Mark also omits any account of Jesus’ ancestry and birth, beginning where Jesus’ public ministry began, with His baptism by John in the wilderness.

Mark demonstrated the humanity of Christ more clearly than any of the other evangelists, emphasizing Christ’s human emotions (1:41; 3:5; 6:34; 8:12; 9:36;), His human limitations (4:38; 11:12; 13:32), and other small details that highlight the human side of the Son of God (e.g., 7:33, 34; 8:12; 9:36; 10:13–16).

Interpretive Challenges

Three significant questions confront the interpreter of Mark: 1) What is the relationship of Mark to Luke and Matthew? (*see below, "The Synoptic Problem"*); 2) How should one interpret the eschatological passages? and 3) Were the last 12 verses of chap. 16 originally part of Mark's gospel?

The Synoptic Problem

Even a cursory reading of Matthew, Mark, and Luke reveals both striking similarities (cf. 2:3–12; Matt. 9:2–8; Luke 5:18–26) and significant differences, as each views the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus. The question of how to explain those similarities and differences is known as the "Synoptic Problem" (*syn* means "together"; *optic* means "seeing").

The modern solution—even among evangelicals—has been to assume that some form of literary dependence exists between the synoptic gospels. The most commonly accepted theory to explain such an alleged literary dependence is known as the "Two-Source" theory. According to that hypothesis, Mark was the first gospel written, and Matthew and Luke then used Mark as a source in writing their gospels. Proponents of this view imagine a nonexistent, second source, labeled *Q* (from the German word *Quelle*, "source"), and argue that this allegedly is the source of the material in Matthew and Luke that does not appear in Mark. They advance several lines of evidence to support their scenario.

First, most of Mark is paralleled in Matthew and Luke. Since it is much shorter than Matthew and Luke, the latter must be expansions of Mark. Second, the 3 gospels follow the same general chronological outline, but when either Matthew or Luke departs from Mark's chronology, the other agrees with Mark. Put another way, Matthew and Luke do not both depart from Mark's chronology in the same places. That, it is argued, shows that Matthew and Luke used Mark for their historical framework. Third, in passages common to all 3 gospels, Matthew's and Luke's wording seldom agrees when it differs from Mark's. Proponents of the "Two-Source" theory see that as confirmation that Matthew and Luke used Mark's gospel as a source.

But those arguments do not prove that Matthew and Luke used Mark's gospel as a source. In fact, the weight of evidence is strongly against such a theory:

1) The nearly unanimous testimony of the church until the nineteenth century was that Matthew was the first gospel written. Such an impressive body of evidence cannot be ignored.

2) Why would Matthew, an apostle and eyewitness to the events of Christ's life, depend on Mark (who was not an eyewitness)—even for the account of his own conversion?

3) A significant statistical analysis of the synoptic gospels has revealed that the parallels between them are far less extensive and the differences more significant than is commonly acknowledged. The differences, in particular, argue against literary dependence between the gospel writers.

4) Since the gospels record actual historical events, it would be surprising if they did not follow the same general historical sequence. For example, the fact that 3 books on American history all had the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War in the same chronological order would not prove that the authors had read each others' books. General

agreement in content does not prove literary dependency.

5) The passages in which Matthew and Luke agree against Mark (see argument 3 in favor of the "Two-Source" theory) amount to about one-sixth of Matthew and one-sixth of Luke. If they used Mark's gospel as a source, there is no satisfactory explanation for why Matthew and Luke would so often both change Mark's wording in the same way.

6) The "Two-Source" theory cannot account for the important section in Mark's gospel (6:45–8:26) which Luke omits. That omission suggests Luke had not seen Mark's gospel when he wrote.

7) There is no historical or manuscript evidence that the *Q* document ever existed; it is purely a fabrication of modern skepticism and a way to possibly deny the verbal inspiration of the gospels.

8) Any theory of literary dependence between the gospel writers overlooks the significance of their personal contacts with each other. Mark and Luke were both companions of Paul (cf. Philem. 24); the early church (including Matthew) met for a time in the home of Mark's mother (Acts 12:12); and Luke could easily have met Matthew during Paul's two-year imprisonment at Caesarea. Such contacts make theories of mutual literary dependence unnecessary.

The simplest solution to the Synoptic Problem is that no such problem exists! Because critics cannot prove literary dependence between the gospel writers, there is no need to explain it. The traditional view that the gospel writers were inspired by God and wrote independently of each other—except that all 3 were moved by the same Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20)—remains the only plausible view.

As the reader compares the various viewpoints in the gospels, it becomes clear how well they harmonize and lead to a more complete picture of the whole event or message. The accounts are not contradictory, but complementary, revealing a fuller understanding when brought together. Apparent difficulties are dealt with in the notes of each gospel.

Outline

I. Prologue: In the Wilderness (1:1–13)

A. John's Message (1:1–8)

B. Jesus' Baptism (1:9–11)

C. Jesus' Temptation (1:12, 13)

II. Beginning His Ministry: In Galilee and the Surrounding Regions (1:14–7:23)

A. He Announces His Message (1:14, 15)

B. He Calls His Disciples (1:16–20)

C. He Ministers in Capernaum (1:21–34)

D. He Reaches Out to Galilee (1:35–45)

E. He Defends His Ministry (2:1–3:6)

F. He Ministers to Multitudes (3:7–12)

G. He Commissions the Twelve (3:13–19)

H. He Rebukes the Scribes and Pharisees (3:20–30)

I. He Identifies His Spiritual Family (3:31–35)

J. He Preaches in Parables (4:1–34)

1. The sower (4:1–9)
2. The reason for parables (4:10–12)
3. The parable of the sower explained (4:13–20)
4. The lamp (4:21–25)
5. The seed (4:26–29)
6. The mustard seed (4:30–34)

K. He Demonstrates His Power (4:35–5:43)

1. Calming the waves (4:35–41)
2. Casting out demons (5:1–20)
3. Healing the sick (5:21–34)
4. Raising the dead (5:35–43)

L. He Returns to His Hometown (6:1–6)

M. He Sends out His Disciples (6:7–13)

N. He Gains a Powerful Enemy (6:14–29)

O. He Regroups with the Disciples (6:30–32)

P. He Feeds the Five Thousand (6:33–44)

Q. He Walks on Water (6:45–52)

R. He Heals Many People (6:53–56)

S. He Answers the Pharisees (7:1–23)

III. Broadening His Ministry: In Various Gentile Regions (7:24–9:50)

A. Tyre and Sidon: He Delivers a Gentile Woman's Daughter (7:24–30)

B. Decapolis: He Heals a Deaf-Mute (7:31–37)

C. The Eastern Shore of Galilee: He Feeds the Four Thousand (8:1–9)

D. Dalmanutha: He Disputes with the Pharisees (8:10–12)

E. The Other Side of the Lake: He Rebukes the Disciples (8:13–21)

F. Bethsaida: He Heals a Blind Man (8:22–26)

G. Caesarea Philippi and Capernaum: He Instructs the Disciples (8:27–9:50)

1. Peter confesses Jesus as Christ (8:27–30)
2. He predicts His death (8:31–33)
3. He explains the cost of discipleship (8:34–38)
4. He reveals His glory (9:1–10)
5. He clarifies Elijah's role (9:11–13)
6. He casts out a stubborn spirit (9:14–29)
7. He again predicts His death and resurrection (9:30–32)
8. He defines kingdom greatness (9:33–37)
9. He identifies true spiritual fruit (9:38–41)
10. He warns would-be stumbling blocks (9:42–50)

IV. Concluding His Ministry: The Road to Jerusalem (10:1–52)

A. He Teaches on Divorce (10:1–12)

B. He Blesses the Children (10:13–16)

C. He Confronts the Rich Young Ruler (10:17–27)

D. He Confirms the Disciples' Rewards (10:28–31)

E. He Prepares the Disciples for His Death (10:32–34)

F. He Challenges the Disciples to Humble Service (10:35–45)

G. He Heals a Blind Man (10:46–52)

V. Consummating His Ministry: Jerusalem (11:1–16:20)

A. Triumphal Entry (11:1–11)

B. Purification (11:12–19)

1. Cursing the fig tree (11:12–14)
2. Cleansing the temple (11:15–19)

C. Teaching in Public and in Private (11:20–13:37)

1. Publicly: in the temple (11:20–12:44)

a. Prelude: the lesson of the cursed fig tree (11:20–26)
b. Concerning His authority (11:27–33)
c. Concerning His rejection (12:1–12)

d. Concerning paying taxes (12:13–17)
e. Concerning the resurrection (12:18–27)
f. Concerning the greatest commandment (12:28–34)
g. Concerning the Messiah's true sonship (12:35–37)
h. Concerning the scribes (12:38–40)
i. Concerning true giving (12:41–44)
2. Privately: on the Mount of Olives (13:1–37)
a. The disciples' question about the end times (13:1)
b. The Lord's answer (13:2–37)
D. Arrangements for Betrayal (14:1,2,10,11)

E. Anointing, the Last Supper, Betrayal, Arrest, Trial [Jewish Phase] (14:3–9; 12–72)

1. The anointing: Bethany (14:3–9)
2. The Last Supper: Jerusalem (14:12–31)
3. The prayer: Gethsemane (14:32–42)
4. The betrayal: Gethsemane (14:43–52)
5. The Jewish trial: Caiaphas' house (14:53–72)
F. Trial (Roman Phase), Crucifixion (15:1–41)

1. The Roman trial: Pilate's Praetorium (15:1–15)
2. The crucifixion: Golgotha (15:16–41)
G. Burial in Joseph of Arimathea's Tomb (15:42–47)

H. Resurrection (16:1–8)

I. Postscript (16:9–20)

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