

Author

- 1) Though the gospel itself does not claim a writer, from earliest records of the church fathers, Mark (also called John Mark) is said to be the writer.
- 2) Papias, writing somewhere between 90 to 140 AD, clearly states that Mark is the author.
- 3) Numerous other early church writers backup this claim that Mark was the writer, including Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Jerome.
- 4) From this, it is obvious that the early church unanimously believed this also
- 5) No alternative authors have been proposed.
- 6) Mark was not an apostle and as such was not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry.
- 7) An important point to be made here is that many of these writers add that John Mark wrote the gospel using the eyewitness accounts of Peter.
- 8) Papias wrote: "Mark became the interpreter of Peter."
 - a) It's unclear if he means that Mark interpreted Greek for Peter because he preached in Aramaic, or if he means that Mark put Peter's oral teachings into written form.
 - b) Either way, if indeed Mark was this involved with Peter's preaching and teaching, he obviously would have brought that experience into his gospel account.

Some Facts About Mark

- 9) As mentioned a moment ago, he wasn't an apostle, and he wasn't an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus, ***so who was he?***
- 10) Mark is actually first mentioned in passing in Acts when Peter is miraculously freed from prison.
- 11) This is the incident where Peter is sleeping between two guards.
 - a) An angel appears to him, has him put on his cloak, then leads him out of the prison.
 - b) Peter thinks he is having a vision but finally we read in Acts 12

Acts 12:12-15 (NIV)

- 12) Though this is the first actual scriptural by name mention of Mark, some scholars believe that he was the young man who ran away without his cloths in the garden at Jesus' arrest.
 - a) The reasons for this assumption are twofold –
 - i) First, this particular fact is only found in the gospel of Mark.
 - ii) Second, looking at context, the incident comes totally as a surprise and almost as a aside to the happenings of the moment.
 - b) I found one commentator's interesting scenario that at least seems plausible – again, no real basis in fact for these assumptions – just interesting:

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John Mark's mother lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12), and so it is possible that Mark was wakened by the noise of the soldiers leaving the city during the night of Passover to arrest Jesus. After all, the man was described as wearing only a linen sheet—the typical sleeping garments of this time period. The scenario would go something like this—Mark left his mother's home and followed the soldiers to the Garden. Once he was grabbed, Mark ran away naked, leaving his linen sheet in the hands of soldiers. It seems that Mark recorded the account in his gospel, perhaps as a form of confession for having abandoned the Lord in this way.

13) Next scripturally, we hear of Mark working with Barnabas and the apostle Paul. In Acts ...

Acts 13:1-5 (NIV)

14) The John mentioned here is of course, John Mark.

15) The journey continued and then in 13:13, the wheels sort of fall off for him ...

Acts 13:13 (NIV)

16) Obviously, no reason is given here or elsewhere for Mark's departure and return to Jerusalem.

17) The next we hear of Mark is in chapter 15 as he becomes a source of dispute between Paul and Barnabas ...

Acts 15:36-16:1 (NIV)

18) Whatever the reason for Mark's leaving, we can infer from this exchange that Paul, at least, did not think it was a legitimate or excusable reason.

19) The word used here might lead one to think Mark's reason was related to the work itself – possibly one of lost interest.

20) One can also assume from this situation that Paul's opinion of Mark is not very high at this point.

21) We do not hear of Mark again in the book of Acts.

22) Looking at that situation being exposed if one would predict the final outcome of Mark's life, it would not be that he would become a writer of one of the four Gospels.

a) Nor would he become a valued worker alongside two of the giants of the apostolic community.

23) First, we find that Mark becomes a companion and worker with Peter.

a) As mentioned earlier, Papias writes that Mark was an interpreter of Peter.

b) In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter himself calls Mark "my son".

1 Peter 5:13 (NIV)

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- 24) Based on Papias' comment, we can infer with great certainty, that the Mark who Peter refers to here is that same Mark that later writes the Gospel.
- 25) We also find that despite the initial problems with Paul and Paul's low opinion of Mark, he obviously becomes a worker with him as well.
- 26) Paul mentions Mark favorably in 3 different epistles

Philem 23-25 (NIV)

Col 4:10-11 (NIV)

2 Tim 4:9-11 (NIV)

Date of Writing

- 1) O.k. then – when was this gospel written?
- 2) This opens onto another of those current day “scholarly debates”.
- 3) There are actually two aspects of this question that are part of this ongoing debate and should be considered.
 - a) First is the order that the Gospels were written which opens the scholarly question of sources of information used in the Gospels.
 - b) Second is the actual date and how it relates to the content of Mark's writing.

4) The Church Father's View

- a) The tradition handed down by the Church Fathers regarded Matthew as the first Gospel written in Hebrew.
- b) It later became a source used by Mark and Luke.
 - i) Augustine of Hippo wrote in the 5th century:

"Now, those four evangelists whose names have gained the most remarkable circulation over the whole world, and whose number has been fixed as four, ...are believed to have written in the order which follows: first Matthew, then Mark, thirdly Luke, lastly John." And: "Of these four, it is true, only Matthew is reckoned to have written in the Hebrew language; the others in Greek. And however they may appear to have kept each of them a certain order of narration proper to himself, this certainly is not to be taken as if each individual writer chose to write in ignorance of what his predecessor had done..."

- c) The tradition can be traced back at least as far as Irenaeus (c. 120-202 A.D.) who wrote:

"Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple, and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the

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companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia."

Against Heresies, Book 3, Chapter 1

The Synoptic Problem

- 5) In preparing for this introduction, I ran into a large volume of information referring to what is called the "Synoptic Problem"
- 6) So, what is the "synoptic problem"?
 - a) When the first three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are compared, it is unmistakable that the accounts are very similar to one another in content and expression.
 - b) As a result, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the "Synoptic Gospels."
 - c) The word synoptic basically means "**to see together with a common view.**"
 - d) The similarities among the Synoptic Gospels have led many scholars thru the years to wonder if the Gospel authors had a common source
 - i)Another written account of Christ's birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection from which they obtained the material for their Gospels.
 - ii) Or was the first Gospel written the source for the other two.
 - e) The question of how to explain the similarities and differences among the Synoptic Gospels is called the **Synoptic Problem**.
- 7) Let's look at the past and present "Scholarly" view of the solution to the "Synoptic Problem"
 - a) Remember, the church father's view was that Matthew was written first.
 - b) This view of the Gospel origins began to be challenged in the late 18th century.
 - c) Gottlob Christian Storr proposed in 1786 that Mark was the first to be written.
 - i) This is termed the Marcan Priority
 - d) There were at least 4 others who worked on and helped advance the hypothesis of Marcan Priority throughout the 19th century
 - i) were Karl Lachmann, Christian Wilke, Christian Weisse, and Heinrich Holtzmann.
 - e) Most scholars in the twentieth century regarded Marcan priority as no longer just a hypothesis, but an established fact.
 - f) However, challenges from B. C. Butler and William R. Farmer have proven influential returning many scholars to the exploration of Augustine's original statement that Matthew's Gospel was actually written first.
- 8) Other hypothesizes arose involving other sources that were proposed to have been used by the gospel authors to account for the similarities and word for word likenesses.
 - a) Q-source, L-source, and M-source.

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- b) These hypothetical writings that have never been found to exist but are supposed to account for these gospel likenesses and the “Synoptic Problem”.
- 9) Personally, I do **not** believe there is truly a “Synoptic Problem”.
- 10) The explanation as to why the Synoptic Gospels are so similar is first and foremost that they are all inspired by the same Holy Spirit.
- 11) The similarities and, for that matter the differences, are **only** a problem if you take the Holy Spirit out of the equation and in my opinion “over think” the questions.
- 12) The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew the apostle, one of the twelve who followed Jesus and were commissioned by Him.
- 13) The Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, a close associate of the apostle Peter, another one of the twelve.
- 14) The Gospel of Luke was written by Luke, a close associate of the apostle Paul.
- 15) Why would we not expect their accounts to be very similar to one another?
- 16) Why would we not consider the possibility that they had actually read each other’s accounts?
- 17) Each of the Gospels is ultimately inspired by the Holy Spirit.
 - a) Therefore, we should expect coherence and unity.
 - b) Not to mention the obvious – they are reporting in many cases the same events.
- 18) Of course, as to the differences, in the big picture, we are talking about perspectives of the writers and their target audiences.
- 19) Each was written to a different audience – Matthew to a Jewish audience and Luke Theophilus and possibly other Greek converts.

Target Audience for Mark

- 1) Tradition suggests that Peter and Mark worked together in Rome.
- 2) It is this assumption that leads most to believe that the first audience was the church at Rome.
 - a) These were primarily gentile Christians who would have newly acquired and most likely limited knowledge of Jewish law and the prophesies concerning Christ.
- 3) Even if it is not the church at Rome who were the first recipients, we know with reasonable certainty that the target audience was Gentile.
- 4) The structure and certain characteristics of the Gospel presentation are the basis for this.
 - a) First, there are omissions which, if his audience were primarily Jewish would not have occurred:
 - i) Mark makes no reference to the genealogy of Christ.
 - ii) He referred to the Old Testament less than the other Gospel writers.
 - iii) He did not use the word "law," which was mentioned often by Matthew, Luke, and John.

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- b) In several places, Mark takes time to explain Jewish terms to his readers. e.g. >>>>

Mark 5:41 (NIV)

- c) In several instances, he explains Jewish customs which would be germane to the topic at hand but not obvious to a non-Jewish reader. e.g. >>>>

Mark 7:3-5 (NIV)

- d) In several places, Mark uses Latin words and phrases which do not appear other places in the New Testament.
- i) To a Roman audience, this would be totally understandable – to a Jewish audience, not so much.
- e) He uses the Roman references to time.
- 5) It also seems clear from the characteristics of the presentation that He is writing to Christians.
- a) He uses distinctively Christian terms such as baptize and Holy Spirit without explaining them.
- b) He also assumes his readers were familiar with Jesus' background and with John the Baptist.
- c) He starts with reference to the events surrounding Jesus' baptism without any background explanation at all.

Purpose and Message

- 1) The purpose was to present a clear and concise picture of Christ to his readers.
- 2) We have no real concrete ideas as to what prompted Mark to write the Gospel.
- a) I think without doubt, we can know the Holy Spirit was the prompter.
- b) We also know that this writing took place toward the end of Peter's life perhaps, even after his death.
- c) If the early Church Fathers are correct and Mark was indeed an interpreter for Peter, it may have been that they (Peter and Mark) collectively decided it was time to set down in writing Peter's recollections of his time with the Lord.
- 3) Whatever the reason behind the writing, we can be assured of the purpose:
- a) The Gospel of Mark gives its readers a close and personal look at Jesus, our Savior and Lord.
- b) If the original audience was the church at Rome, it gave them assurance that the faith they were living and for which they were giving their lives was true and reliable.
- c) Jesus, the Son of God, had lived, served (1-13), suffered, and died for them and us (14-15).
- d) Mark wants his readers to see the servant Jesus – the man who gave all for them and others.
- e) The key verse for the entire idea is in chapter 10:

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Mark 10:45 (NIV)

- 4) He had risen from the grave (16:1-8) — their triumphant Savior was alive!
- 5) Today we enjoy the Bible, complete with Old and New Testaments.
- 6) In fact, most of us probably own several copies of the Scriptures.
- 7) And, of course, this leads to an obvious purpose – first-century believers did not have that privilege.
- 8) It could be that the Holy Spirit moved Mark to writing the Gospel for that reason alone which would have been purpose enough.