

The Gospel of Mark

Session 1:
Getting Started

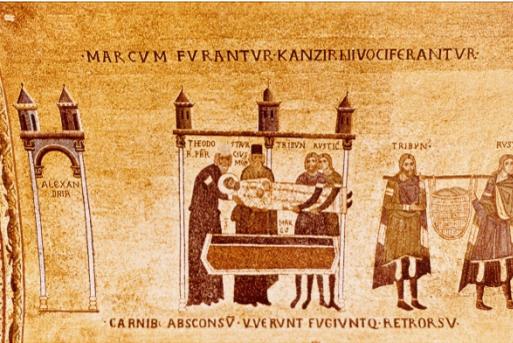
I. What do we know about St Mark?



Left: Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry, Folio 19v - The Martyrdom of Saint Mark the Musée Condé, Chantilly.



Right: St Mark the Evangelist, by Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506).



Left: The translation of the relics of St Mark. Mosaic in Basilica di San Marco, Venezia (11th century).

- It used to be thought that the author had written himself into the text as the naked young man at the betrayal (14.51f), but there is no reason to make this identification.
- According to Papias (early 2nd century): *“The Elder used to say: Mark, in his capacity as Peter’s interpreter, wrote down accurately as many things as he recalled from memory—though not in an ordered form—of the things either said or done by the Lord. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied him, but later, as I said, Peter, who used to give his teachings in the form of useful anecdotes, but had no intention of providing an ordered arrangement of the logia of the Lord. Consequently Mark did nothing wrong when he wrote down some individual items just as he related them from memory. For he made it his one concern not to omit anything he had heard or to falsify anything.”*

Right: St. Mark writes his Gospel at the dictation of St. Peter, by Pasquale Ottino (1578-1630).



2. What did St Mark believe?

There are a number of key 'scenes' in the Gospel, but two pivotal moments are:

1. The 'confession' of Jesus as Son of God at Caesarea Philippi (8.27-33)
2. The revelation of Jesus at the Transfiguration (9.2-13)
3. The recognition of Jesus by the centurion at the crucifixion (15.39)

3. Bible Study

The confession at Caesarea Philippi

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Mark 8.27-33

- a. This seems to be a pivotal moment in the Gospel. What do you think Peter feels in this encounter?
- b. Why does Jesus want to keep his identity secret?

4. What can we say about St Mark?

In fact, we know hardly anything about Mark. What we can say is:

- His Gospel was written first (Augustine suggested that Mark abbreviated Matthew, but source criticism tells us otherwise).
- There are clues which point to events in Mark's lifetime. Note the 'Little Apocalypse' in Ch. 13 which points to events in Mark's lifetime, especially the persecution of Christians in 64, earthquakes in 60 and 63, defeat of Romans by Parthians in 62.
- There is evidence of his unfamiliarity with Palestine, e.g. 5.1; 7.31. Most scholars think that Mark was writing in Rome. Also unfamiliar with Jewish customs, e.g. 7.2-4.

5. Bible Study

The 'Little Apocalypse'

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?' Then Jesus began to say to them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs. 'As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

Mark 13.3-13

- a. This passage may reflect the time when Mark was written. Does it resonate today?
- b. Could we see the whole passage as a metaphor for the struggle of Christianity in the world?