

Introduction To The Gospel According To Mark

The Gospel of Mark is the first Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is the shortest, only sixteen chapters. Though Matthew is given first place in most Bibles, as the favorite Gospel of the ancient church, Mark was the first account written of the life and work of Jesus, barring some undiscovered more ancient account. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke have their foundation in the Gospel of Mark. Ninety percent of the Gospel of Mark is included in Matthew, though Matthew takes significant liberty in revising the stories to fit his approach to the God News.

This first Gospel stands out in a number of ways compared to the others. It presents no background story. In Matthew and Luke, we get a glimpse of the birth of Jesus and his youth. John takes us back to the very beginning of time. In Mark, we first find Jesus as a man in his early thirties about to begin ministry. Twenty-five percent of the Gospel is devoted to the final week of the life of Jesus. There are also no accounts of the activities of Jesus after the resurrection. No appearances. We are told that there was an empty tomb, which was found by Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who then promptly flee. The story ends there. In the Gospel of Mark, the disciples are portrayed as particularly dense. They have little idea of what Jesus is about most of the time. They hear him, but do not understand him. Another noteworthy thing about Mark is the use of term “immediately,” which is found throughout the Gospel. This gives the sense of rushing breathlessly from one event to another.

Though Mark is not as elaborate as the other Gospels, it should not be dismissed. It is a work of theology, and sets out to show God at work, through Jesus Christ. His job: to reconcile the world to God and to give us a path to closeness to the divine.

Like the other Gospels, the author is anonymous. There is nothing found within the Gospel to suggest the identity of the author. This is not so unusual for ancient documents. The name Mark was given to this work in the Second Century CE by Irenaeus of Lyon, a bishop with a love of naming things.

The location of the writing of the first Gospel is not known, but many scholars believe it was written within a Jewish Christian community in Rome, based on textual analysis. Others believe it was written in Galilee in the area around the northern part of the lake or in the Decapolis. Textual analysis also suggests that the book was written between 68-70 CE, likely before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

So, this Gospel of Mark is a straightforward story in many ways. As the writer says in the first line, “This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” Jesus then sets about showing that Good News in words and actions.

Let’s get started.