

Gospel of Mark 1 :- Introduction and Chapter 1, verses 1 – 13

The author:- is accepted by most scholars as John Mark -Acts 12 verses 12 and 25; Acts 15, verses 37 – 39. Mark was the companion of Peter when at Rome – 1 Peter 5, verse 13 and there is a tradition that he was the “*young man who followed (Jesus) wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they sized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked*” - Mark 14, verses 51 – 52.

Date and place of writing:- The majority of scholars have placed it somewhere between A.D. 50 and 80. The best assessment suggests A.D. 65 – 70. If Mark wrote after the death of Peter and Paul (A.D. 67) and before the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) see Mark 13, verse 14 – 18 then it gives us a date between A.D. 67 and 70. The most likely place of writing was Rome after the preaching and teaching there of the Apostle Peter.

Readers and Characteristics:- It is almost certain that this Gospel is written for Roman Christians. There is an assumption of some background knowledge – John the Baptist is introduced without any attempt at identification and his imprisonment is referred to as though the reader is familiar with the fact. The terms *baptism* (chapter 1, verse 4) and *Holy Spirit* (chapter 1, verse 8) are used without any explanation.

Mark's Gospel is written in 'Common' (*Koinē*) Greek. There is a vivid realism and a characteristic urgency typified by the use of the word “*immediately*” which occurs some forty-one times – nine times in chapter 1!

Some background to Chapter 1, the prologue to the ministry of Jesus:- The first eight verses seem to be devoted entirely to John the Baptist. In fact they treat John almost exclusively in his capacity as the ‘forerunner of the Mighty One – or Messiah’. These verses then, say more about the credentials of the Lord Jesus Christ than they do about John himself. They apply the prophecies of the Old Testament to the preaching and teaching of John as the long expected ‘Elijah’ - see Matthew 17, verses 10 – 13. Mark in his ‘prologue’ is doing something similar to what Matthew and Luke were doing in their stories of supernatural birth and infancy and what John was doing in his preliminary teaching, that is demonstrating that Jesus was in fact the eternal Word of God become flesh.

The Title – Chapter 1, verse 1:- Note that the word “*gospel*” here does not refer to the book but the message of the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. The facts of the life and death of Christ make up “*the beginning of the gospel* . . .” the continuation of “*the gospel*” was in the preaching and teaching of the Apostles and early church: see Matthew 28, verse 16 – 20; Acts 1, verse 8; Romans 1, verses 1 – 6 etc. As we have noted; to Mark, no less than to John, the deity of Christ is of prime importance and thus he includes it in the title of his Gospel.

The Preparation for Christ's Ministry - Chapter 1, verses 1 – 8:- Passing over the birth and early years of the life of Jesus Christ, Mark turns at once to the opening events of the Lord's public ministry. As predicted in the Old Testament Jesus was preceded by a herald sent to prepare men for his appearance. John the Baptist came as the last representative of the old order with the express purpose of introducing the key personality of the new.

“*As it is written . . .*” - these words were used as a legal formula to designate an unalterable contract! The words were spoken by the prophets and were now being fulfilled. Verse 2 is a quote from Malachi 3, verse 1. Verse 3 is the quote from Isaiah 40, verse 3.

Verse 5 describes the masses of people going to hear the preaching of John. The description that follows in verse 6 emphasises that his clothing is the same as that of the great prophet Elijah – see 2 Kings chapter 1, verse 8. These two verses would be a good reason for the crowds to flock to hear him. It is worth reading the longer account of his ministry in Luke's Gospel, chapter 3, verses 1 – 20.

The God given task of John the baptizer is found in the Book of the prophet Malachi, chapter 4, verses 5 – 6. The message of John was a call to repentance. A preparation of hearts and minds ready to receive the gospel brought by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The preparation of Christ Himself for Ministry (1) – chapter 1, verses 9 – 11:- Read the longer version of the Baptism of the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 – 17. In coming to John for “*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” the Lord Jesus was identifying himself totally with ordinary sinful human beings! See 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 21 and Hebrews chapter 2, verses 17 – 18. These verses read as though the Lord Jesus was the only one who saw the descent of the Holy Spirit and heard the voice. This was an assurance to the Lord Jesus himself and to the readers of the Gospel according to Mark that Jesus was indeed the anointed Messiah.

The preparation of Christ Himself for Ministry (2) – chapter 1, verses 12 – 13:- These two verses could be entitled “The Battle with the Devil joined”. The phrase “*The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*” is typical Marcan phraseology. The other Gospels talk of the Spirit “leading” Jesus into the wilderness. Mark gives us a more forceful description! It happened straight after the baptism and Jesus was acting under a compulsion from the Spirit. (See Hebrews chapter 5, verses 7 – 10). It is worth reading the account of the Temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ in either Matthew chapter 4, verses 1 – 11 or Luke chapter 4, verses 1 – 13.

The Gospel according to Mark often presumes that its readers already know some of the background stories and he omits the detail given in the other Gospels. We need to remember that it was most likely written for those who were already Christians or were seeking to make a commitment. The gaps, as we have seen, can readily be filled by a cross reference to the other Gospels.