

Week 1: Introduction to the Group & the Gospel of Mark

INTRODUCTION

This first week of Bible study will look a little different than the following weeks as we want to get a broad overview of the book of Mark, helping us to put into context where this gospel account fits into the larger story of Scripture and the history of God's people. To do that, we will spend time this week learning about the book's author and will also watch an overview video that will help us understand the movement and themes of the book itself.

Some recommendations for your first meeting are:

- Bring nametags and sharpies; have each group member print their first name on a tag and wear it. Repeat this for the first four weeks.
- Give details on day/time/place of the study. Include an ending time and stick to it.
- Have members each say their name and one reason they are in this Bible study.
- Pass around a sheet for names, email address, and phone numbers.

Each week there will be four sections to your time together: 1. Context, 2. Content, 3. Application, 4. Prayer

CONTEXT

Who is Mark?

The author is anonymous, but the book is traditionally attributed to John Mark, who was a companion of both Peter and Paul, the most prominent leaders of the early church.

Take a few minutes to look up these Scripture passages, which help to reveal Mark's history and relationship with both Peter and Paul. If you prefer not to look up each individual passage, you can walk your group through this history using the notes provided.

Companion of Peter:

Acts 12: 11-12: The beginning of this passage describes Peter's miraculous escape from prison. Verses 11-12 describe how Peter went to the home of John Mark's mother after his escape, which seems to be a hub for members of the early church.

I Peter 5:13: Peter describes John Mark as his "son", suggesting an intimate relationship between the two church leaders.

Companion of Paul:

Acts 12: 24-25: Paul and Barnabas take John Mark to their home in Antioch after delivering financial gifts to the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 13: 1-5, 13: Barnabas and Paul take John Mark on their first missionary journey, but he leaves early in that mission to return to Jerusalem.

Acts 15: 36-41: Barnabas and Paul have a disagreement. Barnabas takes John Mark with him to Cyprus.

Col 4: 10: Paul and John Mark seem to repair their relationship after the earlier split, as Paul asks the church in Colossae to welcome John Mark into their fellowship.

II Timothy 4: 9-11: As Paul is languishing in prison in Rome, he asks for John Mark to come to him, saying that "he is helpful to me in my ministry."

What does Mark write about?

There are three prominent themes in Mark

1. Jesus is the **kingly Messiah**
2. Jesus is God's **suffering servant**
3. Jesus keeps His **identity a secret**

Mark also emphasizes the *works* of Jesus rather than the *teachings* of Jesus

When was Mark written?

Most likely around 65 AD., shortly after the deaths of both Peter and Paul in Rome

To Whom was this Gospel Written?

Most likely, the original audience was the church in Rome. Here is a short excerpt about the times and culture in Rome:

“It was killing time in Rome. The church was experiencing the Neronian holocaust, in which many believers had been burned alive at Nero’s garden parties and two of the church’s most important figures- Peter and Paul- had been executed. Soon after, there appeared among them a small book- Mark’s gospel- written to remind them of the nature of Jesus’ own messiahship (as God’s suffering servant) and to encourage cross-bearing discipleship.”¹

Where did Mark write his gospel?

The gospel account was most likely written in Rome, where John Mark was attending to both Peter and Paul before their deaths.

How did Mark write his gospel?

Tradition suggests that much of the gospel of Mark comes from Peter’s retellings as a disciple and eye-witness of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Mark helps to turn Peter’s stories into a connected, fast-paced narrative that demonstrates Jesus’ *power* and *authority* as He does the work of His Father.

CONTENT

Watch the Bible Project video on Mark: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/mark/>



Answer these questions after watching the video:

1. What themes did you hear emerging in this video related to the book of Mark?
2. Do any of these themes speak to patterns, questions, or observations in your own faith life?
3. What did you find interesting, confusing, or new in this short overview of Mark?

APPLICATION

- How might understanding the **context** of Mark (who he was, where he wrote, who he wrote to, when he wrote) help deepen, broaden, or contribute to your study of this book?
- Mark wrote to a group of Christians who were living in difficult circumstances, perhaps making it challenging for them to see and believe that the kingdom of God was still among them. What are some of the circumstances in our culture, this campus, or in your own life that make it difficult for you to see or believe that the kingdom of God is still among you?

PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer. Some ideas are:

- Use words/images/themes from the overview to guide your prayer.
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Say the Lord’s prayer together:
“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”

¹ *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* by Gordon Fee, ©2014, Zondervan, page 278