

FOLLOW ME

LESSON ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK



FAST FACTS

- St. Mark is also called John Mark in the New Testament. He was the cousin of St. Barnabas, and was close to St. Peter.
- St. Mark probably wrote his Gospel between 64-68 AD.
- This Gospel was written in Rome to a Gentile audience.
- There are many similarities between the “synoptic Gospels:” Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- St. Mark wrote his Gospel to spread the good news to the Gentiles, to defend the faith against false accusations, and to teach that Jesus Christ is God.

MAP



From your early youth, the light of truth enlightened you, O Mark, and you loved the labor of Christ the Savior. Therefore, you followed Peter with zeal and ministered unto Paul as a good fellow-laborer, and having written the Gospel, you enlightened the whole world.



When you received the grace of the spirit from on high, O Apostle, you broke the webs of the philosophers, and gathered all nations into your net and brought them to your Lord, O glorious Mark, by the preaching of the divine Gospel.

WHO WAS ST. MARK?

St. Mark is referred to in the Bible as John Mark. His mother was a Christian woman in Jerusalem named Mary, who knew the Holy Apostle Peter (Acts 12:12). He was the cousin of St. Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), and traveled with Ss. Barnabas and Paul on St. Paul’s first missionary journey [although he left them in Turkey to return to Jerusalem] (Acts 13:13). In fact, it was an argument over whether to take St. Mark on another missionary journey that caused Ss. Paul and Barnabas to go on separate missionary trips: Ss. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, while Ss. Paul and Silas went to Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-41).

The Bible tells us that St. Mark knew St. Peter during St. Peter’s later years in Rome (1 Peter 5:13). According to such early Church Fathers as Ss. Papias of Hierapolis (+130) and Irenaeus of Lyons (+202) [as well as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, and Blessed Augustine], St. Mark wrote down St. Peter’s memories of the life and ministry of Jesus.

St. Mark traveled throughout Asia Minor, and later went to Egypt, where he was the bishop of Alexandria and established the first Christian school. He also evangelized Libya and other areas of north Africa. He was martyred by being dragged through the streets of Alexandria.

LOOK AT YOURSELF

The fact that Ss. Paul and Barnabas parted over their argument about St. Mark teaches us two important things.

First, we learn that, even when things immediately seem bad — or even *are* bad — God can use these things to accomplish His purpose. It was of course disappointing to the early Christians when Ss. Paul and Barnabas argued. God, however, used their going in different directions to spread the Gospel to an even larger area than would have been possible if Paul and Barnabas had stayed together.

Second, we also learn forgiveness. St. Paul was angry that St. Mark had left the first missionary journey. He later forgave St. Mark, however, even asking Mark to visit him when he was imprisoned in Rome (2 Timothy 4:11). We also need to forgive others when they let us down.



WHEN WAS MARK WRITTEN?

We are not certain when St. Mark wrote his account of the Gospel. We do know that it was written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Blessed Theophylact (a great biblical commentator who lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries) claims the Gospel was written in 43 AD. St. Irenaeus states that it was written after the death of Ss. Peter and Paul, who were martyred approximately 64 AD, during the persecution of the Roman emperor Nero. Most scholars believe this Gospel was written somewhere between 55-70 AD, with the majority of scholars believing it was written between 64-68 AD.

It is generally believed that St. Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome. Clement of Alexandria states that the Christians in Rome asked St. Mark to write the Gospel so that they could remember the things St. Peter had taught them about Jesus.



IT'S IN THE BIBLE

When studying a single book of the Bible you see how God dealt with His people in a certain time and place, and to learn what this means for us today. There are several questions we can ask to help us understand the meaning of a chapter in a Bible book:

- Who is speaking?
- To whom is the writer speaking?
- When was the book or chapter spoken or written?
- Where is it being spoken or written?
- What circumstances prompted the message?
- What is the main subject of the message?
- What is the goal of the message?

WHY DID ST. MARK WRITE HIS GOSPEL?

St. Mark had a number of reasons for writing his Gospel.

First, St. Mark wrote to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (people who were not Jews). While the Church started in Jerusalem with the Jewish Apostles, it was growing in the Gentile Roman Empire — people who did not understand the Jewish basis for the story of Jesus Christ. He therefore spends a lot of time explaining Jewish words and customs that the Gentiles would not understand, making it possible for non-Jews to see how Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in what is now the Old Testament.

St. Mark also wrote to encourage Christians to be faithful disciples, particularly under persecution. The Church had experienced terrible persecution under the emperor Nero in 64 AD, even losing Ss. Peter and Paul. St. Mark prepares Christians to endure further persecution by telling of Christ's suffering and how he had predicted His followers would endure similar suffering.

Another reason for St. Mark's Gospel is to defend the Christian faith against false charges. There were many

rumors during the first two centuries of the Church that Christians were dangerous rebels whose strange religious beliefs and practices were a threat to the Empire. St. Mark's Gospel both defends Jesus against charges of being a political revolutionary, and shows Christians to be good citizens.

Christians today often need to do defend the faith: in this country we often need to correct the wrong understanding that other Christians have of Orthodox Christianity, and in some countries Christians still face persecution from governments and religions that do not understand Christianity.

The most important reason St. Mark wrote was to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is God. In his Gospel St. Mark shows the Father proclaiming Jesus as His Son at Christ's baptism and Transfiguration. He also shows Jesus' divinity by having the centurion announce his belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and through the Resurrection and angel's announcement that the Son of God has conquered death.



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

Future lessons will end with questions that you can answer to better understand the Bible reading for that week. This week, however, we have a challenge: be sure to read the assigned reading every week from the Gospel according to St. Mark. We should feel the same way about the Bible that St. John of Kronstadt (+1907) did: "I especially love to read the Holy Scriptures, both Testaments. I cannot live without this reading. They contain so much. So many laws for the life of man's soul are revealed there! A person striving for spiritual renewal can obtain so much guidance in being reborn from evil to good."

