

INTRODUCTION TO ST MARK'S GOSPEL

WHO?

Early Christian writers seem to indicate that Mark was close to Simon Peter, and was able to put down many of the details that such a privileged eye-witness as Peter could give.

WHEN?

A good guess is round about AD 65. This time marked the beginning of vicious persecution of Christians by the Romans under their emperor Nero. Many of the eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus would certainly have perished in this first wave of persecution.

WHY SO LONG AFTER THE RESURRECTION?

There are a few possible reasons for this.

- Since Jesus' ministry on earth finished when he was still in his early thirties, those around who were eye-witnesses would have lived for many years after to give proclamation about Jesus and spread his teaching.
- There was also a strong belief that Jesus would return (the Second Coming) within a lifetime, so many believers would not see the need for a written record.
- Many people were illiterate and yet were accustomed to remembering stories; it is no surprise that the oral tradition survived and flourished long after the gospels were written.

WHY DID MARK WRITE?

- Perhaps the need for a written account of Jesus' life and teaching took on urgency after the death of many eyewitnesses in Nero's persecution.
- Perhaps false stories and teachings of Jesus were being spread around the early Christian communities. If such were the case then an accurate written record would counter the spread of falsehoods.

FOR WHOM WAS HE WRITING?

- It seems likely that he was writing with the persecuted Christians of Rome in mind. Under Nero's terrible persecution their faith in Jesus would have been severely tested.
- Mark's gospel seems to have a message and comfort and strength for these early Christians of Rome

'Master, do you not care? We are going down!' Mark 4:39

'Master! Master! We are going down!' Luke 8:24

- His gospel emphasises that Jesus was himself misunderstood, terribly treated and put to death, and yet he conquered death by rising again. A third of Mark's gospel is taken up with the final days, suffering and death of Jesus.

Mark's audience were probably not too familiar with Jewish practice and with the language of Palestine (Aramaic). Mark always explains Aramaic expressions.

'Talitha, Kum!' which means, 'Little girl, I tell you to get up'. 5:41

WHAT DID HE TRY TO GET ACROSS?

- First, that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah - but not the popular idea of a messiah the people of Palestine seemed to have had.
- Second, that Jesus acted with great power, and these were signs of the Kingdom.
- Third, that a true disciple might be called on to give up their life for the Gospel; suffering was not a sign of God's disapproval but rather the price to be paid for being faithful.
- Fourth, that final triumph and the Kingdom belong to Jesus and all who follow him.

TRUE OR FALSE?

a) Pick out the false statements and rewrite them in a non-trivial way so as to make them true.

1. Mark wrote that Jesus had the surname 'Christ'.
2. Luke and Matthew both used Mark's gospel as a source for their own gospels.
3. Mark was writing his gospel for the Christians of Rome, to give them strength and comfort.
4. Mark used John's gospel as a source for his own gospel.
5. All the gospels were written in Greek.
6. Matthew and Luke both seemed to have access to an unnamed source for their gospels.
7. All the four gospel writers were among the twelve apostles of Jesus.
8. The gospels appear in the Bible in the order they were first written.
9. All the gospel writers were Jewish.

b) Use the word square to fill in the blanks below.

K	Y	Y	E	H	C	A	D	I	D
E	R	H	V	M	A	R	K	W	T
R	S	P	A	N	H	O	J	H	C
Y	W	A	N	O	H	D	I	E	I
G	E	R	G	O	Z	R	M	E	T
M	N	G	E	M	T	P	B	M	P
A	D	O	L	Y	F	L	K	O	O
R	O	I	I	P	E	T	E	R	N
O	O	B	S	Q	U	I	A	M	Y
J	G	W	T	L	T	L	O	D	S

1. A word that means *with the same eye*, describing the similarity of three of the gospels
2. _____ tradition - the life and teachings of Jesus passed on by word of mouth
3. The main message about Jesus - a Greek word meaning *proclamation*
4. Teachings to the early Church on the Christian way of life - a Greek word meaning *teaching*
5. A basic meaning of the Anglo-Saxon words *god spel*
6. Where Mark probably wrote his gospel
7. _____ years - the approximate gap between the Resurrection and Mark's gospel
8. The gospel writers - from the Greek words meaning *announcer of good news*
9. The eye-witness who probably gave Mark much of his information
10. The gospel of _____ - the shortest of the four gospels
11. The gospel of _____ - the gospel unlike the other three
12. A detailed written account, in order from birth to death, of the life of a famous person