

Mark

- 1. Who is the writer? What do we know about him from the rest of the New Testament?** The writer is John Mark, who was a close friend to Peter -- see 1 Peter 5:13, and probably received the information for this gospel firsthand from Peter's teachings. Acts 12:12 gives us the first information about him, saying that his name was John, also called Mark. While Peter was being held for execution, the brethren were gathered at the home of Mark's mother, Mary. When Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem after delivering a collection for the brethren there, Mark accompanied them -- see Acts 12:25. Mark then joined Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey, but abandoned them along the way -- see Acts 13:13. A serious split occurred between Paul and Barnabas on account of Mark, so Barnabas partnered up with his cousin Mark (Colossians 4:10) while Paul chose Silas -- see Acts 15:37-41. When Paul wrote the books of Colossians and Philemon, he spoke positively of Mark. Near the end of Paul's life, Mark was a useful servant to Paul -- see 2 Timothy 4:11.
- 2. Who is the primary intended audience of this gospel account?** Whereas Matthew's gospel targeted the Jews, Mark's gospel seems tailored to Gentile readers. In contrast to Matthew, Mark gives explanation about Jewish customs -- see Mark 7:1-4, 15:42-43. Mark also translates Aramaic words throughout this gospel -- see 3:17, 5:41, 7:11, 7:34, 15:22. It appears that Mark wrote his gospel shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D 70. By this time, there was much Roman persecution against Christians. Hence, there was a need for the example of Christ to be displayed for Gentile Christians as well as for those Gentiles who would be converted to the faith.
- 3. The very first verse of this book is quite telling. What do we learn from it?** Mark 1:1 states, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." First, notice that Mark points out that his account just covers the *beginning* of the gospel of Jesus. This concurs with the implication of Acts 1:1 that the completion of Jesus' gospel is found in the book of Acts. Next is the direct declaration that Jesus is the Christ. Mark's account of Jesus' life on earth establishes that Jesus was the coming Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament. Finally, we see that Mark was very open about the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Over and over again throughout this book, Mark emphasizes the divinity of Christ. Mark wants his readers to understand that Jesus wasn't only a King, but was God in the flesh.
- 4. Does this book focus more on what Jesus taught or on what He did?** Unlike the gospel of John, where we get an intimate view of Jesus' discussions with the Jews and His teachings, Mark emphasizes the deeds of Christ. He still readily points out that Jesus was "the Teacher," using some form of the word "teach" or "Rabbi" 37 times. However, Mark's gospel is action-packed, quickly moving from one event of Christ to another (the Greek word translated "immediately" is used over 40 times in this book). Mark places priority on the miracles of Jesus, communicating God's divine power at work through Him.
- 5. What does Mark teach us about what it takes to be a disciple of Christ?** Mark 1:15 says that a disciple must "repent and believe in the gospel." Mark shows Jesus challenging people to "follow" Him -- Mark 1:17, 2:14, 8:34, 10:21. In this book, it is clear that a disciple is a "follower" of Christ -- see Mark 4:10, 6:1, 15:40-41. Mark clearly communicates the straightforward words of Jesus as He sets forth the cost of discipleship -- see Mark 8:34-38, Mark 10:21-25, Mark 10:43-45. Jesus also promises a great reward to those who do follow Him -- Mark 10:28-31.

6. **What do we learn about fear and faith in this gospel?** There is an old saying that summarizes the teachings in Mark's gospel about fear and faith. It goes like this, "Fear knocked at the door; faith answered, and no one was there." Truly fear and faith cannot coexist; any spot held by fear is conquered by faith. Check out these verses in Mark that communicate this point:

Mark 4:40 -- The disciples were afraid while Jesus was sleeping in the boat. Jesus said, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?"

Mark 5:34 -- The woman with a hemorrhage was fearful after Jesus was questioning who had touched Him. Jesus said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace..."

Mark 5:36 -- Jairus, the synagogue official who was told his daughter had died. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe."

Mark 6:50 -- The disciples were afraid as Jesus came to them, walking on the water. Jesus said, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid."

This is true in our lives as well. If we wish to remove our fear, we must build our faith. "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe."

7. **About what in particular were the Sadducees mistaken? Why were they mistaken?** In the time of Christ, the Sadducees were sort of an opposition party to the Pharisees -- see Acts 23:6-8. Acts 23:8 says, "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all." Mark 12:18-27 records the discussion between the Sadducees and Jesus. They attempted to set Him up with a hypothetical question about whose wife a woman would be in the resurrection. The particular mistake of the Sadducees dealt with in Mark was their unbelief in the resurrection. Jesus said that they were mistaken because they did not understand either the Scriptures or the power of God. He then logically established from the Old Testament that there had to be a resurrection. Jesus closed His discussion by speaking of God, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken." Jesus gave them an extra zinger about angels in His answer concerning the woman, "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are *like angels in heaven*."
8. **What do we learn about Joseph of Arimathea in this gospel account?** Mark 15:43-46 gives us some information concerning Joseph of Arimathea. Mark tells us that Joseph was a prominent member of the Council. In other words, Joseph was a part of the Sanhedrin – the ruling Jewish council comprised of both Pharisees and Sadducees. In Matthew's gospel account we find that Joseph had become a disciple of Jesus. John's account lets us know that he was a secret disciple for fear of the Jews. Mark terms this discipleship a bit differently – he says that Joseph was "waiting for the kingdom of God." It is clear that Joseph believed in Jesus and was looking for something better than anything this world had to offer. I also like the phrase that Mark uses about Joseph approaching Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus; it says, "He gathered up courage." Joseph was under tremendous pressure from peers in his political circle, so he had to make a choice. He gathered up courage, asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, and laid that body in his own tomb, thereby fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. Each of us has our own fears to conquer. What prophecies might be fulfilled when we summon courage and stick our neck out for Christ?
9. **What does the book of Mark say about immersion?** Mark's short gospel actually has quite a lot to say concerning baptism (immersion).

- John's immersion was an immersion of repentance for the forgiveness of sins – 1:4
- Many people were being immersed by John in the Jordan River – 1:5
- John promised that One was coming who would immerse with the Spirit – 1:8
- Jesus was immersed by John in the Jordan – 1:9
- Jesus asks James and John if they were able to be immersed with the immersion with which Jesus was to be immersed (immersion of suffering) – 10:38-39
- Jesus responds to the challenge of His authority by the chief priests, scribes, and elders by asking them if John's immersion was from heaven or from men – 11:27-33
- Jesus says that the person who believes and is immersed *shall be saved* – 16:16

10. According to Mark, what was the purpose of the signs that were performed by first-century Christians? Mark 16:17-20 speaks of signs that would accompany those who have believed. These signs would include casting out demons, speaking in new tongues, picking up serpents, not being hurt by deadly poisons, and healing the sick. The specific purpose of these signs is given in verse 20; the signs were God's confirmation that the word they spoke was true. This is consistent with the stated purpose of the gifts of the Spirit both in Acts 14:3 and Hebrews 2:4.