

# Introduction to the Gospel of Mark



## The Plan

This term we will be looking at the Gospel of Mark. The purpose of this Introduction is to help us all “get into” the book as a whole. Hopefully some of these points will help to fit the individual stories into the big picture and help us appreciate this carefully crafted book. We have a real opportunity to get into it, so why not focus on the book in your own devotions. Start off by reading the book through in one sitting, and then work through it slower, bearing in mind the points made here and any other book that may help. Use different translations if you can. Read the relevant passages in the week before each Home Church gathering. We are looking not just to understand it better, but to be able to live it better. As one KBCTC lecturer used to say: “live in the story”!

## Introduction

Mark’s Gospel is generally accepted to be the earliest of the four gospels. It was probably written around **AD 66-67** by **John Mark**, companion of Paul and Barnabus. Evidence from as early as AD 120 indicates that he knew the Apostle Peter well and drew most of his information from him. This makes for a very descriptive, vivid, and dynamic account, as well as it being very personal, especially when it come to Peter’s part in the story.

Mark was probably **in Rome** when he wrote it, and had in mind his church there as he was writing. They were **suffering** under the hand of the Romans at the time. They must have been struggling with **whether Jesus work was really what God was doing**, and if so why don’t the Jews see it. Mark reassures them that God was in fact acting in the work of Jesus, that **he did it through suffering and so must they**. God will prove them right, just like he did with Jesus; but, more than that, **people will see and respond to Jesus the King** – even the Romans (just like the Roman Centurion in 15:39).

## Things to look out for

- 1) The Disciples** – The disciples so often miss Jesus’ points it is almost farcical! Having walked with Jesus for a good while, you would have thought that they would have got what he was about. But however hard Jesus tries, he can’t get them to see what is going on in his ministry. This is particularly emphasised during a section of the book that I have titled “The Way” (8:22-10:52, see (3) in the Running Order below). The blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26), who needed two touches before he was healed, seems to characterize them: by the middle of the gospel they understand that he is the Messiah, but they need a second ‘touch’ to see the way he was going to work. The disciples are probably the characters in the story that we associate with most of all!
- 2) Who is Jesus?** – This is the central theme of the Gospel. As the reader we are treated to a sneak preview in the introduction (1:1-15): Jesus is the Messiah that Isaiah prophesied about and Israel hoped for. In the first section (1:16-8:21) Jesus is shown to be bringing about Israel’s deliverance in his words and in what he does, but only to the few, as he seems to want to keep it a secret. The evidence is building, however and, as with many ancient books, it climaxes in the middle with Jesus’ question, as much to the reader as to his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” (8:29). His family think he is mad (3:21), the religious leaders think he is demonised (3:22), the disciples are a bit foggy (see “disciples”), the demons think he is the Son of God. Who will *you* agree with!! At the start of the book a voice from heaven declares who Jesus is, in the middle Peter voices it, finally the book finishes with a dramatic announcement of who he is by a Roman Centurion, no less, at the foot of the cross: “Surely this man was the Son of God” (15:39)

- 3) **Following Jesus** – Part of the reason for the disciple’s inability to comprehend what Jesus is really about is because of the way that Jesus is acting. It is so different from what they expected the Messiah to be like. During “The Way” section, in the middle of the book, Jesus tells the disciples three times of his fate, but each time they completely miss it, and Jesus takes the opportunity to explain to them what following him really means. The stark reality of what it means to follow Jesus is central to the book. The only person (not demonised!) to really see who Jesus is is the Roman Centurion (15:39) – the message is clear: you don’t fully understand who Jesus is until you see him on the cross. It is at the foot of the cross that following Jesus starts: understanding who he is and the way that his Kingdom works. He is the model for all to follow: “if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (8:34).
- 4) **Kingdom of God** – God’s kingdom, as promised through Isaiah, has now started in Jesus – *this* is Mark’s “gospel” message (1:1), which is best explained by the story that unfolds. This Kingdom is “at hand” and you are part of it if you “repent and believe”. But it is a little mysterious to many. It has not come in one moment through a bloodthirsty battle, defeating the Romans. The signs of its coming are here – the blind see, the lame walk, demons are defeated, people are fed – but it is different. It is characterised not by military victory but in sacrificial love, it is not for one people it is for all peoples, the enemy is not “non-Jews” but the demonic, victory is won not through killing others but by the King dying for all. Jesus is finally given the title of “King” for the first time in 15:2, but then again on the cross with his “crime” being nailed above him on the cross: “King of the Jews” (15:26). What is clear is that he is, in fact, the King of the World.

## Running Order

- 1) **Introduction (1:1-15)** – *Israel’s hopes are fulfilled here, in this gospel story. Enter stage right the preparer John the Baptist, and stage left the Messiah himself, Jesus!*
- 2) **Jesus is the promised deliverer and what people think about it (1:16-8:21)**
- A. Mighty words and actions (in Galilee) and people like it! (1:16-45)
  - B. But opposition begins to come (2:1-3:6) – *4 questions from religious leaders.*
  - C. A new family (3:7-34)
  - D. Jesus responds: the mystery of the kingdom (4:1-6:52)
  - E. Good news for everyone! Jesus works outside of Galilee (6:53-8:21)
- 3) **Following in The Way of Jesus the Messiah (8:22-10:52)**
- A. Two touches – the blind see but don’t quite see (8:22-26)
  - B. **WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?** – *the crunch question* (8:27-30)
  - C. Round 1: Trust in me and my way (8:31-9:29)
  - D. Round 2: It is all upside-down (9:30-10:31)
  - E. Round 3: It needs servant leadership (10:32-45)
  - F. One touch – the faithful receive clear sight and follow (10:46-52)
- 4) **Into Jerusalem (11:1-16:8)**
- A. Triumphal entry – the King is coming (11:1-11)
  - B. Messiah and the Temple (11:12-12:44)
  - C. End of the Temple (13:1-37)
  - D. Jesus’ Passion (14:1-15:47)
  - E. The Resurrection (16:1-8)
- 5) **Epilogue (16:9-20)**