

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. First, we will learn about the origin of each Bible book: who wrote it and when and where he wrote it. Second, we will learn about how the Bible book may be divided into parts. Third, we will learn the main contents and messages of each Bible book. Finally, we will learn how to understand some difficult parts of the Bible book.

Today's teaching is: THE INTRODUCTION OF MARK - PART 1. Today we will learn how the Gospel of Mark came into being and its characteristics.

It is important to remember that there are several different theories about the dating of the events in the New Testament. The dates used in our studies, although tentative, are based on the best scholarship in the world.

### **POINT 1. THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

The second Gospel is called "Mark", the name of the fellow-worker of the apostles Peter and Paul. In order to verify the claim of Christian history that Mark was the writer of this Gospel, we have to shortly study the history of the apostles Peter and Paul.

#### **First. The history of Mark when he was a young man.**

In Mark 14:51-52 the evangelist (Gospel writer) Mark tells about an incident about a young man who was probably himself. Although the following cannot be proved, it is quite possible that it happened. It was the Thursday night before the crucifixion. Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover festival in the Upper Room. It is possible that this room was part of the house owned by Mark's mother, Mary, and thus the home where Mark lived. It is also possible that Mark himself was the man carrying a jar of water, leading the disciples to the place of the Upper Room (Mk 14:13-15). This means that it is possible that Mark had himself seen and heard some of the things he writes about in his Gospel. As it was late in the night, the young man, Mark, was probably asleep. When Jesus and his disciples left the Upper Room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane, the young man awoke, threw a linen garment around his body and rushed out to follow Jesus and his disciples. When the temple guards (Jn 18:3) arrested Jesus, all his disciples deserted him and fled. The temple guards grabbed the young man, but he escaped, leaving his cloak in their hands! Jesus was crucified and resurrected in April A.D. 30.

#### **Second. The history of Mark in association with Peter.**

At Pentecost in May A.D. 30, there were Jews from Rome (Act 2:10-11). Some of them must have been among the three thousand converts after the preaching of the apostle Peter. The events described in Acts 1-12 occur during A.D. 30-44. It is quite possible that during these years, the apostle Peter made one or more visits to Rome in order to establish the Jewish Christians there. Peter was in Jerusalem in A.D. 36 to meet the newly converted Paul (Act 9:26-28; Gal 1:18). In about A.D. 40, before the reign of Claudius and Herod, who received the control of Judea from him, he visited Caesarea. From A.D. 41 onwards the attitude of the Jews in Jerusalem changed for the worse against the apostles.

In A.D. 44 he was again in Jerusalem when he was imprisoned by Herod. It was also during this period that we read again about Mark. Just before king Herod died in A.D. 44, Peter was arrested and imprisoned. In Acts 12 we read how the church gathered in the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where they prayed earnestly to God for him. We read how an angel rescued him from prison, how he went to the house where they prayed and then left for another place. Because many were gathered in their house, Mark was probably acquainted with the other apostles and several of the early other followers of Jesus.

According to the testimony of the early church fathers, Mark worked together with Peter in Rome. This probably happened in the period after A.D. 44 when the apostle Peter left Jerusalem for another place. The church father Eusebius wrote in A.D. 300, "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter." The church father Clement of Alexandria, wrote in A.D. 190, "The occasion for writing the Gospel of Mark was the following: Peter had publicly preached the word in Rome ... Mark had followed him for a long time and remembered what he had spoken. Many people, who were present, urged Mark to write down what Peter had said. He did this and distributed the Gospel among those who had asked him for it. When Peter learned about this, he neither strongly forbade it nor promoted it." And the church father Papias, who was a disciple of the apostle John, wrote in A.D. 115, "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately ... whatever he remembered of what was said

and done by the Lord. ... Mark gave careful attention to leave out nothing of what he had heard and also to falsify nothing.”

There is absolutely no justification to deny the unanimous testimony of the ancient historians that Mark wrote this Gospel and that it was mainly based on the preaching and teaching of the apostle Peter in Rome. Mark probably wrote his Gospel during A.D. 44-46 in Rome for the Romans.

### **Third. The history of Mark in association with Paul.**

Colossians 4:10 says that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. In Acts 12:25 we read that during the time of the great famine in Judea in A.D. 46, Barnabas and Paul came down from Antioch in Syria to bring the relief fund to Jerusalem. When they returned to Antioch, they took Mark with them.

In Acts 13 we read that the church of Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul on a missionary journey in A.D. 47-48. This was the so-called First Missionary Journey of Paul. They took Mark along as their “helper”, that is, Mark probably served them as their business manager, arranging their journey, making provision for food and lodging, sending messages, but probably above all serving them as a teacher. If he had already written his Gospel, then he would especially have been a good teacher for the new Christians! However, for some unknown reason, Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. He could have disagreed with the change of leadership from his cousin Barnabas to Paul, but the real reason was more probably all the hardships they had to face on the journey, hardships which Paul summarises in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Later in A.D. 50 Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking Mark on the next missionary journey. Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul chose a new fellow-worker, Silas, and went with the blessing of the church on his Second Missionary Journey (Act 15:36-41).

### **Fourth. The history of Mark in association with Peter and Paul in Rome.**

Between the years A.D. 50-60 we know nothing about the whereabouts of Mark. However, during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome from A.D. 60-62, we read in Colossians 4:10-11 that Mark was again with Paul and that he was a great comfort for Paul. From all Paul’s Letters from his prison in Rome, we gather that Peter was not in Rome during Paul’s imprisonment. However, after Paul was released and travelled to the various churches he had planted everywhere, the apostle Peter was again in Rome and Mark was with him. In 1 Peter 5:13, written in A.D. 63, Peter sends the greetings from the Christians in Rome and from Mark to the Christians in Asia Minor. The fact that Peter calls Mark “his son” shows that Peter had been a spiritual father and supervisor of Mark for a long time. So it seems that between A.D. 61-64 Mark carried on his ministry in Rome. After the apostle Peter was martyred in Rome, probably under Nero’s persecution in A.D. 64, Mark once more became Paul’s helper. It is possible that Mark in co-operation with Timothy made a tour of the churches in Asia Minor. Nevertheless, when Paul was imprisoned for a second time in Rome probably in the winter of A.D. 64-65, he wrote in 2 Timothy 4:11, “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”

## **POINT 2. THE PLACE OF WRITING THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

The unanimous statements of the early church fathers state that Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome and for the Romans. It is a fact that he wrote his Gospel for a non-Jewish public, because he translates Aramaic words, like “Boanerges” (3:17), “talitha kum” (5:41), “corban” (7:11), “ephatha” (7:34) and “Abba” (14:36) into Greek. He also explains Jewish customs, like the ceremonial washing of hands (7:3-4), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (14:12) and Preparation Day (15:42).

Mark even explains some Greek terms in the Latin language of Rome. In Mark 12:42 he explains that the two “lepta” or copper coins amounted to one Roman “quadrans” or a fraction of a penny. In Mark 15:8 he explains that the “aule” or palace was the “praetorium” or governor’s official residence.

Mark in chapter 15:21 is the only Gospel which tells us that “Simon of Cyrene” is “the father of Alexander and Rufus”, two people who according to Romans 16:13 were evidently well-known in Rome.

The way in which Mark pictures Christ, would be of interest to the Romans, who in their lust for power and exercise of authority have conquered the world. Mark pictures him as an active, energetic, swiftly moving and conquering King, the Victor over the destructive forces of nature, over disease, over demons, and even over death. Mark pictures a King who by far excels any earthly conqueror. His kingdom is far more extensive, his armour is far more effective, and his rule is far more enduring than anything originating here below. Moreover, his victories are far more honourable, because he causes the conquered to share in the glory of the conquest! The King who Mark pictures, is the Saviour-King!

### **POINT 3. THE DATE OF WRITING THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

First. The statement of a church father places the writing during A.D. 41-54. The church father Eusebius states that it was during the reign of Claudius during A.D. 41-54 that God in his beneficent care guided ... Peter to Rome. The hearers of Peter requested Peter's follower, Mark, to write a record of the teaching, which Peter transmitted to them orally. Thus, they became responsible for the production of the Gospel of Mark.

Second. A papyrus fragment found near Qumran places the writing before A.D. 50. The small papyrus scrap found in a cave in the desert in Palestine contains a part of Mark 6:52,53. This fragment is dated A.D. 50. If this scrap belonged to a copy of the Gospel of Mark, then the Gospel was written more towards the beginning of the reign of Claudius. As we saw from the book of Acts, it is quite possible that the apostle Peter and Mark were in Rome during A.D. 44-46.

Conclusion. We can safely conclude that the Gospel of Mark was written during A.D. 40-65. There is much evidence that it was written about A.D. 44-46 in Rome for the Romans.

### **POINT 4. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MARK**

#### **First. The Gospel of Mark is the shortest Gospel.**

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest Gospel. While Luke contains 1147 verses, Matthew 1068 verses, Mark only has 661 verses. While Luke has 27 parables and Matthew has 19 parables, Mark only has 4 parables. Of the 6 great sermons in Matthew, Mark has only one, that is, the sermon about the Last Things (Mk 13).

#### **Second. The Gospel of Mark is the Gospel of action.**

##### One. The Gospel of Mark contains many miracles.

Each of Mark's first eleven chapters contains at least one miracle account. The healing of the deaf and mute man described in Mark 7:31-37 is only found in the Gospel of Mark. Mark describes how Jesus heals this man. He first put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. Finally, he looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said, "Ephatha", which means, "Be opened!" At once the man's ears were opened and he could hear, and his tongue was loosened and he could speak clearly. The people who saw this, were overwhelmed with amazement and exclaimed, "Jesus has done everything well!"

And the healing of the blind man at Bethesda described in Mark 8:22-26 is also only found in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus took this blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. After Jesus had spit on the man's eyes and had put his hands on him, he asked him if he could see anything. The man answered that the people looked like trees walking around. Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes and then his eyes were opened and he could see everything clearly.

##### Two. In comparison with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the Gospel of Mark describes things in a very lively way.

For example, when Jesus began to preach the gospel of the kingdom, in Matthew he only says "repent" (4:17), but in Mark he adds "and believe the gospel"! (1:15).

When Jesus called James and John to follow him, Matthew says "They left the boat and their father", but Mark says that they did not leave their father helplessly alone, but "left their father in the boat with the hired men" (1:20).

In healing Peter's mother-in-law, Matthew says that Jesus "touched" her hand, but Mark says "he took her hand and helped her up" (1:31).

With regard to the sick and demon-possessed, Matthew says that "many" came (8:16), but Mark says "the whole town gathered at the door" (1:33).

With regard to prayer, Luke says "at daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place" (4:42), but Mark says "very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (1:35).

While Luke says that the people were looking for Jesus (4:43), in Mark the disciples say to Jesus, "Everyone is looking for you!" (1:36).

### **Third. The Gospel of Mark is the most orderly Gospel.**

#### One. Luke compared to Mark.

Luke places the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth in the beginning of the Galilean ministry. But the description itself in Luke 4:23 presupposes that Jesus had already been doing considerable work in Galilee. This proves that Luke is not very interested in chronological order. Mark and Matthew do not relate this incident until they have almost reached the middle of their respective books.

Similarly, in the middle section of Luke's Gospel various time references are quite indefinite, like "one day" (11:1), "meanwhile" (12:1) and "on a Sabbath" (13:10). From this too it is clear that, although the Gospel of Luke is certainly "orderly" as he says in his introduction (1:3), the arrangement of the material is chronological only in a very general sense.

Finally when Luke describes the pointing out of the betrayer *after* the institution of the Lord's Supper (22:14-23), while in Matthew, Mark and John it is *during* the meal, then it is clear that Luke does not arrange his material in precise "before and after" order. Luke arranges his material according to themes and his *thematically* arranged narrative is just as much inspired by the Holy Spirit as the far more *chronological* narrative of Mark.

#### Two. Matthew compared to Mark.

Matthew does not arrange the miracles of Christ in chapter 8 and 9 in the order of their occurrence.

Mark shows that the cursing of the fig tree took place on Monday (11:12-14) and its lesson was told on Tuesday (11:20-25) of the Passion Week (the last week before the crucifixion). Thus Mark draws attention to the chronological order, but Matthew does not. Matthew wants to tell the entire event and its lesson all at once (21:18-22).

#### Three. Mark is most chronological.

Most sections from Mark 10:13 to the end are paralleled both in Matthew and in Luke. But what is especially significant is the fact that in general when the order in Luke departs from Mark, Matthew has the same order as Mark, and when the order in Matthew departs from Mark, Luke has the same order as Mark.

While Matthew summarises all Christ's sermons in six large sections, Mark refers to each of them in the order in which they were delivered. This proves that Mark is the most chronologically ordered Gospel.

#### Four. Even Mark does not intend to write a chronological history.

Mark does not intend to write a *biography* in chronological order. For example, Mark has no account about the birth of Jesus; a few of Mark's sections also begin with indefinite time indicators; and Mark does not cover the Early or Later Judean Ministries of Jesus.

### **Fourth. The Gospel of Mark describes the growing relationship between Jesus and his disciples.**

Mark is not interested in Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees, which occupies a lot of attention in Matthew.

Mark describes more vividly the dynamics of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. He describes the unbelief of the disciples and then their growing faith in Jesus.

### **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read through Luke chapters 1-5.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".