

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The Synoptic Gospels II

The Gospel According to Mark

1. **Authorship:** Tradition states that the writer of the “Second Gospel” was an early follower of Jesus named John Mark. However, one of the difficulties associated with Mark’s Gospel is that Mark was not one of Jesus’ twelve disciples. But based on Mark’s life and relationships, there is no question he was qualified to write an account of Jesus’ life and ministry. Although he wasn’t among The Twelve, tradition states that Mark’s mother was an earlier follower of Jesus, even allowing Jesus and the disciples to use her “Upper Room” for the Passover meal and other meetings (Acts 12:12).

Some scholars have detected an autobiographic note in Mark 14:51-52, where the writer notes, “*And a young man followed him, with nothing by a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.*” It’s suspected that Mark was the “young man” who was following Jesus and the disciples at a distance, but fled with everyone else after Jesus’ arrest. Therefore, if this is true, it’s likely that Mark would have witnessed at least a few parts of Jesus’ life and ministry. However, there is evidence in Acts that John Mark was a part of the early missionary movement. According to Acts 13:5, Mark assisted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. However, after Paul found fault with Mark, likely due to immaturity, Paul dismissed him from the next trip, which led to a “*sharp disagreement*” between Paul and Barnabas (Mark’s cousin) (Acts 15:36-41). From that point forward, Paul chose Silas to be his partner, and Barnabas took Mark. But in God’s providence and grace, Mark became a close associate of Peter, and Peter referred to Mark as “*my son*” (1 Pet. 5:13). It’s believed that Peter disciplined Mark, leading him to greater spiritual maturity and faithfulness. Hence, near the end of Paul’s life, Mark and Paul are back together again while Paul is in prison (Col. 4:10).

However, it’s Mark’s close association with Peter that qualifies him to write an accurate account of Jesus’ life. As he listened to Peter’s preaching and teaching, and heard personal stories about the life and ministry of Jesus, he gathered all the necessary information to write his Gospel. Therefore, in some sense, the Gospel of Mark might best be called “the Gospel of Peter.” Scholars have even noted that the content and order of Mark’s Gospel follows closely with Peter’s sermon in Acts 10:34-43.

- a. **Quote:** “This also the presbyter [The apostle John] said, ‘Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that March committed no error which he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any

of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.'" (Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, AD 130; recorded in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.15).

2. **Date:** Like the other Gospels, there is scholarly debate concerning the time Mark was written. Some scholars contend that Mark was written in the late 50s/early 60s, mainly because Mark includes Jesus' prophecies concerning the fall of Jerusalem, which hadn't taken place yet (AD 70). This range gives time for Matthew and Luke to use Mark as a source.
3. **Audience:** Conservative scholars seem to favor the idea that Mark primarily wrote to a gentile audience while in Rome as he accompanied Peter during his imprisonment. Could it be that Peter commissioned Mark to write an account of the gospel to the gentiles, knowing that his days of preaching and teaching were coming to an end? Guthrie notes a few lines of evidence: (1) Mark explains Palestinian customs (hand-washing, purification, etc.); (2) Aramaic expressions are translated into Greek; (3) Geographic locations are given with greater detail (Bethsaida described as a village, etc.); (4) Clement of Alexandria states that Mark wrote while Peter was still preaching the gospel in Rome (1 Peter 5:13); (5) There are many "Latinisms" (Roman sayings) contained in the Gospel, which reveal a Roman audience.
4. **Purpose:** Mark's Gospel seems to have a dual-purpose, which are both recorded in the center of the book (Mark 8).
 - a. **Christology:** Mark aims to show Jesus' divine nature through miraculous works and his redeeming mission through his personal sacrifice. Mark presents Jesus as the suffering servant of God. Jesus said, "*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again*" (Mark 8:31).
 - b. **Discipleship:** Mark highlights Jesus' call to deny oneself and follow him in faith, which often involves hardship, suffering, and loss. Jesus states, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*" (Mark 8:34).
5. **Structure:** Mark outlines his Gospel according to geography. He begins with Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, moves to his ministry in Galilee, and concludes with his death, burial, and resurrection in Jerusalem.
6. **Characteristics**
 - a. **Intensive:** The Gospel of Mark has been described as an "intensive gospel." While it's the shortest of the four Gospels, only covering 3 1/2 years of Jesus' life, he packs in a ton of content. Despite being the shortest gospel, Mark records more miracles (18) than the others.
 - b. **Rapid:** Mark's Gospel is filled with action, telling the story of Jesus at a rapid pace. Mark uses the word "immediately" 42 times, moving from one scene to the next. William Hendrikson notes, "Mark pictures Christ as an active, energetic, swiftly moving, warring, conquering king."

The Gospel According to Luke

1. **Authorship:** The Gospel of Luke has traditionally been accredited to a first century Gentile convert named Luke. According to Acts, Luke was a travel companion and ministry assistant of the apostle Paul, accompanying him on several missionary journeys (Luke uses the pronoun “we” when describing his travels with Paul; Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). Paul also identifies him as “*Luke the beloved physician*” (Col. 4:14), indicating that he was trained in medicine. Like Mark, Luke was not one of Jesus’ twelve disciples. While there is no evidence that he knew Jesus during his life and ministry, Luke wrote under the supervision of the apostle Paul and gathered his information from “eyewitnesses,” putting it all together in an “*orderly account*” (Luke 1:1-3). There are several references in the New Testament where Luke and Mark are mentioned together, which gives additional evidence that Luke most likely used Mark’s Gospel as a source (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24). It’s also been noted that Luke’s Gospel contains a more sophisticated Greek grammar and elevated style, which points to the Gospel being written by a highly educated person, such as a physician. Köstenberger states, “Luke wrote in elegant Greek, mastered by vocabulary and prose of an educated man, and was able to employ a variety of genres and styles. Renan called the Gospel of Luke ‘the most beautiful book every written’” (Köstenberger, 257). As noted, Luke the doctor wrote with “surgical precision.”

Most conservative scholars agree that Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and Acts, sometimes viewed as a compilation, Luke-Acts. According to Carson, even “the heretic Marcion identified Luke as the author of these books in the middle of the second century” (Carson, 205). Furthermore, near the same time, the early church father Irenaeus detailed that Luke was a doctor, Paul’s companion, and the writer of the Third Gospel (*Adversus Haereses*, 3.1.1, 3.14.1). We find agreement with Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian (Guthrie, 114).

- a. **Quote:** “The third book of the Gospel, that according to Luke, the well-known physician Luke wrote in his own name....Moreover, the Acts of the Apostles are comprised by Luke in one book.”
– According to the *Muratorian Canon*, AD 180, (Kruger, 94).
 - b. **Apologetic:** While critical scholars are skeptical of Luke’s authorship, Guthrie questions why the early church would fictitiously assign a Gospel to an insignificant person like Luke? Why not attribute it to Paul, Timothy, Phillip, Barnabas, etc.?
2. **Date:** Like the other synoptic gospels, Luke was most likely written in the early AD 60s. This estimation corresponds to Jesus’ predictions about the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in AD 70. In addition, Carson notes that the book of Acts makes no mention of widespread persecution under Nero, the deaths of Peter and Paul, nor the destruction of the temple, all of which took place after AD 62. Therefore, it reasons that if Luke-Acts were a compilation, both were completed around AD 60 or earlier (Carson, 207).
 3. **Audience**
 - a. **Theophilus:** The immediate audience for Luke-Acts appears to be a man named “Theophilus.” Luke writes, “*It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught*” (1:3-4). The name Theophilus is a transliteration of the Greek phrase, “lover of God.” While some have suggested that Luke used this name merely as a

pseudonym to include all believers (i.e., lovers of God), Carson details that “the more natural interpretation is that Luke has a definite individual in view...this person’s name might have been Theophilus, or Luke might be using an alias to guard the person’s true identity” (Carson, 210). Likewise, since his name is qualified by “*most excellent*,” it could be that he was a person of high rank or status, perhaps a Roman governor or ruler, who converted to faith in Christ. Luke uses the same word (“*most excellent*,” Gk. “*kratiste*”) to describe the Roman rulers Felix (Acts 23:26) and Festus (Acts 26:25). Carson even suggests that Theophilus could have been Luke’s patron, the one who funded Luke’s writing project (Carson 210).

- b. **Gentiles:** While the primary reader was Theophilus, there is no question that Luke meant for this work to be read by a wider Gentile audience, even Jews. Most likely, those in Rome and beyond had little access to reports and testimonies about Jesus, so Luke wanted to write a summation of all that took place in Jesus’ life and ministry. Luke being a Gentile himself may have added credibility to these claims.
4. **Purpose:** Like most ancient Greek writers, Luke states his purpose at the beginning before fleshing out the details. It’s clear that he wants to “write an orderly account,” giving “certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” In other words, Luke wants to give early believers reasonable assurance that everything they have learned about the life and ministry of Jesus is accurate and trustworthy. In an age filled with countless gods and religious claims, no one should question the good news about Jesus.

5. Characteristics

- a. **Length:** The Gospel of Luke is the longest book in the New Testament. When joined with Acts, these books comprised 27% of New Testament writings. Adding to the other Gospels, Luke gives the broadest range of Jesus’ life and ministry, giving the most details of the infancy narratives and concluding with his ascension. Chronologically, it’s the most complete Gospel. Luke also contains more parables than the other Gospels.
- b. **Content:** While Luke contains familiar material found in the other Gospels, there seems to be a focus on Jesus’ concern for the poor, women, children, the sick, outcasts, and others of low status in society (Köstenberger, 257). Jesus is described as a “*friend of sinners*” who came “*to seek and save the lost*” (Luke 19:10).
- c. **Universalism:** Since Luke’s Gospel was written primarily to a Gentile audience, it’s no surprise that he emphasizes the universal aspects of the gospel. For example, he records the angel’s goodwill message directed to “*all men*” (2:14); Simeon declares that Jesus will be “*a light to the Gentiles*” (2:32); the Samaritans are placed on the same level as Jews (9:54); he includes two illustrations where Jesus referenced non-Jews from the Old Testament (the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian (4:25-27); like Matthew, the great commission is directed to “*all nations*” (24:47).
- d. **Prayer:** Luke seems to place a special emphasis on prayer. He records nine prayers of Jesus, with only two being recorded in the other Gospels. Two of Jesus’ parables involved prayer. He describes Jesus finding quiet places to pray alone.