

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Date: ~65 A.D.

Author: Attributed to John Mark, a companion of Peter and Paul.

Audience: The church in Rome—and probably those who had not heard the story of Jesus before.

Big Idea: Mark captures Jesus, the Son of God, as a man on a mission towards the cross in order to save us from our sins. About 90% of Mark's content appears in the other three Gospels, but the book makes an ideal starting place for someone who knows little about Jesus. Its style—simple sentences, without complicated transitions or long speeches—makes understanding easier. In fact, Mark was probably written as a missionary book to people who knew next to nothing about the new Christian faith.¹

Key Themes:

The good news is Jesus Christ

Victory is found through surrender

Discipleship is costly and includes suffering

Outline:

1. Prologue: Baptism and Temptation (1:1-13)
2. Beginning of Public Ministry
 - A. Gathering Crowds (1:16-45)
 - B. Initial Opposition to Jesus (2:1-3:6)
 - C. The Following (3:7-35)
3. The Kingdom of God Made Known
 - A. Jesus' teaching in parables (4:1-34)
 - B. Jesus' power in healing (4:35-6:6a)
 - C. Jesus' extending to the Gentiles (6:6b-8:26)
4. The Way of Discipleship
 - A. The Cost of Discipleship (8:27-38)
 - B. Transfiguration (9:1-13)
 - C. Jesus prepares his disciples (9:14-10:52)
5. Preparing to Die
 - A. Entering Jerusalem (11-12)
 - B. Last Supper to Crucifixion (14-15)
6. Resurrection (16)

¹ from *The Student Bible, Zondervan (1992)*. 888.

PHILIPPIANS

Date ~62A.D.

Author: Paul, joined by his younger companion Timothy

Audience: Mostly Gentile (non-Jewish) church in Philippi founded by Paul, Timothy and Saul.

Big Idea: This letter to his dear friends reveals the heart of Paul and his joy-filled recognition that Christ's crucifixion and resurrection are the greatest gifts that allow us to be both humble and confident in who we are in Him. This joy makes the rest of life's successes look like rubbish.

Themes: Christ is the key to all of life from the beginning to the end; Knowing Christ will cause us to become like him his death (Sacrificing oneself for others); Rejoicing in Christ even in suffering in order to endure the race for the final prize of eternity with God.

Outline:

1. Prologue: Greetings, Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:1-11)
2. Report From the Field
 - A. Paul's Circumstance (1:12-26)
 - B. Philippian's Circumstance (1:27-30)
3. Call for Humility: Christ Hymn (2:1-18)
4. Sending of Missionaries
 - A. Timothy (2:19-24)
 - B. Epaphroditus (2:25-29)
5. Warnings and Appeals
 - A. No confidence in the flesh (3:1-11)
 - B. Press on Towards the Goal (3:12-4:1)
 - C. Unity and Joy (4:2-9)
 - D. Thanks for their gifts (4:10-20)
 - E. Final Greetings (4:21-23)

EPHESIANS

Date: ~60 A.D.

Author: Paul

Audience: The church in Ephesus—perhaps 4 years after its launch.

Big Idea: Jesus Christ reveals the mystery of God's purpose in order to equip Christians to share His grace with the world.

Themes:

- Salvation comes from faith not works
- Grace is given to all through Jesus Christ
- The Spirit equips us to live out grace

Outline

1. Prologue:
 - A. Greetings (1:1-14)
 - B. Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:15-23)
2. Faith In Christ
 - A. Alive in Christ (2:1-10)
 - B. One in Christ (2:11-22)
3. Paul as Preacher and Prayerer
 - A. Mystery Revealed (3:1-13)
 - B. Prayer (3:14-21)
4. Maintaining Unity
 - A. Unity of the Body (4:1-16)
 - B. Living as Children of the Light (4:17-20)
5. Household Code (Chapter 5:21-6:9)
6. Conclusion: Stand Firm in Faith (6:10-20)

PSALMS

Date: Range 1000 B.C. to 400 B.C.

Author: Primarily David, but some are attributed to others.

Audience: Considered Israel's "Hymn" Book, especially after Exile.

Big Idea: This is a collection of songs written by people during times of great joy and sorrow; while many were written during a better season of the life of Israel, they were most useful for the people who had been dislocated from their homes.

Themes: Trust & Praise to God for his goodness; lament over wickedness and injustice; God as King.

Advice for Reading the Psalms: The psalms were written to be sung—one by one—and not in order. Therefore, exploring the different styles of the Psalms helps to understand how they would have been used and are most useful now.

Classification of the Psalms

Hymns: 8, 19, 29, 33, 65, 67, 68, 96, 100, 103-5, 111, 113, 114, 117, 135, 145-150

God's Enthronement: 93, 97, 99

Individual Complaint: 3, 5-7, 13, 17, 22, 25-28, 32, 38, 39, 42, 43, 51, 54-57, 61, 63, 64, 69-71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140-143

Communal Complaint: 44, 74, 79, 80, 83, 89

Thanksgiving: 18, 30, 34, 40, 41, 66, 92, 116, 118, 138

Royal Psalms: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144

Wisdom Psalms: 1, 14, 37, 73, 91, 112, 119, 128²

² John Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*.

JOHN

Date: ~90-95 A.D.

Author: "The beloved disciple" who mostly likely is John the son of Zebedee.

Audience:

Big Idea: John's Gospel tells the Jesus story from a different lens than the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), by focusing on the theological implications of His life, death and resurrection rather than including many of Jesus's parables or even the Lord's Prayer.

Themes: Jesus is the Logos (Word) and Light of God that existed from the beginning and brought all things to a climactic end ("It is finished"). Marked by Seven Signs and "I am" Statements, John echoes the creation story by revealing Jesus' power to do miraculous works and His claim to be the I AM—the name God told Moses to call Him. Emphasis upon discipleship as remaining in the presence of God (Come and See) and bearing fruit (Go and Be).

Outline

1. Prologue: Chapter 1
2. Seven Signs and "I am" Statements"
 - A. Sign 1: Water into Wine (2:1-11)
 - B. Sign 2: Healing the Officials Son (4:46-54)
 - C. Sign 3: Healing the Sick Man (5:1-9)
 - D. Sign 4: Feeding of 5,000 (6:5-13)
 - E. Sign 5: Walking on Water (6:16-20)
 - I) I AM: The Bread of Life (6:25-59)
 - II) I AM: The Light of the World (8:12)
 - F. Sign 6: The Man Born Blind: (9:1-7)
 - III) I AM: The Gate (10:7)
 - IV) I AM: Good Shepherd (10:11)
 - G. Sign 7: Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)
 - V) I AM: The Resurrection and Life (11:25)
3. The Passion
 - A. Preparing to Die (11:45-12:50)
 - B. Washing Disciples Feet (13:1-17)
 - C. Long Table Talk with His Disciples (13:18-16:33)
 - VI) I AM: The Way (14:6)
 - VII) I AM: The Vine (15:1)
 - D. Jesus Prayer (17:1-26)
 - E. Slain and Raised Lamb (18:1-20:31)
4. Epilogue (21:1-25)

GENESIS

Historical Focus: Creation to Joseph in Egypt (1600 BC)

Big Idea: The Creator God becomes invested in the lives of His creation even though they rebelled against Him, thereby beginning the Gospel story of Redemption.

Themes: God is both a transcendent and personal deity, who created human beings to be His image bearers. God's Creation is corrupted by the misdeeds of humanity. God mercifully establishes covenant relationships with His creation. God intervenes into the fullness of humanity by choosing a man and his family—Abraham to become his children.

"For modern readers Genesis might appear to be a strange book beginning as it does with God and creation and ending with Joseph in a coffin in Egypt! But that strangeness is evidence that even though it has integrity as a book in its own right (careful structure and organization), it is at the same time intended to set the whole biblical story in motion."³

Outline

1. Creation Accounts
 - A. Cosmic View (1:1-2:3)
 - B. View from a Garden (2:4-3:24)
2. Pre-Abraham History
 - A. Cain and Abel (4)
 - B. Noah Narrative (5-10)
 - C. Babel (11)
3. Patriarchs
 - A. Abraham (12-25)
 - I) The Call of Abram (12)
 - II) Alternate Character: Lot (13-14)
 - III) God's Covenant With Abram/Abraham (15)
 - IV) Alternate Character: Hagar (16)
 - B. Issac
 - I) Arrival (21:1-7)
 - II) Alternate Character: Ishmael (21:8-21)
 - III) "Akedah": Abraham's Test (22)
 - IV) Rebekah (24)
 - C. Jacob (26-36)
 - I) Birth of Twins (25:19-34)
 - II) Isaac's Blessing (27)
 - III) Alternate Character: Laban (27:41-31:55)
 - IV) Alternate Character: Esau (36:1-37:1)

³ Gordon Fee, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

D. Joseph (37-50)

- I) Dreamer sold into Slavery (37:2-41:40)
- II) Joseph in Charge of Egypt (41:41-45:28)
- III) Family Reunion (46-50)

ACTS

Date: 64A.D. or after Jerusalem's fall (70A.D.)

Author: Attributed to Luke, a sometime companion of Paul; it is the only Gentile author of the Bible.

Audience: It is directed toward Theophilus (literally "God lover" in greek) as a detailed account; implied readers are Gentile Christians.

Big Idea: This is Luke's sequel to the Gospel account of Jesus that focuses on the Acts of the Holy Spirit to catalyze the movement of 11 disciples from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth.

Themes: God's Messiah has come first to the chosen people of Israel in order to reach the Gentiles; The ministry of Jesus is continued through ordinary people empowered by the Holy Spirit; The church—gathered body of believers—is the vehicle through which God will accomplish His mission; The gospel will be accepted in joy by some and rejected in anger by others.

Outline: *(Based on Acts 1:8)*

1. *Coming of the Holy Spirit (1:1-2:41)*
2. *From Jerusalem (2:42-6:7)*
3. *Scattered Into Judea and Samaria (6:8-9:31)*
4. *To the Gentiles*
 - A. *Asia (12:25-16:5)*
 - B. *Europe (16:16-19:20)*
 - C. *Rome (19:21-28:30)*