

An Identity Commentary on the Gospel of Mark

And looking up he said "I see men, that as trees I see walking!" [Mark 8:24]

An Introduction to The Gospel of Mark - Part 1: What is the Source of the Gospel?

Here we are going to endeavor to present a commentary on the Gospel of Mark, which we pray is the fruitful beginning of many such projects. The reason we have chosen to present Mark before Matthew is not because we believe it was penned first, but because it shares most of its accounts with Matthew and Luke. By presenting Mark's comparatively concise gospel first, we hope to establish a foundation for future commentaries while also avoiding any unnecessary repetition.

While many modern critics try to reposition Mark as the earliest gospel, scrutiny exposes their hypocritical methods as nothing more than vain attempts to undermine Christianity. The claims of the scoffers are entirely unfounded, yet unfortunately popular. Therefore, we will begin by deconstructing these misconceptions about Mark, and then discuss the eyewitness source of the gospels. Through this we will demonstrate how the preponderance of evidence points to Mark being written third, address the so-called 'synoptic problem', and from there we will delve into the origin and composition of Mark in detail.

The Dubious Presumption of 'Marcan Priority'

It is unanimously attested to by all of the early Christian writers that Matthew wrote his gospel first, and that is notably significant considering how often those writers disagreed on other issues. There isn't anything at all which can be found to discredit their testimony, and for this reason the veracity of Matthew's antecedence was never challenged until the shifting politics of the 19th century made it a necessity.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th century Marcan priority was being popularized among academics as part of their broader efforts to address the so-called 'Synoptic Problem' - which really isn't a problem at all. It is only a question as to why the three synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke have so much material in common, and the answer is relatively simple for those who are willing to follow where the evidence leads. But for those who found that answer particularly inconvenient or undesirable, it was suggested that the synoptic question was indicative of extensive copying instead, and this presupposition makes Mark stand out like a sore thumb, as it is shorter and has little unique material.

Around 97% of the passages in Mark are also found in one of the other two synoptic gospels, so in their reasoning how then could Mark have copied from Matthew? It is difficult to rationalize why he would have chosen to retract so much material while adding only a small handful of new accounts in return. This peculiarity was used to support the theory that Matthew and Luke copied from Mark and are therefore redactions of his gospel.

But pulling Mark forward presented a difficult conundrum for them as to how Matthew and Luke agree whenever Mark is not able to be followed. Because they had no where left to turn, from the recesses of the abyss a new phantom manuscript (a century later dubbed 'Q' from *quelle* - German for *source*) was conjectured to have been the second source for both Matthew and Luke. This facile theory eventually became popular enough to balloon Marcan priority into what is now known as the "two source" theory (Mark and Q).

There is of course no credible evidence that "Q" ever existed, and none of the early Christian writers (as prolific as they were) provide any credible acknowledgement of its existence. It is a mind bender to imagine that Q was secretive enough to have eluded all the early writers but somehow still influential enough to be a source for both Matthew and Luke. It also must have vanished back into the abyss as soon as those gospels were written, which is awfully convenient. The more critical scholar will confess

that there is no evidence that the golden calf of Q ever existed,¹ and this may be an unfortunate reality for some, but it doesn't trouble us at all. We will return to Q later when we propose our answer to the Synoptic question.

The case for Marcan priority isn't any stronger without Q and can be soundly refuted by looking at the ordering of events in the gospels and comparing where they differ. We are only entertaining the presuppositions of copying in order to show how the scoffers fail, and by looking at the attached chart, we can see that Matthew only follows the same order as Mark where Luke doesn't - and vice-versa.

This begs the question: was there an exhaustive and complex collaboration between Matthew and Luke, with the two men sitting in the same room as they meticulously divided Mark? If that is too hard to believe, then perhaps the third author had the scrolls laid out in front of him as he painstakingly deliberated to follow Mark only in the places where the second author didn't? But that too is needlessly complex and superfluous, it is vain to imagine the gospel writers would go through such an excruciating effort for no apparent reason at all!²

There is of course another possibility, which is that Mark was written third and naturally balances the ordering between the other two gospels. This hypothesis is not complex and neither is it hard to imagine, and it can even be supported with a technical analysis, as New Testament scholar Malcolm Lowe reached the following tally upon calculating the probability of priority for each of Mark's shared accounts one by one:

Mark written first: 57/90
Mark written third: 88/90

While we certainly do not prefer or even respect this methodology, it does serve to demonstrate that the evidence in our favor is not restricted to any peculiar method or reason, and that even the very means of textual criticism which the scoffers use can be used against them. (The technicality behind Lowe's algebraic formula is available in the footnotes for those who are curious.)³

Now considering the dearth of historical evidence for Marcan priority and Q, most of the arguments today are structured around obscure and specious methods of counting or analyzing how words are patterned. But these deceptive methods are reversible, for example it is often claimed that you can see Mark's language being borrowed by Matthew, but you can also say that Matthew's language is being borrowed by Mark! The assumption is reversible and argument mute - they just *assume* Mark was written first.

Another is the so-called 'criterion of embarrassment', which is aptly labeled because it should be embarrassing if anyone actually uses it as a definitive measurement. It posits that the later gospels would omit anything which they found to be 'offensive' from the earlier ones, because that is what the scoffers would do. This is of course a presumptuous claim, especially considering that the Bible is never shy to proclaim things which the society finds offensive, and we are confident that not one writer of the Scriptures was ashamed of its testimony. But the motives of the scoffers

SYNOPTIC ARRANGEMENT		Matthew	Mark	Luke
The Baptist and Jesus' Baptism	T1	3:1-17	1:1-11	3:1-22
Temptation		4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13
Into Galilee		4:12-17	1:14-15	4:1-13
Call of Four Disciples		4:18-22	1:16-20	
Events at Capernaum			1:21-38	4:31-43
A preaching tour	4:23		1:39	4:44
The Leper			1:40-45	5:12-16
Five Occasions of Controversy			2:1-3:6	5:17-6:11
Healing of Multitudes	4:24-25		3:7-12	(6:17-19)
Calling of the Twelve			3:13-19	(6:12-16)
<i>Sermon on the Mount</i> (Matthew) OF and B		5:1-7:27		
<i>Sermon on the Plain</i> (Luke) B				6:20-49
Matthew's narrative continued	7:28-8:34			
Luke's narrative continued				7:1-17
<i>The Apostolic Commission</i> (Matthew)	9:35-10:42			
Matthew's narrative continued	11:1-12:21			
Luke's narrative continued				7:18-8:3
"He is beside himself"			(3:20-21)	
On Collusion with Satan	T2	12:22-30	3:22-27	
Sin against the Holy Spirit		12:31-37	3:28-30	
Jesus' True Kindred		12:46-50	3:31-35	
The Parable Collection				
Parable of the Sower and comments	13:1-23	4:1-20	8:4-15	
Lamp under Bushel/Bed		4:21-25	8:16-18	
Parable of Seed Growing Secretly		(4:26-29)		
Parable of Mustard Seed	13:31-32	4:30-32		
Use of parables	13:34-35	4:33-34		
<i>The Parable Collection continued</i> (Matthew)	13:36-52			
Across the Sea and back		4:35-5:43	8:22-56	
Jesus Rejected at Nazareth	13:53-58	6:1-6a		
Commissioning the Twelve	T3		6:6b-13	9:1-6
Opinions concerning Jesus		14:1-2	6:14-16	9:7-9
Death of the Baptist		14:3-12	6:17-29	
Return of the Apostles			6:30-31	9:10a
The Five Thousand		14:13-21	6:32-44	9:10b-17
Walking on the Water, and Healings		14:22-36	6:45-56	
Defilement, Traditional and Real		15:1-20	7:1-23	
Syro-Phoenician (Canaanite) Woman		15:21-28	7:24-30	
The Deaf-Mute (Matthew, Healings)		(15:29-31)	7:31-37	
The Four Thousand		15:32-39	8:1-10	
Pharisees: Sign and Leaven		16:1-12	8:11-21	
The Blind Man			(8:22-26)	
The Confession of Peter		16:13-20	8:27-30	9:18-21
First Prediction of the Passion		16:21-23	8:31-33	9:22
"If any man will come after me"		16:24-28	8:34-9:1	9:23-27
The Transfiguration		17:1-9	9:2-10	9:28-36
The Coming of Elijah		17:10-13	9:11-13	
The Epileptic Boy		17:14-21	9:14-29	9:37-43a
Second Prediction of the Passion		17:22-23	9:30-32	9:43b-45
True Greatness		18:1-5	9:33-37	9:46-48
The Strange Exorcist			9:38-41	9:49-50
Warnings against Temptation		18:6-9	9:42-50	
<i>Discourse on True Greatness</i> (continued)		18:10-35		
Departure to Judea		19:1-2	10:1	9:51
Luke's Central Section OF				9:52-18:14
On Divorce and Adultery	T4	19:3-12	10:2-12	
Jesus blesses the Children		19:13-15	10:13-16	18:15-17
On Riches and Discipleship		19:16-29	10:17-31	18:18-30
Third Prediction of the Passion		20:17-19	10:32-34	18:31-34
The Sons of Zebedee		20:20-28	10:35-45	
The Blind Bartimaeus		20:29-30	10:46-52	18:35-43
The Triumphal Entry		21:1-9	11:1-10	19:28-40
Jesus in Jerusalem		21:10-11	11:11	
Cursing of the Fig Tree		21:18-19a	11:12-14	
Cleansing of the Temple			11:15-17	19:45-46
Conspiracy against Jesus			11:18-19	19:47-48
The Fig Tree Withered		21:19b-22	11:20-26	
The Question about Authority		21:23-27	11:27-33	20:1-8
Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen		21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19
Questions on Tribute and Resurrection		22:13-33	12:13-27	20:20-40
The Great Commandment		22:34-40	12:28-34	
Questions about David's Son		22:41-46	12:35-37a	20:41-44
Woes to Scribes and Pharisees		23:1-36	12:37b-40	20:45-47
The Widow's Mite			12:41-44	21:1-4
The Eschatological Discourse				
Prediction about the Temple etc.		24:1-22	13:1-20	21:5-24
False Christs and False Prophets		24:23-28	13:21-23	
The Coming of the Son of Man		24:29-36	13:24-32	21:25-33
Conclusion: "Take Heed, Watch"			(13:33-37)	
Discourse continued (Matthew)		24:37-25:46		21:34-36
Conclusion (Luke)				21:37-38
Jesus' Death Predicted	T5	26:1-5	14:1-2	22:1-2
Anointing at Bethany		26:6-13	14:3-9	
Betrayal by Judas		26:14-16	14:10-11	22:3-6
Preparation for the Passover		26:17-20	14:12-17	22:7-14
Jesus Foretells his Betrayal		26:21-25	14:18-21	
The Last Supper		26:26-35	14:22-31	22:15-34
Gethsemane		26:36-56	14:32-50	22:39-53
The Young Man who Fleed			14:51-52	
Jesus before the Sanhedrin		26:57-68	14:53-65	22:54-55
Pater's Denials		26:69-75	14:66-72	22:56-62
Jesus Delivered to Pilate		27:1-2	15:1	23:1
Trial before Pilate		27:11-14	15:2-5	23:2-5
Jesus Condemned to Death		27:15-26	15:6-15	23:17-25
Jesus Mocked by Soldiers		27:27-31a	15:16-20a	
The Road to Golgotha		27:31b-32	15:20b-21	23:26-32
Crucifixion		27:33-43	15:22-32a	23:33-38
The Two Thieves		27:44	15:32b	23:39-43
Death of Jesus		27:45-54	15:33-39	23:44-48
Witnesses to the Crucifixion		27:55-56	15:40-41	23:49
Burial of Jesus		27:57-61	15:42-47	23:50-56
Women at the Tomb		28:1-8	16:1-8	24:1-9
The Last Twelve Verses				(16:9-20)

¹ Michael Goulder, Thomas J. Mosbo, Mark Goodacre

² We can also notice that Matthew and Luke never agree in order *against* Mark, which is incredibly damning towards the Q construct. For this reason some of the more stubborn critics have persisted upon there being multiple Q manuscripts, which only exacerbates the aforementioned issues with Q.

³ [The Demise of Arguments from Order for Markan Priority](#), Malcolm Lowe (Jan. 1982)

are as transparent as glass and their hypothesis is just about as fragile.

The most common example given is that Mark records the family of Christ calling Him “insane”.⁴ In regards to the account, it is not apparently clear if they said this in ignorance or because they thought it was an expedient way to attempt to pull Christ out from the crowd. Regardless, John provides a relatively similar circumstance when he notes that some of Christ’s brothers did not believe in Him.⁵ It was also John that recorded the words of Christ concerning the symbolic eating of His flesh and blood,⁶ and this is certainly more significant than anything in Mark. So considering all this supposedly ‘offensive’ material, was John written first?

(It is also hard to think of anything in Mark which is more charged than John 8:44 or Luke 19:27. Was it Luke then which was written first? Not many are brazen enough to be branded upon those claims, but if the method can be used to uphold Marcan priority, then they’re all for it.)

Of course, what is “embarrassing” is entirely subjective and reliant on whoever determines the criteria, so we can see how this method too is reversible. If anything, the honesty in how the gospels relate their bolder accounts is a testimony towards their authenticity, and there is nothing offensive to the Christian man in the Scriptures. Perhaps those who love the society are offended, but scoffers don’t know how to read words, only how to count them.

Mark 8:38 For whoever should be ashamed of Me and My words among this adulterous and sinful race, also the Son of Man shall be ashamed of him, when he should come in the honor of His Father with the holy messengers!"

We’ll offer ‘editorial fatigue’ as one last example of their defective methods, which has grown in popularity presumably because the scoffers are fatigued and helpless. This one conjectures that an author borrowing from a source might edit or clarify material as he goes along, but then later forget about his edits and revert back to the original wording of the source (maybe he exchanged *king* for *tetrarch* somewhere but then later reverted back to writing *king*).⁷ Another alleged form of editorial fatigue is that an author may refer back to a passage in the original source which they forgot to give context for in their own. The idea is that in doing these things, the author would show which work he was copying from. Of course, it’s hard to imagine that someone carefully writing the most important work of their life would have the memory of a goldfish and goof up like this, but the desperation of the critics has made them hare-brained.

As you would expect, this argument is reversible and you can find an equal amount of material pointing in either direction,⁸ so this method is just as contrived and circular as the ones which came before. It is simply taken for granted that Mark was written first, and we should wonder why the scoffers go to all these fallacious lengths instead of just being deductive in their reasoning.

It isn’t difficult to conclude that there may be an agenda in the works, and we have already discussed some of the political motivations. We will see how they go a little deeper than what we already described.

The Political Origins of Marcan Priority

Marcan Priority was first proposed in the late 18th century by the German protestant theologian Gottlob Christian Storr, and it was met with very little approval at the time. It wasn’t until Ferdinand Christian Baur founded the Tübingen School of Theology and politicized the way in which the New Testament is studied that this hypothesis was even seriously considered. His methods were the groundwork for many of the fallacious arguments used today.

The Tübingen school was attractive for Baur’s contemporary David Friedrich Strauss, who later wrote a book claiming that the miracles of the gospels were embellishments and not representative of the

⁴ Mark 3:21

⁵ John 7:5

⁶ John 6:53

⁷ Matthew 14:1, 14:9 is used as an argument that Matthew copied from Mark 6, who calls Herod *king* instead of *tetrarch*.

⁸ [The Modified Augustinian Hypothesis \(MAH\) regarding Gospel Origins](#), James Deardorff. (Again, while we don’t agree with most of what the author says, it does serve to show how editorial fatigue is as reversible as any other method)

historical Christ. Strauss was a controversial figure despised by many of his peers, and effigies of him were burned by the common people during a festival in Switzerland; we would agree with the crowds that this was an appropriate response to his ideas.

While Strauss never seemed to have endorsed Marcan priority, it was undoubtedly attractive for later men who shared Strauss' views. Mark has no account of the virgin birth (which Strauss considered legendary) or the resurrection appearances, while Matthew has both these things. It was difficult for scoffers to acknowledge with strained lips that such miracles are recorded in the earliest account, so they had to have Mark pigeon-holed forward. These necessities have led to it being elevated as an idol among the scoffers. (Mark of course includes many wonderful miracles, such as the raising of Jairus' daughter, the transfiguration on the Mount, walking on water, countless healings, and it also records Christ foretelling His resurrection three times. Again, these men were better at counting words than they are at reading them.)

Propaganda only becomes more pervasive the longer it is taught, and those who are rolled through the machine are taught Marcan Priority by professors who learned the same concept from their own teachers. Graduates in any field are inclined to adopt the prevailing thought, especially for areas outside of their expertise, and to challenge the status-quo often amounts to vocational suicide given that your livelihood is determined in a "publish or perish" environment. While there are more volatile issues than Marcan Priority, most men are hesitant to become even the slightest pariah.

This is the same fear of the Jew which silenced many Israelites among the Pharisees who believed in Christ.⁹ These are the same lies which anthropologists claim that gender doesn't exist,¹⁰ even though they spend their lives looking at skeletons. Modern academia is a Jewish cancer, but Christians should not fear their fear, nor should they be deceived by these institutions which are bereft of the fear of God.

The historical testimony that Matthew was written first is overwhelming, and there would never be any debate if it were a Classical work of Greek literature. Matthew was also the primary gospel quoted by early Christians: it did not inexplicably supplant the first gospel - it was the first gospel. It is only because it's the Scriptures that scoffers are adamant to brand their consciences with iron. Marcan priority is a form of Biblical minimalism for the New Testament, it is unfounded and needs games of counting words as a form of life support. Their arguments are all reversible and fallacious, and they are all vanity, and many of those who support them are likely walking vanities themselves.

The Transmission of the Gospel

The historical criteria is much more valuable than the increasingly desperate methods of the scoffers, and it actually aligns with the internal evidence found in the Scriptures instead of contradicting it. The apostles emphasized that they were eyewitnesses of Christ,¹¹ and the character of the gospels indisputably aligns with their testimony.

From the words of Christ Himself:

John 15:27 But you also shall testify, because you are with Me from the beginning.

And as Peter wrote in his second surviving epistle:

2 Peter 1:16: For not following after cleverly devised myths have we made known to you the power and presence of our Prince Yahshua Christ, but having been spectators of His majesty.

These spectators of Christ had arranged many reports, and men such as Luke who had never seen the Prince compiled their testimonies as well as those of other eyewitnesses.

Luke 1:1-4: Seeing that many have taken in hand to arrange a report concerning those matters fully ascertained among us, just as they who from the beginning having been eyewitnesses and attendants of the Word transmitted them to us, it seemed good also to me, having closely followed from the first in all

⁹ John 12:42-43

¹⁰ <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/1515521/skeletons-dont-have-gender-richard-iii-would-disagree/e>

¹¹ John 21:24 | 1 John 1:1-4 | Acts 1:22, 4:20, 5:32, 10:39 | Luke 24:48 - et al

things accurately, to write to you methodically, most excellent lover of Yahweh, that you may decide concerning the certainty of the accounts which you were taught. (CNT)

It is possible and even likely that Luke used Matthew's gospel as a resource, but the different details which Luke provides in their shared accounts shows that he consulted the testimonies of others, as he himself implied in his introduction. One of these would have been Mariam the mother of Christ, whom he records as having "kept all these words in her heart".¹² Luke, who was an exacting and thorough historian, must have either interviewed her or recorded some of her memories at some point. She would have been the only firsthand source for much of what is related in Luke's opening two chapters, since other witnesses such as Elizabeth, Zecharias, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna were most certainly all passed away by the time he wrote his gospel.

Though Luke likely used Matthew as a reference (and that negates the need for Q), it was certainly not some systematic operation - otherwise the shared accounts between the two gospels would have been identical.

The critics attempt to explain these different perspectives away with the phantom Q, but in their customary hypocrisy they also try to use Q to explain why they agree. They cannot have it both ways! How many Qs were there and where was this secretive library located? Why don't we see ever such harmony in the fraudulent apocryphal gospels? Was Q only reserved for the apostles then? But why would eyewitnesses need it?

The character of the gospels and their subtle differences in detail are indeed indicative of human memory, as different men will recall different details concerning the same event. The fact that they present all these details without ever contradicting one another multiplies their veracity fourfold. The truth is simple. How easy it is to love the truth!

The scoffers who can count words but are unable to read them often resort to calling these different perspectives "contradictions". They are indeed fools, because one man being mentioned doesn't negate the possibility of there being two. And if Christ is recorded as having gone to two different places, then perhaps one was the ultimate destination, and the other was the next point on the road. It is arrogant to assume that varying perspectives are contradictions when they can be made to work harmoniously.

One of the most enjoyable parts of studying the gospels is seeing how they weave together so beautifully. A simple and excellent example is the feeding of the five thousand, which is recorded in all four Gospels at Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-14.

Every gospel except Luke mentions that the people sat on the grass, and John notes that there was much of it.¹³ This may appear like an insignificant detail, but it suggests that it was during the rainy winter season, and this is confirmed once we see in John that it was indeed the Passover,¹⁴ which is in April on our modern calendars. This also explains why Mark wrote that there were many people coming and going.¹⁵ Josephus estimated that perhaps 2.7 million were present in Jerusalem for the Passover in 70 AD.¹⁶

One other example. It is only recorded in John that Yahshua specifically asked Phillip where they could buy food,¹⁷ and John mentioned that Phillip was from Bethsaida elsewhere in his gospel.¹⁸ Luke records that this miracle had occurred in or around that very same town,¹⁹ so Phillip would have been expected to be familiar with the local markets, and this was likely part of the reason as to why Christ chose to ask him specifically.

Yahweh willing, we look forward to presenting many other harmonies as we go through Mark, of which some are quite subtle and take more time to elaborate upon. These are sometimes called "undesigned coincidences" and they are emblematic of eyewitness testimony.

¹² Luke 2:19

¹³ John 6:10

¹⁴ John 6:4

¹⁵ Mark 6:31

¹⁶ Wars, 6.9.3.

¹⁷ John 6:5-6

¹⁸ John 1:44, 12:21

¹⁹ Luke 9:10

Just earlier in this presentation we looked at a chart which showed the ordering of accounts in the synoptic gospels, and there are two things which should be kept in mind if we are going to ask why they are sometimes ordered differently.

The first is that many passages and parables throughout the gospels are placed in sequences according to their theme or didactic value, allowing them to impart even more resounding lessons. The second is that Christ repeated many of His teachings at diverse times and places. For instance, the famous Olivet discourse is recorded in all three synoptic gospels, but Luke describes Christ giving a shorter version of it in Luke 17 before the actual discourse is recorded at Luke 21. This shows us that a teaching of this general theme was at minimum given on two separate occasions.

John Mark's Authorship

We will now take some time to discuss the origin of Mark's gospel. Virtually all of the early Christian writers agree that John Mark is the author of this gospel, and that he compiled it from the preaching of Peter, and we will see as we continue just how perfectly this aligns with its peculiar style.

The earliest surviving witness regarding Mark's authorship is Papias, who wrote in the early 2nd century,²⁰ and while his works are now lost we do read a quote of his from Eusebius:

"And the presbyter said this: Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, **wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered**. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities, but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements." (Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History, 3:39)

So Papias relates the testimony he received that Mark was an interpreter of Peter and that Mark carefully compiled his gospel from whatever he remembered from Peter's preaching.

Papias wrote that he was keen to learn what the ambassadors said from those who heard them, and this makes Papias' early witness to the authorship of Mark that much more notable. This we see in another quotation of Papias from Eusebius:

"If, then, any one came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders — what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter [elder] John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice." (3.39.4)

Now Eusebius also quoted the 2nd century writer Clement of Alexandria, who had this to say concerning the Gospel of Mark:

"The Gospels containing the genealogies, he says, were written first. The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, **many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out**. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it. When Peter learned of this, he neither directly forbade nor encouraged it. [...]" (Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History, 6.14-15)

So Clement of Alexandria agrees that Mark was a follower of Peter and that he compiled his gospel from Peter's preaching, adding that Mark was allegedly encouraged by many to do so. Clement also expresses his belief that Matthew and Luke were written first, which is certainly where the evidence leads.

Continuing with Eusebius, we see that he also quotes the 3rd century writer Origen:

"The second is by Mark, who composed it according to the instructions of Peter, who in his Catholic epistle acknowledges him as a son, saying, 'The church that is at Babylon elected together with you, salutes you, and so does Marcus, my son.'" (Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History, 6.25.5)

²⁰ Papias was allegedly a hearer of the apostle John and companion of Polycarp. (Against Heresies, 5.33.4 | Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 3.39.7)

So Origen doesn't agree with Clement concerning the ordering of the gospels, but does agree concerning the origin of Mark. Another witness concerning the gospel's authorship is found in the 2nd century writer Irenaeus:

"Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church [this is extremely doubtful]. **After their departure**, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, **did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter**. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3.1)

We see with Irenaeus yet another witness that Mark was Peter's interpreter, and that he compiled his gospel from Peter's preaching. Irenaeus also claims that Mark did so after Peter died, and that certainly seems to be the case.

Another witness is the 2nd century writer Justin Martyr:

"And when it is said that He changed the name of one of the apostles to Peter; and when it is written in the memoirs of him that this so happened, as well as that He changed the names of other two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means sons of thunder." (Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 106)

There is no doubt that Justin Martyr is referring to the Gospel of Mark here where he mentions the "memoirs of Peter" - as that is the only account which records that Christ labeled the sons of Zebedee with the name *Boanerges*.

There are other witnesses concerning Mark, but what we have presented should be more than sufficient for our purposes here. While these early historical testimonies are useful, this does not mean that we should ever use the early Christian writers as a source for any kind of doctrine. Apostolic Christianity was quickly judaized and paganized after the departure of the apostles - Scripture is the only legitimate source.

Now with all of the early writers unanimously agreeing that this gospel was written by Mark, it is important for us to see what the Scriptures inform us concerning his life.

Mark had a second name, John, as we read in Acts 12 and 15 that he is "Iohannes who is called Markos." Luke simply calls him John in Acts 13:5 and 13:13, and also just calls him Mark in Acts 15:39. He is only ever referred to as Mark in the surviving epistles of Paul and Peter. (Men in ancient times often went by more than one name, as there was no concept of a 'legal' name then, which today only exists as a means for the government to exact more control.)

Peter certainly affirms through his own words that he had a close bond with Mark, where he affectionately calls him "his son" in the salutation of his first surviving epistle.²¹ Peter being older than Mark, we can imagine that their friendship was somewhat similar to that of Paul and Timothy. Peter fled to the house of Mary the mother of Mark in Antioch after Yahweh sent a messenger to rescue him from prison there, so Peter must have known Mark from 41-44 AD²² at the very latest.

But it is possible that Peter was familiar with Mark from a much earlier time, given that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas,²³ who had joined the early Christian community before the martyrdom of Stephen.²⁴ Barnabas would come to be trusted among the brethren, as his confidence in Paul had apparently assuaged their initial fear of him when Paul came and tried to join the students in Jerusalem.²⁵ In fact, his name was Joseph but the ambassadors called him Barnabas, which means "son of consolation".

It is also noted by Luke that Barnabas was a Levite,²⁶ so it is possible that Mark was as well and this would fit well with his role as Peter's transcriber.²⁷

Mark traveled with Barnabas and Paul as an assistant during their journey through Cyprus (Acts 13:5-13) circa 44 AD. Barnabas himself was a Cypriot by birth, though he was evidently living in Judaea

²¹ 1 Peter 5:13

²² [Ordering and Chronology of the Epistles of Paul](#), William Finck (Christogenea.org)

²³ Col 4:10

²⁴ Acts 4:36-37

²⁵ Acts 9:27

²⁶ Acts 4:36

²⁷ It was not uncommon for Levites to be scribes in former times, and it is logical that many Levites during the time of Christ would have still been continuing the vocations of their fathers. 1 Chronicles 24:6, 2 Chronicles 34:13, Ezra 7:6

throughout the early years recorded in Acts. After journeying across the island they sailed to Pamphylia in Asia, and at that time Mark withdrew from them and returned to Jerusalem, which did not leave a good impression on Paul.

It is evident that Mark being a Hebrew had ties in Jerusalem, as well as ties in Antioch through his mother's residence there, and being a cousin of Barnabas he likely had family in Cyprus also, given that the island was easily accessible from Antioch. Simon of Cyrene, (the man who was selected to help Christ bear the cross), was in Antioch around the same time which Mark left there for Cyprus with Paul and Barnabas.²⁸ Mark is the only gospel writer who mentions Simon's sons,²⁹ and it is most certain that he knew them personally.

When Paul and Barnabas were later sent to Antioch after the council of Jerusalem in 48 AD, they at some point met with Mark again in the city. After spending considerable time there, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return to some of the cities in Asia where they announced the Gospel, and see how they were holding up. Barnabas wished for Mark to join them on this journey, but Paul was reluctant to bring him along when last time he withdrew from them in Pamphylia.

Act 15:36-39 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas: "Now turning we should visit the brethren throughout every city in which we declared the Word of the Prince, how they sustain." And Barnabas was resolved to take along also Iohannes who is called Markos. But Paul thought it fitting not to bring him along, who withdrew from them from Pamphylia and did not go together with them to the work. And there was irritation, consequently for them to depart from each other, and for Barnabas taking Markos to sail off to Kupros.

There is much which occurred during this time in Antioch which Luke does not record in Acts, and we see a glimpse of it in Paul's epistle to the Galatians:

Galatians 2:11-14 But when Kephas [Peter] had come to Antiocheia, I had confronted him personally because he was condemning himself: for before some who were to come from Iakobos, he had eaten in common with the Nations, but when they came he withdrew and separated himself, being in fear of those of the circumcised; and also the rest of the Judaeans had acted with him, so that even Barnabas had been led away by them in hypocrisy. But when I had seen that they did not walk uprightly, according to the truth of the good message, I had said to Kephas before them all: If you, being a Judaeans, live like a foreigner and not like a Judaeans, how do you compel the Nations to imitate the Judaeans?

This confrontation may have also influenced Paul's decision regarding Mark, who was associated with Peter and perhaps even caught up in his hypocrisy, but that is only conjecture. What we do know is that Paul's misgivings about bringing along Mark had irritated Barnabas to the point that he chose to separate from Paul completely, despite having traveled with him for some years now. Paul wrote to the Galatians that "even Barnabas had been led away by them in hypocrisy." so perhaps there was some lingering tension. Whatever the case may have been, Paul did not convey any hard feelings against Barnabas when writing his first surviving epistle to the Corinthians roughly eight years later, and his mention of Barnabas infers that he was known among the assembly in Corinth by that time.³⁰

Mark went with Barnabas to Cyprus after this disagreement in Antioch, while Paul selected Silas and together they passed through Syria and Cilicia.

Thirteen years later Paul was under house arrest in Rome, and writing to Timothy in his second surviving epistle to him, he asks that he come to Rome and adds that he bring Mark along with him, who was ostensibly in Ephesus with Timothy at the time of Paul's writing.

2 Timothy 4:11 Loukas alone is with me. Taking Markos, bring him with yourself, for he is useful to me for the ministry.

Regardless of whether Paul's original estimation was correct or not, a lot can change in thirteen years, and now Paul expresses confidence in Mark. (Ultimately Mark would be incredibly valuable for generations to come, given that he provided us a gospel.) We know that Timothy followed Paul's instructions faithfully and indeed brought Mark with him to Rome, because Mark is later mentioned in Paul's epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon.

²⁸ Acts 13:1

²⁹ Mark 15:21

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 9:6

Colossians 4:10 Aristarchos my fellow prisoner greets you, and Markos - the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions, if he should come to you, receive him),

Philemon 1:23-25 Greeting you are Epaphras my fellow prisoner in Christ Yahshua, Markos, Aristarchos, Demas and Loukas my colleagues. The favor of our Prince Yahshua Christ is with your spirits.

So Mark was reconciled with Paul and ostensibly accompanied him until his death under Nero, which wouldn't have been relatively long after these epistles were written.

The next and final place where we see Mark mentioned is in the salutation of Peter's first surviving epistle. The context of Peter's two surviving epistles suggests that he's writing to assemblies founded by Paul which were in need of guidance after his arrest. Because Mark is with Peter at this time and not in Ephesus or Rome, it is likely that Paul had been executed by the time Peter wrote these epistles. It is therefore evident that Mark traveled to Babylon to be with Peter not very long after Paul's death in 63 AD:

1 Peter 5:13 The elect woman in Babylon and Markos my son greet you.

There is a largely Catholic superstition that Peter uses Babylon as a coded reference to Rome, but the Catholics should be consistent and interpret the Mystery Babylon of Revelation as Rome as well - but they wouldn't dare.

There is no evidence in Scripture that Peter was ever in Rome, though there is a tradition of it in some of the early Christian writers. While Irenaeus wrote that Peter and Paul laid down the foundations of a singular "church" in Rome,³¹ Paul makes no mention of such an assembly in his epistle to the Romans. He instead implies in his epistle that there are several assemblies in Rome.³² In the lengthy salutation of that epistle Paul makes no mention of Peter, which makes sense given that he was an ambassador for the circumcised.³³ Furthermore, when Paul was later brought to Rome in chains, the leaders of the Judaeans there were eager to hear about Christianity from an apostle, which implies they didn't have the opportunity to do so until then.³⁴

Interpolations in favor of Catholic tradition are not far-fetched. The editors of "The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325" demonstrate that there were indeed some Roman Catholic interpolations of the works of Cyprian. The interpolations were supportive of later Catholic doctrine, and can be proven as corruptions when compared against the older manuscripts.

It does make sense that we see Peter in Babylon however, as he was an ambassador to the circumcised, and eastern Hebrew literature from the 2nd century does suggest a presence of circumcised Judaeans in Mesopotamia. In fact, the language of Mark resembles a Semitic use of Greek found in the texts of that region. It is possible that many of these Judaeans were descendants of those who didn't return to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. While the ancient city of Babylon itself was in ruins, the reference to Babylon is as much a reference to the district and towns around the ancient city, which were still inhabited.³⁵

Peter penned his second surviving epistle not long after this, and there the ambassador relates his absolute conviction that he will soon depart from his earthly tabernacle to be with Christ. It is not apparent how long after writing the epistle that Peter fell asleep.

2 Peter 1:13-15 Now I deem it righteous, for as long as I am in this tabernacle, to arouse you by reminder, knowing that soon is the putting aside of my tabernacle, just as also our Prince Yahshua Christ has shown me, and I shall also be diligent that on every occasion you have a mention to do these things after my departure.

We know that Christ told Peter that he would not want to be brought to the place where he would die (in some shape or form), and we can concede that it is *possible* that this was Rome. It is apparent from its Latinisms that Mark wrote his gospel with a Latin audience in mind, so it is possible Peter was somehow brought from Babylon to Rome and martyred there, and that Mark came with him.

³¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3.1

³² Romans 1:7

³³ Galatians 2:7

³⁴ Acts 28:17-28

³⁵ Some cities located around the site of ancient Babylon were flourishing, such as Seleucia and Ctesiphon. (Strabo's Geography 16.1 | Pliny's Natural History 6.30)

It also isn't unreasonable to conjecture that Mark returned to Rome after Peter's death, and then compiled his gospel from shorthand notes shortly thereafter, or even that he wrote the gospel in Babylon with ambitions to bring it back with him to Rome at a future date. Because we don't have enough precise information, it is folly to try to determine which one of these if any are closer to the truth.

Regardless of what may have transpired, Peter evidently never went to Rome before Paul's death in 63 AD (if he ever went at all).

There is one more thing which can be addressed concerning John Mark, which is the peculiar passage in his gospel (14:51-52) that mentions a man wrapped with a linen cloth in Gethesmane during the night of Christ's arrest. Ostensibly the man was dressed that way because he was just earlier bathing in the brook of Kedron running through the garden.³⁶ He is described by Mark as having fled naked upon being seized, and many have postulated that this man is Mark himself, who would have been in Jerusalem for the Passover.³⁷ This is a reasonable conjecture, and would explain why Mark takes the time to add this relatively minor detail. If he was indeed this man, then it is possible that he was a student of Christ, or perhaps even one of the seventy-two.³⁸

Dating Mark

There is not the slightest grain of doubt among the early historical witnesses that Matthew wrote first, and several early writers³⁹ claimed that the gospel was originally written in Hebrew. The substance of the gospel itself suggests that it that it was written for a Hebrew audience, so we see that the internal evidence is substantiated by the historical testimonies. Translators of the Dead Sea Scrolls such as Jean Carmignac have claimed that the linguistic qualities of Matthew suggest that it is a translation of an earlier Hebrew work.

There are elements of Matthew which evoke a feeling that the ink was put to the papyrus not long after the Ascension, such as when Matthew writes that the high priests and their lies concerning the burial tomb of Christ were still "uttered by the Judaeans until this day today".⁴⁰ A written gospel would have been desirable from the earliest time, and especially after the Christian communities were scattered following the martyrdom of Stephen. It is reasonable to estimate that Matthew was written in Judaea sometime between 32-42 AD.

Luke was not himself an eyewitness of the ministry of Christ, but was an exacting historian seeking to compile a faithful and focused account of the ministry of Christ. Acts is a continuation of his gospel account, so it was certainly written afterwards, and it is through Acts that we can date Luke.

Acts continues up until the time of Paul's house arrest in Rome and mentions that it lasted two years, but ends without making any mention of Paul's martyrdom.⁴¹ It therefore must have been written during this time, and perhaps it was finished shortly before Paul's execution. (It is also possible that it was written shortly after Paul arrived in Rome, and that the last two verses were a later addendum by Luke.)

Because Luke remained with Paul in Rome,⁴² it would have been an excellent opportunity for them to sit down and record his gospel and mission for Christ. So while we can't decisively say how long of a time there was between the composition of Luke and Acts, what we can confidently say is that Luke was written before Paul's death in 63 AD.

³⁶ John 18:1

³⁷ It is required under the law that every man in Israel appear before Yahweh three times each year, at the feasts of Unleavened Bread (of which the first day is Passover), and also for the feasts of First Fruits and Tabernacles.

³⁸ Luke 10:1

³⁹ Iraenaues, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1. | Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.24.6. | Eusebius quoting Origen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.4. | Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Matthew 28:15

⁴¹ Acts 28:30-31

⁴² Luke traveled with Paul to Rome (Acts 27-28), and was with him before Timothy came from Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:11), and was still with him afterwards (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24).

Irenaeus stated that Mark was written after Peter's death,⁴³ and Papias implies it, and if these testimonies are true then it certainly pushes Mark past 63 AD, as Peter almost certainly died sometime after Paul. There is no reason for Mark to have waited very long to compile Peter's preaching into a gospel, so it is fair to date Mark between 64-70 AD.

We cited Eusebius' quotation of Clement earlier concerning the authorship of Mark, and we can also see with Clement an early witness which supports our proposed ordering of the gospels:

"Again, in the same books, Clement gives the tradition of the earliest presbyters, as to the order of the Gospels, in the following manner: **The Gospels containing the genealogies, he says, were written first.**" (Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Book 3)

An Honest Solution to the Synoptic Question:

If we are going to address why there are similarities between the three synoptic gospels, then we can start by saying that Matthew having written first had no source except his own memories and those of his fellow ambassadors and followers of Christ. If there was any writer who might have used another gospel as a reference, it would certainly be Luke, who by his own admission carefully compiled his gospel from the testimonies of others. It is hard to imagine that Luke was ignorant of Matthew's gospel.

If Luke had on occasion consulted Matthew then this explains where their gospels agree in their accounts and construction, and Q is not needed, in fact Q was never needed if extant accounts were taken into consideration. We could conjecture that Matthew's Hebrew oriented gospel was not yet as readily available to some of the assemblies across the *oikumene*, and Luke might have taken care to include some of Matthew's accounts for that very reason. As for when Luke presents unique accounts or details which Matthew did not specify, Luke would have had the testimonies of all the men and women whom he and Paul knew and had fellowship with.

While we are not fond of nor agree with many of their methods of textual criticism, many writers⁴⁴ have agreed with our assertion concerning Luke having borrowed from Matthew and not Mark, and that Q is therefore not needed:

If the hundreds of 'minor agreements' scattered throughout the Triple Tradition are seen to merge with and form a pattern with the scores of 'major agreements'...then it becomes increasingly apparent that Luke was primarily dependent on Matthew and not Mark, and there is no need for Q or the priority of Mark. (David Barrett Peabody. *One Gospel from Two - Mark's Use of Matthew and Luke*, p. 6)

Matthew and Peter were witnesses of the same ministry, and we can see that Peter essentially condensed Matthew's Gospel into his preaching. This explains why Mark barely has any double tradition with Luke, but has so much in common with Matthew.

So we see that the content of the synoptic gospels is harmonious with the historical witnesses concerning their authorship. It is truly a blessing that the Gospel was organized in this way, because having several witnesses enriches it with a vivid clarity, and the resulting harmony testifies all the more towards its veracity.

Peter's Gospel

With this lengthy but necessary exposition on the authorship and dating of Mark thoroughly explored, we may now turn its peculiar style, which we believe is one of its most brilliant aspects.

The language of Mark is simple, it keeps its longer discourses and teachings relatively brief, and it focuses instead on the deeds and works of Christ. The gospel maintains a fast and active pace from beginning to end, with Mark using the word εὐθὺς⁴⁵ 41 times, which is often translated as *immediately*

⁴³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3.1

⁴⁴ [Michael Goulder](#), [Thomas J. Mosbo](#), [Mark Goodacre](#)

⁴⁵ The other Gospels don't use the word εὐθὺς nearly as often, despite them being longer accounts. It appears six times in Matthew, and then only three times each in Luke and John.

or *straightaway*. But why does it have this peculiar style?

We can remember that the early Christian writers testified that Mark was careful to preserve the authenticity of Peter's preaching in writing, being cautious not to add or redact any wording, and this would explain why Mark reads like a verbal sermon instead of a literary gospel.⁴⁶ If Mark faithfully recorded Peter's preaching, then we would expect his gospel to be written more how you would speak a story than how you would write one. If you try reading Mark out loud, then you may see this for yourself.

Speech tends to be more simple than writing and it is also naturally more pleonastic. It is easier to economize your words when you're writing rather than when you're speaking, so we would expect Mark to be the most verbose of the gospels. It certainly is. The extemporaneous origin of Mark has made it captivating and descriptive, with its accounts often being longer than in the other gospels.

I think most can agree that fishermen tend to be talented storytellers, and in this gospel Peter's preaching comes to life. This was the gospel which was shared by the campfire and the sea, by a man who was himself a spectator of the majesty of Christ.

To see an example of these qualities in Mark, we may compare the three Gospel accounts of when Christ calmed the storm:

Matthew 8:23-25 And with His boarding into a vessel His students followed Him. And behold, a great commotion happened on the sea, so for the vessel to be covered by the waves, but He slept. And coming forth they roused Him saying "Prince, save us! We are being destroyed!" (CNT)

Luke 8:22-24 And it happened in one of those days that He and His students boarded into a vessel, and He said to them: "We should pass through to the other side of the lake", and they set out. Then most of them had fallen asleep, and a furious storm of wind descended upon the lake, and being filled with water then they were endangered. So drawing near they aroused Him saying "Master, Master, we are being destroyed!" And awakening He censured the wind and the waves of water, and they stopped, and it became calm. (CNT)

Mark 4:35-38 And He says to them on that day, it being late: "We should go across to the other side." And having left the crowd they took Him, as He was in the vessel, and other vessels were with His. And there came a great tempest of wind and the waves cast upon the vessel, so for the vessel to be already filled. And He was in the stern sleeping upon a cushion. And they arouse Him and say to Him: "Teacher, is it not a concern to You that we are destroyed?" (CNT - *with unique details underlined*)

So we can see an example of how Mark is much more expressive and naturally fit for being spoken aloud. If we go to the account right after the calming of the storm, we can see an example of how accounts in Mark are often longer and more descriptive:

Matthew 8:28 And upon His coming to the other side to the country of the Gadarenes two men possessed by demons coming out from among the tombs met with Him, exceedingly troublesome, so that not anyone is able to pass by through that road.

Luke 8:26-27 Then they came ashore in the region of the Gadarenes which is opposite the coast of Galilaea. And with His coming out upon the land He met a certain man from the city having demons, and for considerable time who had not worn a garment, and has abode not in a house but among the tombs.

Mark 5:1-4 And they came to the other side of the sea to the region of the Gadarenes, and upon His coming out from the vessel immediately a man with an unclean spirit from among the tombs met Him, who had a dwelling among the tombs, and not even in chains was anyone any longer able to bind him,

A: Noah and his sons (Gen 6:10)
B: All life on land (6:13:a)
C: Judgement on land (6:13:b)
D: Flood announced (6:7)
E: Ark (6:14-16)
F: Beasts (6:17-20)
G: Food (6:21)
H: Animals in man's hands (7:2-3)
I: Entering the Ark (7:13-16)
J: Waters increase (7:17-20)
X: God remembers Noah (8:1)
J: Waters decrease (8:13-14)
I: Exiting the Ark (8:15-19)
H: Animals (9:2,3)
G: Food (9:3,4)
F: Beasts (9:10a)
E: Ark (9:10b)
D: No flood in future (9:11)
C: Blessing on land (9:12-17)
B: All life on land (9:16)
A: Noah and his sons (9:18,19a)

⁴⁶ Mark has a higher frequency of variants than the other synoptics, which may possibly represent scribes seeking to make this peculiar style more literary.

on account that often he having been bound in fetters and chains and the chains being torn apart by him and the fetters being shattered, and no one prevails to overpower him.

We can see how the other gospels are much more literary in their language than Mark, whose gospel is also more naturally fit to be read aloud. We can safely conjecture that Peter couldn't help but be expressive when relating these things which he witnessed, and many unique details straight from Peter's own memories are found throughout the gospel. An example would be when Christ went out to pray the morning after He healed Peter's mother-in-law:

Luke 4:42 Then day coming, departing He went to a desert place, and the crowd sought Him and having come unto Him then they detained Him, for which not to go away from them.

Mark 1:35-37 And in the morning, having arisen very late at night He went out and departed into a desert place and there He prayed. And Simon and those with him pursued soon after Him, and they found Him and say to Him that "They all seek You!"

This is why the gospel reads like an eyewitness account despite being written by Mark: the vivid and striking language is the faithful preservation of Peter recalling these events.

Anything difficult to memorize is also absent from Mark, such as Christ's genealogy and the longer parables, which is what we would expect if the historical testimonies are true. Mark does not have any longer teachings either, apart from the Olivet discourse, which is understandably shorter in this gospel than it is in Matthew. And in regards to memory, there are micro-versions of a literary technique called chiasmic structure in Mark, where the narrative is presented with a sort of symmetrical pattern (see an example from Genesis in the chart to the right). This is a valuable mnemonic device which the ancients used to help them memorize poetry, and it has been found in Homer's works. Because Mark is the preservation of oral preaching, it is not a coincidence that we find such patterns in its structure,⁴⁷ and even many men today have for the joy of it taken to memorizing Mark.

If we take into account that this gospel is Mark's faithful preservation of Peter's preaching, then we can answer many of the questions concerning its unique style and composition:

- **Why is Mark's Gospel shorter?** It has an oral source, and brevity would have made it easier to memorize and efficiently convey.
- **Why does it not include the virgin birth?** Ostensibly because Peter strove to only mention what he himself saw, as much as he is able. The preaching style of Peter as it is recorded in Acts, where he focuses on the public life, death, and resurrection of Christ, accords perfectly with Mark's gospel.
- **Why is the language simple?** It has an oral source.
- **Why is it more verbose?** It has an oral source. Pleonasm is an excellent aspect of oral storytelling. "And upon its becoming late, when the sun sank" [1:32]
- **Why does it have more Aramaic phrases?** It has an oral source, and citing phrases as you remember them being spoken can be an immersive experience for the listener.

Papias wrote that Mark was not overly concerned with chronology, but none of the gospels were ever intended to be a complete and exhaustive biography on the earthly life and ministry of Christ. Their primary purpose was to provide the most important details necessary for Christian deportment and understanding.⁴⁸ As John wrote near the end of his gospel: "*Now indeed also many other signs Yahshua did before His students, things which are not written in this book. But these things are written in order that you may believe that Yahshua is the Anointed Son of Yahweh, and that believing you would have life in His Name.*" (John 20:30-31)

It is interesting how Mark is often silent where other accounts specify that it was Peter who said or did something. For example, the gospel makes no mention of Peter walking on water, or that it was Peter who cut off Malchus' ear. This is a similar humility which Matthew and John had in their accounts, and in doing so Peter would not distract anyone from the importance of the narrative.

Something unique to Mark's ending is the singling out of Peter's name in the instructions given to the women, (and this peculiar mention again agrees with Peter being the source of this gospel):

⁴⁷ Some examples are Mark 3:20-25, 6:7-30, 11:12-21

⁴⁸ Jn 20:21, Lk 1:4

Mark 16:7 But you go tell His students and Petros that He goes on before you into Galilaea. There you shall see Him, just as He said to you!"

The account then ends relatively abruptly one verse after this, and it is not clear if Mark ever finished his gospel. There is a lengthy interpolation that follows this, which is missing in the earlier 4th century manuscripts and should certainly be rejected. It is unsurprising that this spurious interpolation does not have the same oral style as the rest of Mark's gospel, thus demonstrating that it has a different hand.

We could conjecture that Mark's rather abrupt ending is intentional. Christ had personally appeared to Peter after His resurrection,⁴⁹ and Peter told this to the other ambassadors,⁵⁰ but perhaps the details of this appearance are not recorded in any of the gospels for reason that it was something dearly personal to Peter. The last time he saw Yahshua was when he denied Him.

Hebrew and Latin

Both Mark and Peter were Hebrews, and there is no evidence that Mark was as schooled in Greek as Luke or Paul. For that reason we should expect to perhaps find a few Hebraisms in Mark's text, and while some of them may be dismissed as mere stylistic choices (such as the placing of verbs at the beginning of sentences), there are other aspects of his grammar which are irrefutably Hebrew.

For example, the relative pronoun (who, which, etc) in Hebrew is indeclinable and without gender, so a personal pronoun (him, her, etc) must follow and provide clarity, and for that reason pronouns in Hebrew are naturally redundant. Now this is completely unnecessary in Greek, which is a highly inflected language - but Mark uses pronouns redundantly anyways.

Mark 7:25 but immediately a woman hearing about Him, of whom her daughter had an unclean spirit, having come fell to His feet,

This clause literally reads in Greek as "whose daughter of her", which is awkward. It would be more grammatically proper to amend the redundant relative pronoun ἧς to make it read "whose daughter". Other examples of Hebraisms in Mark include redundant prepositions, adjectival substitutes, and the use of Hebrew parallelisms.

These are all clues that the author is a Hebrew speaker writing in a second language, but with Koine Greek being the lingua-franca at the time, one shouldn't jump to the conclusion that Mark was *struggling* to write in Greek. His use of Greek is very similar to a Semitic use of the language found in apocryphal Hebrew literature of the east, written both before and after the ministry of Christ. Remember: Mark spent time with Peter in Babylon.

There are also several transliterations of Aramaic words in Mark, which show the author's familiarity with the language. This also proves that the gospel was originally penned in Greek (otherwise the Aramaic words would have been translated).

And of course there is the Latin. While there are Latin words which appear in more than one Gospel, such as denarius and census, in Mark we find peculiar Latin words where Matthew and Luke would have used the equivalent Greek word instead. In Mark we find words such as kenturion⁵¹ (*both Matthew and Luke use ekatontrachês, the equivalent term in Greek*), speculator⁵² (*a bodyguard, scout, executioner*) and sextarius⁵³ (*a unit of measurement nearly equaling a pint*). Mark also has Latin translations of Greek words on two occasions, where we see the use of quadrans⁵⁴ instead of λεπτὰ δύο, and praetorium instead of ἀλλῆς, though he is not the only Gospel writer to do this.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ 1 Cor 15:5

⁵⁰ Luke 24:34

⁵¹ Mark 15:39, 44, 45

⁵² Mark 6:27

⁵³ Mark 7:6, 8

⁵⁴ Mark 12:42

⁵⁵ Κοδράντης - Matthew 5:26 | πραιτώριον - Matthew 27:27, John 18:28*2, 33, 19:9

Mark also used Latin idioms⁵⁶, though this is not extraordinary as some of them are used elsewhere in the New Testament⁵⁷ and other Greek writings.

Mark also takes time to elaborate on Judaeen customs, which shows that he did not expect his readers to be familiar with them. He explains that two lepta (a Judaeen coin) is equivalent to a quadring (a Roman coin) at Mark 12:42. He provides some context for the traditions of the elders at 7:3-4, the Passover at 14:12, and the preparation day at 15:42. It is also evident that he didn't expect his readers to be familiar with the geography of Jerusalem, since he mentions that the Mount of Olives was opposite the temple at 13:3.

The Latinisms and explanations of Judaeen customs certainly do suggest that Mark wrote his gospel in Rome for a Roman audience (and we discussed that possibility), but the Latinisms still do not make it definitively certain. Rome held the hegemony, and many of these idioms and terms had become colloquial by Mark's time. This is why we can see some of them in other New Testament books.

Conclusion

Throughout this series we will be reading from the Christogenea New Testament, which is translated by William Finck and prioritizes the earliest surviving manuscripts. We will discuss the Greek wherever it seems appropriate, and make note of any significant variants between the manuscripts.

Indeed with "two or three witnesses" is a matter established, but Yahweh went beyond the law and gave us four accounts working together to create a cohesive whole, of which Mark is an excellent preservation of Peter's preaching, and a wonderful introduction to the gospels.

This concludes our introduction to the Gospel of Mark, and Yahweh willing, we will return with Mark's first chapter soon.

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⁵⁶ 2:23 ὁδὸν ποιεῖν = Latin iter facere (to make one's way) | 3:6 συμβούλιον ἐδίδου = Latin consilium dederunt (to give counsel) | 3:17; 7:11, 34; 12:42; 15:16, 42 ὃ ἐστίν = Latin hoc est (that is) | 15:15 ἰκανὸν ποιῆσαι = Latin satis facere (to satisfy) | 15:19 τιθέντες τὰ γόνατα = genua ponentes (bending the knees).

⁵⁷ Acts 17:9, δὸς ἐργασίαν = Latin da operam (give attention)