

# GOSPEL OF MARK

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**Approximate date:** late 50s or early 60s C.E.

**Time period:** the ministry of John the Immerser to the ascension of Yeshua

**Author:** John Mark, secretary of the Apostle Peter

**Location of author:** Rome

**Target audience and their location:** predominantly Roman, later Alexandrian

**People:**

Yeshua the Messiah, John the Immerser/the Baptist, the Twelve Disciples: Simon Peter, Andrew, James (son of Zebedee), John, Levi/Matthew son of Alphaeus, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas Iscariot, Yeshua's family: Mary, James, Joseph, Judas, Simon (all brothers), religious leaders, Pharisees, Legion, Jairus, Syrio-Phoenician woman, Bartimaeus, Sadducees, Simon the Leper, Pontius Pilate, Barabbas, Simon of Cyrene, Alexander, Rufus, Mary Magdalene, Joses (probably a shortened form of Joseph), Salome, the centurion (at the cross), Joseph of Arimathea

**People mentioned:**

Isaiah, Moses, David, Herodians, Beelzebul, Elijah, Satan

**Places:**

wilderness of Judea, Jerusalem, Jordan River, Nazareth, Galilee, Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Idumea, Tyre, Sidon, region of the Gerasenes, Decapolis, Gennasaret, Syria Phoenicia, Dalmanutha, Bethsaida, Caesarea Philippi, Jericho, Bethphage, Bethany, Mount of Olives, Garden of Gethsemane, Golgotha (Calvary)

**Places mentioned:**

Praetorium, Cyrene

**Key Themes and Events:**

proclamations of John the Immerser / immersion (or baptism) of Yeshua / calling of disciples / acknowledgement of Yeshua by demons / varied miraculous healings by Yeshua (sick, leprosy, paralytic) / Yeshua forgives sins / Yeshua is called a blasphemer / Yeshua declares Himself Lord of the Sabbath / large crowds follow Yeshua / Yeshua appoints Twelve *specific* Apostles / Yeshua is accused of being demon possessed / Yeshua gives His parable of the sower / Yeshua describes His followers as a light, the Kingdom of God as a mustard seed / Yeshua calms a storm on the Sea of Galilee / Yeshua casts Legion out of a Gerasene man into a herd of pigs / a

woman is healed by touching Yeshua's garment / Yeshua resurrects Jairus' daughter from the dead / Yeshua questioned in His hometown / Yeshua doubted by His family / Yeshua feeds the five thousand / Yeshua walks on water / Yeshua tells some Pharisees that what comes out of a person is more important than what goes inside / Yeshua delivers the Syrio-Phoenician woman's daughter of a demon / Yeshua heals a deaf man / Yeshua feeds four thousand / Yeshua heals a blind man / Peter confesses Yeshua to be the Messiah / Yeshua predicts His own death / Yeshua rebukes Peter about His death / Yeshua is transfigured before Peter, James, and John / Yeshua heals a boy with an evil spirit / Yeshua warns against leading others' astray / Yeshua speaks about unwarranted divorce / Yeshua compares the Kingdom of God to small children / Yeshua encounters a rich young man / Yeshua tells James and John they will have to endure similar things that He will have to experience / Yeshua heals a blind man at Jericho / Yeshua enters triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey / Yeshua clears the Temple complex of the moneychangers / Yeshua curses a fig tree / Yeshua's authority questioned / Yeshua delivers the parable of the tenants / some Pharisees try to trick Yeshua into speaking against Caesar / some Sadducees ask Yeshua about the resurrection / Yeshua speaks about the greatest commandment / Yeshua highlights the widow's offering / Yeshua teaches on the End of the Age / Yeshua anointed in Bethany / Yeshua celebrates the Passover with His Disciples / Yeshua predicts Peter's betrayal / Yeshua prays to His Father in Gethsemane / Yeshua is arrested / Yeshua defends Himself before the Sanhedrin / Peter denies Yeshua / Yeshua appears before Pontius Pilate / Yeshua is mocked and beaten by Roman soldiers / Simon of Cyrene is impressed to carry Yeshua's cross / Yeshua is crucified and dies a painful death / the veil in the Temple is torn in two / the centurion at the cross proclaims Yeshua as the Son of God / Yeshua buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb / the Marys and Salome witness the resurrected Messiah [ / Yeshua rebukes those who failed to believe the report of the women / Yeshua admonishes His Disciples to go out into the world / Yeshua ascends into Heaven ]

**Key Scriptures:** Mark 1:1-3; 10:45 / **Introduction** (1:1-13); **Galilean Period** (1:14-5:43); **Further Journeys in Galilee** (6:1-9:50); **Judean Period** (10:1-13:37); **Last Supper and Resurrection Narratives** (14:1-16:20)<sup>1</sup>

**Theological Summary:** In past theological history, the Gospel of Mark was often thought to have only been a kind of abridgment of the Gospel of Matthew, and so it was not given a huge amount of examination, or even in some cases thought to have that much value. This significantly shifted among theologians in the Twentieth Century, with now the Gospel of Mark believed to contain one of the earliest testimonies to the ministry of Yeshua (Cranfield, *IDB*),<sup>2</sup> actually having been composed first among the Synoptics. So much attention has been given to Mark in the past half-century, that "the number of written works...over the past forty

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), pp 100-101.

<sup>2</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, "Mark, Gospel of," in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 3:267, 269.

years [to 1992]...rivals and may well surpass that written on Matthew and Luke combined” (Guelich).<sup>3</sup>

At least ninety percent of the material of Mark is repeated in Matthew, and this is often viewed as evidence regarding how important Mark was to the authors of Matthew and Luke,<sup>4</sup> and the primacy of this text to these other works. In recent years, previous neglect of Mark has now been replaced by a renewed interest in Markan studies. Some specialty translations of the New Testament produced, notably including that by classics scholar Richmond Lattimore,<sup>5</sup> now may place Mark as the first Gospel before Matthew and Luke. A large number of conservative scholars are in agreement that the Gospel of Mark was the first of the four Gospels to have been written, with the authors of Matthew and Luke borrowing extensively from it.

The authorship of the Gospel of Mark is widely confirmed by conservatives to be John Mark (Acts 12:25; 15:37), although some liberals may say that this is an arbitrary assignment. The Apostolic Scriptures indicate that John Mark was the son of Mary, whose house provided a meeting place for the Believers in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), and was a companion with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5). Mark deserted Paul and his party at Perga in Pamphylia, and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). He is described as being Paul and Barnabas’ “helper,” and there was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas about taking him on their second journey (Acts 15:36-39), which resulted in them splitting up. Paul seems to have become extremely displeased about Mark, but later extends greetings to him (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), indicating that he had regained his trust and the two had reconciled. Paul also sent for Mark prior to his death (2 Timothy 4:11). In the closing greetings of the Epistle of 1 Peter, Peter delivers the message, “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and *so does* my son, Mark” (1 Peter 5:13), with Babylon being widely agreed as a code term for the city of Rome.<sup>6</sup>

While not stated in the text internally, it was unanimously agreed by the Church of the Second Century C.E. that John Mark authored this Gospel. We do see from 1 Peter 5:13 that Mark was the traveling companion of Peter, and was with him in Rome, likely until the time of Peter’s death.<sup>7</sup> In composing his Gospel, there are traditions that attest to Mark actually having transcribed Peter’s oral account to him, thus making the Gospel of Mark as the life of Yeshua the Messiah as told to him by the Apostle Peter. Irenaeus communicates, “Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter” (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1).<sup>8</sup> Justin Martyr makes a reference to Peter’s “memoirs”

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<sup>3</sup> R.A. Guelich, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 512.

<sup>4</sup> R.P. Martin, “Mark, Gospel of,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 3:249.

<sup>5</sup> Richmond Lattimore, trans., *The New Testament* (New York: North Point Press, 1996), pp 3-45.

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2.15.2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Guelich, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 515.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 414.

(*Dialogue with Trypho* 106),<sup>9</sup> and how the Messiah had changed the name of some of His Disciples, with such “memoirs” being the Gospel of Mark (presumably making light of Mark 3:16-17). Of particular interest is how the Fourth Century historian Eusebius, testifying to the works of Papias, details how Mark transmitted his Gospel via Peter:

“Mark being the interpreter of Peter whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy but not however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord, but as before said, he was in company with Peter who gave him such instruction as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord’s discourses: wherefore Mark has not erred in any thing, by writing some things as he has recorded them; for he was carefully attentive to one thing, not to pass by any thing that he heard, or to state any thing falsely in these accounts” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15).<sup>10</sup>

That the Gospel of Mark was composed via the oral accounts of Peter, can be detected at times as Peter is depicted as being a little embarrassed or rebuked (9:5ff; 14:29ff, 66-72). If Mark indeed compiled his Gospel from Peter’s recollections to him, then this would naturally have included a few reflections on Peter’s limitations in the service of the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

It would seem reasonable to conclude that if the Gospel of Mark was composed from Peter’s accounts, that it was written sometime close to the Apostle’s death or immediately thereafter, allowing for a dating range sometime up to the mid-60s C.E. Some of the dating of Mark can depend on an interpreter’s eschatological presuppositions, though. If we accept that Yeshua the Messiah can predict the future as He predicted the fall of Jerusalem in Mark 13:2, then the composition of Mark can be placed before 70 C.E. If Mark pre-dates the composition of Matthew and Luke-Acts, then its composition should likely be dated in the late-50s or early 60s C.E. Evangelical Christians who tend to be pre-millennial in their outlook favor Mark being written during this period.<sup>12</sup> Those who conclude that the scene of Mark 13 depicts the fall of Jerusalem after the event, naturally favor a dating of this Gospel into the 70s C.E. or possibly later.

The historical background necessitating the composition of Mark is generally agreed to have been directed at a Roman audience during the time just prior to the persecution of Believers in the Empire, starting with those in Rome itself. Compared to the Gospel of Matthew, there are far less quotations from the Tanach (Old Testament) in the Gospel of Mark. This would suggest that its primary audience would have been Greek and Roman, and that they would likely have not required extensive quotations from the Tanach to prove the Messiahship of Yeshua, as much as a primary Jewish audience would have. Mark goes to some length to explain various Jewish customs of the First Century, and provides internal translations of Aramaic words. Mark also uses a number of Latin-specific terms as well. Eusebius does record how later Mark was sent to Egypt, and “proclaimed the gospel there which he had written and first established churches at the city of Alexandria” (*Ecclesiastical*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea: *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C.F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 105-106.

<sup>11</sup> Martin, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *ISBE*, 2:250.

<sup>12</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, “Mark,” *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 182.

*History* 2.16.1).<sup>13</sup> This tradition indicates that after composing his Gospel, Mark was sent to Alexandria and used his written Gospel to proclaim the good news and establish congregations in Egypt.

There are those in the Messianic community who believe that the Gospel of Mark was originally written in Hebrew, or possibly Aramaic. Yet they probably fail to take into account the reliable traditions regarding where Mark was written, and its initial target audience.<sup>14</sup> But even more so, advocates of a Hebrew or Aramaic origin for Mark do not weigh in the fact that the name of the Gospel is actually *Markos* (Μάρκος) or *Markus*, a name of Latin origin—a fact retained in modern Hebrew translations such as UBSHNT, which uses *Marqos* (מַרְקוֹס). This does not mean, though, that Mark is entirely a product of the Greek, as it does include significant Semitic influences. “We have good reason to speak of an Aramaic background to the Greek of the Gospel.” However, “the existence of Aramaic sources” are probably “oral; and we can speak of the Evangelist’s use of a tradition which ultimately is Aramaic; but to say more is speculation” (Martin, *ISBE*).<sup>15</sup>

Any Semitic sources used in composing the Gospel of Mark are likely oral at best, indicated by the author’s usage of the term “translated” or with translations provided (i.e., 5:41; 14:36; 15:22, 34) for Greek readers. “Some Aramaic expressions, which are retained in the text, are interpreted into Greek and this seems to be evidence that Mark’s readers would not otherwise have understood them. This seems to rule out any possibility of Aramaic-speaking readers” (Guthrie)<sup>16</sup> among the main audience. Mark’s Gospel also employs a fair amount of Latinisms,<sup>17</sup> which would easily account for a Roman audience. Mark’s immediate Roman audience would have been familiar with Koiné Greek, as would have the larger audience that would have used it in the Eastern Mediterranean, including any Egyptians he would have taken it to. While Mark’s audience needed some explanations of various Jewish customs and practices, pointing to a largely non-Jewish audience (i.e., 7:3-4),<sup>18</sup> this does not at all mean that Mark’s Gospel is removed from the messages of the Tanach Scriptures or the culture of Second Temple Judaism. One cannot avoid that the Tanach is quoted or alluded to in Mark.

There is certainly discussion within Markan scholarship about what Eusebius meant when he said that Mark was “the interpreter of Peter” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.83).<sup>19</sup> Does

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<sup>13</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Some of the earliest usage of the Gospel of Mark appears in the late First Century Roman work *1 Clement* 15:2, referencing Mark 7:6.

<sup>15</sup> Martin, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *ISBE*, 3:249.

Martin makes specific light of Semitic influence via usage of “the paratactic *kaí* [καί] in preference to the use of subordinate clauses” and “the use of *ērxato* [ἤρξατο], ‘he began,’ before the verb” ([*Ibid.*]). Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 94-95 who makes light of “Mark’s Greek [being] ‘translation Greek,’” meaning that the written Gospel of Mark was composed in Greek, but with Semitic oral understandings behind it.

<sup>16</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 71-72; cf. Paul J. Achtemeier, “Mark, Gospel of,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:542.

<sup>17</sup> Martin, “Mark Gospel of,” in *ISBE*, 3:249-250; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Martin, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *ISBE* 3:254; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 71; Guelich, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 515.

<sup>19</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 105.

this mean that Mark would have just translated what Peter spoke to him in Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek? Or could it mean that Mark communicated the good news via Peter with skill and precision, conveying the message appropriately? Scholars are divided. Guthrie notes the options: “The relation between Mark and Peter must be determined by the meaning of the word ἑρμηνεύτες [*hermēneutes*].” He continues, “Whereas this could mean either translator or interpreter, most scholars agree that the former must be the meaning in this context.”<sup>20</sup>

It is possible that Mark understood and wrote Greek much better than Peter, and that Peter needed him in order to better communicate the evangelistic message he would compose, as he would have had a better grasp on vocabulary, various clauses, and verb tenses. “The Semitic flavor [of Mark] is unmistakable. But the Greek of the gospel, through it reflects strongly the influence of Aramaic and though it is certainly rough and colloquial, is not incompetent; that Mark had a reasonable grasp of the language is indicated by his careful use of the tenses” (Cranfield, *IDB*).<sup>21</sup> It is further to be observed, “The Greek style of Mark’s gospel is simple and straightforward and full of the kind of Semitisms that one would expect of a [man] Jerusalem-bred” (Carson and Moo).<sup>22</sup> The transcribed Greek of Mark’s Gospel is surely to be taken as being the authoritative text for evangelism and doctrine, and should be what we principally appeal to—but it is by no means something removed from Yeshua’s ministry in First Century Israel.

For those who opt for “interpreter” relating more to the message of the good news, rather than Mark serving as Peter’s secretary, “Mark was in a position to have accurate knowledge of Peter’s understanding of the gospel” (Achtmeier, *ABD*),<sup>23</sup> and he adapted Peter’s words to him accordingly. Furthermore, recognizing that Mark did have an association with the ministry activities of Paul as well, some distinct Pauline teachings or approaches may have affected how he chose to focus parts of his Gospel.<sup>24</sup>

Any reader of Mark’s Gospel will notice that it is a very active text—a “gospel of action”—recording less of the sayings and teachings of Yeshua the Messiah than the other Gospels, but more of His miracles and mighty works. It is notable that throughout the source text of Mark, one will find the term *euthus* (εὐθὺς) or “immediately” used quite a bit.<sup>25</sup> Mark begins with the ministry of John the Immerser (1:1-13), and ends with Yeshua’s execution (14:1-15:47) and the arrival of the three women at His empty tomb (16:1-8). “[T]he vividness of the style gives the impression of a quickly-moving drama with the cross as its climax” (Guthrie).<sup>26</sup> There are certainly discussions in Markan studies regarding the style of its composition, especially if Mark simply compiled a first hand account of Peter’s oral testimony to him. Did Mark bother to really sort through the data? This is not the impression we get from Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15). The point of Mark’s Gospel, to be sure, was to communicate important things about the Messiah:

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<sup>20</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Cranfield, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *IDB*, 3:276.

<sup>22</sup> Carson and Moo, 175.

<sup>23</sup> Achtmeier, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *ABD*, 4:542.

<sup>24</sup> Carson and Moo, 175.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>26</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 61.

“The order is thematic. The stories and teachings are sometimes clustered around common themes...The Markan presentation is largely guided by literary and theological interests. Jesus is presented as a remarkable, even stunning figure” (Evans, *ECB*).<sup>27</sup>

From this point of view, the Apostle Peter gave Mark a record of what struck him personally as the most important substance of the good news and the experiences he had with Yeshua, and Mark wrote it just as Peter communicated it.<sup>28</sup> Recognizing Peter’s authority, Mark would have done little to try to change it.

This Gospel’s primary message is to convey what Yeshua did, and was probably written in a time when the new Believers in Rome needed significant encouragement. Some expositors place its composition at 64 C.E., and assert that possibly Mark was written just prior to the fire in Rome when Nero set the city ablaze and blamed it on the “Christians,” the Believers in the Messiah Yeshua.<sup>29</sup> Others think that Mark was written in conjunction with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., or at least at the beginning of the Jewish uprising in 67 C.E.<sup>30</sup> The main thrust, more than anything else, is that its recipients needed their faith in the Messiah (re)assured, and with this background it is probable that Mark wanted to prepare his readers for the inevitable suffering they would endure for believing in “the Jewish Messiah,” possibly implied in the text (cf. 8:34; 10:30; 13:9-13, 19-20).<sup>31</sup> By recording and featuring the miracles and works of Yeshua, Mark reveals that this Savior is indeed all-powerful and worth believing in to those who are skeptical. The material in Mark was understandably widely drawn upon by Matthew and Luke, for the composition of their Gospels, and expanded with additional material to be employed for their main respective audiences. Mark’s place has been assured in the Apostolic canon because of the ancient traditions which attest to Mark having been the traveling companion of Peter, one of the original Twelve Disciples (cf. Matthew 16:18).

The main area where today’s Messianics have some weakness with Mark is largely centered around ch. 7. This is commonly viewed as Mark’s “interest in the cessation of the ritual elements in the Mosaic law” (Carson and Moo),<sup>32</sup> and in particular what the phrase *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα) means (7:19)—as either “*Thus He* declared all foods clean” (NASU) **or** “purging all the foods” (LITV). This is a passage where understanding the particular traditions present in Second Temple Judaism regarding handwashing (7:3-5), will affect one’s interpretation of whether Mark 7:19 speaks of Yeshua

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<sup>27</sup> Craig Evans, “Mark,” in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1065.

<sup>28</sup> Achtemeier, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *ABD*, 4:542.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Tacitus: *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), pp 360-367.

<sup>30</sup> Evans, in *ECB*, 1065.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1066 actually contrasts the language of Mark 1:1, “The beginning of the gospel of Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God,” with language from the Imperial cult: “the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning for the world of the good news.” The Jewish Messiah Yeshua, then, is thought to ultimately reign and be superior to Caesar.

<sup>32</sup> Carson and Moo, 183.

nullifying the cleanliness or dietary laws of the Torah, or is just speaking of excretion via bodily functions.<sup>33</sup>

Within much of today's Messianic examination of the Gospel of Mark, it should not be surprising that even though this text is only sixteen chapters, it probably does not receive as much attention when compared to Matthew, Luke, or John. Would it be useful for our faith community to learn to better appreciate Mark's role in terms of presenting a miracle working, dynamic Messiah? Just like many theologians in the past half-century have, to a degree, been able to "rediscover" Mark—perhaps Messianic Believers too need to learn to recognize the special place it has among the Gospels as well. Mark 1:1-3 and its definite quotation of Isaiah 40:3, should certainly pique our interest in how Mark does rely on the Tanach. All Messiah followers need moments in their lives when they can be reminded of Yeshua's ultimate power, and affording Mark a higher place than it has had in our Bible studies and teachings, would be a good thing for Messianics to do.

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON MARK:

- 1. To what degree is Mark a shortened version of the life of Yeshua? How does this affect your view of the other three Gospels, particularly the other Synoptics of Matthew and Luke?**
- 2. Why do you think Mark focuses more on the actions of Yeshua, and gives us very little detail or background information about the setting of the events?**
- 3. If you were living in the First Century, what would influence or impress you the most about Mark's Gospel? As a First Century Jew? As a First Century Greek or Roman?**

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<sup>33</sup> Consult the analysis of Mark 7:1-23 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

**4. In the account of Yeshua's ministry in Mark's Gospel, do you think that He is exclusively concerned about the salvation of just Israel, or also outsiders to Israel? Consider the examples of the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Roman centurion at the cross.**

**5. If you were living as a First Century Jew, Greek, or Roman, would you inquire more about Yeshua after hearing about Him from Mark's Gospel?**

### REFLECTION ON MARK'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

*Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Gospel of Mark:*