


MARK

Title and Authorship. The Greek title for this book simply means “according to Mark.” The Gospel of Mark nowhere in its text indicates who the author is. However, the consistent testimony of early Christian leaders such as Irenaeus and Eusebius is that John Mark wrote the book.

Date. The book was written sometime in the middle of the first century A.D., possibly as a way of encouraging the church in the face of suffering and persecution following the deaths of Peter and Paul.

Backgrounds. At the time of Jesus, Judea was part of the Roman Empire. This was the fundamental governmental reality of the entire region. Jesus was a Jew and spent almost His entire life and ministry within a Jewish context. At the time of Jesus, there were four main sects of Judaism: the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and Essenes.

Theology and Purpose. Jesus is the central focus of Mark—who He is and where He is going. The Christology of Mark is a paradoxical mixture of power and weakness. The key for understanding this paradox of power and weakness is found in the meaning of the cross in Mark. The powerful Son of God, who could banish demons, heal any disease, and raise the dead, accepted the ignominy and weakness of the cross to save humanity. At the center of the teaching on discipleship are the twelve men chosen to be apostles. They were far from perfect, but Jesus did not give up on them. It was particularly in the confrontation with demon-possessed persons that Jesus faced evil powers that enslave human beings and oppress them. The powers operate in darkness and are part of a controversy that transcends human history. Yet Jesus confronted them within human history and overcame them, freeing humans from their power.



1 PETER

Title and Authorship. The earliest extant titles given to this epistle are simply “Epistle of Peter A” and “of Peter A.” The author identifies himself as Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an “elder,” and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.

Date. The letter was written before Peter’s death, likely in the early A.D. 60s.

Backgrounds. Written to believers scattered across Asia Minor, Peter’s letter sought to strengthen the church in the face of opposition and suffering, reminding them that they were standing in the “grace of God” (1 Peter 5:12) and that, though society might reject them, God had chosen them as His special people.

Theology and Purpose. One of the foundational themes of 1 Peter is the identification of the people of God as foreign pilgrims and exiles. On the basis of this terminology, many early commentators assumed that Peter’s audience

was comprised of Jewish Christians. But Peter was clearly writing to Gentiles who had been redeemed from the hedonistic lifestyle they had inherited from their ancestors. In an attempt to help these Gentile converts recognize and embrace their identity as the people of God, Peter’s epistle applies terminology associated with Israel to the Christian communities scattered across Asia Minor. He wanted them to know that they were part of God’s covenant family, though in the world they were called to stand apart as God’s chosen people. Although Peter highlights various aspects of the role of each member of the Godhead in the plan of salvation, Jesus Christ is the central focus of his theology. It is through the identification of Christ as both the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and the Cornerstone rejected by human builders that Peter set forth the pattern of worldly rejection and divine vindication that is to be the expected pattern of the life of Christians in this world as they await His return.



2 PETER

Title and Authorship. The earliest copy of this letter bears the title “The Second Epistle of Peter.” The opening words of the letter identify the Apostle Simon Peter as its author.

Date. Second Peter 1:14 suggests that it was probably written near the end of Peter’s life. Early church writers agree that Peter died during Nero’s persecution of the Christians in Rome—about A.D. 65.

Backgrounds. If this letter was written to the same people as 1 Peter, the original audience can be identified as those who were pilgrim exiles dispersed or scattered throughout “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). A close examination of the author’s concerns in 2 Peter makes evident that those to whom this letter was written were in danger of being distracted from their commitment to God and from living out His work in their lives. False teachers and scoffers questioned certain truths

they had been taught about Jesus and His coming and suggested that they were free to follow after their own sinful desires.

Theology and Purpose. The main concern running throughout the Second Epistle of Peter is that people need to be ready to meet the Lord with joy at His coming. Such readiness comes through personally knowing Jesus Christ and the Father, who sent Him. By this means God has made grace and peace available—together with everything needed for life and godliness—and believers are urged to diligently take hold of these provisions by putting this reality into action in their own lives. Peter assures believers that the promise of Jesus’s coming is no myth. The Lord will come at His appointed time, and it will be a terrifying event engulfing all wickedness in complete destruction. This truth should cause believers to soberly examine their own lives in a spirit of repentance and to urge others to do the same.



1 JOHN

Title and Authorship. The earliest extant Greek title of John's first letter is "of John A." Strictly speaking, 1 John is anonymous. Yet the letter was commonly attributed to the Apostle John, the author of the Fourth Gospel.

Date. First John was probably written sometime in the early 90s of the first century A.D.

Backgrounds. The churches to which John wrote faced theological conflicts, particularly related to the nature of Jesus. Some seemed to have rejected the real incarnation of the Christ. The apostle realized that without a real incarnation there is no salvation and strongly argued that Jesus was unquestionably the Son of God in human flesh.

Theology and Purpose. The theology of the epistles of John is about the Father and His Son, Jesus the Christ. John affirmed the doctrine of

the incarnation that was under attack by false teachers in order to instill hope and perseverance in the hearts of believers. John emphasized the work of God through His Son and its significance for believers throughout his epistles. The concepts used by John to describe who God is were probably chosen because they carry ethical implications. God is the only and exclusive source of light for humans, who are imprisoned in darkness. In the truly enlightened life, there is an absence of hatred and a fullness of union with others and God. The love of God is made known to us by the cross, where the Son of God laid down His life for us. Since God loved us and manifested that love in the magnificent death of His Son, John says, "we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). The Son of God is the means by which God's love and power are manifested to us. God's love has been consummated in us and this gives us assurance in the final judgment and expels fear from our hearts.



2 JOHN

Title and Authorship. This commentary holds that John the apostle was the author of this letter.

Date. This letter was written late in the first century A.D., likely after 1 John.

Backgrounds. John's second letter resembles 1 John in many respects. We also find the same themes and concerns. There is, however, a more personal touch as John lovingly encourages his church members.

Theology and Purpose. The theology of the epistles of John is about the Father and His Son, Jesus the Christ. John affirmed the doctrine of the incarnation that was under attack by false teachers in order to instill hope and perseverance in the hearts of believers. John emphasized

the work of God through His Son and its significance for believers throughout his epistles. The concepts used by John to describe who God is were probably chosen because they carry ethical implications. God is the only and exclusive source of light for humans, who are imprisoned in darkness. In the truly enlightened life, there is an absence of hatred and a fullness of union with others and God. The love of God is made known to us by the cross, where the Son of God laid down His life for us. Since God loved us and manifested that love in the magnificent death of His Son, John says, "we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). The Son of God is the means by which God's love and power are manifested to us. God's love has been consummated in us, and this gives us assurance in the final judgment and expels fear from our hearts.



3 JOHN

Title and Authorship. As noted in regard to 1 and 2 John, this commentary holds that John the apostle is the author of this epistle.

Date. This letter was written late in the first century A.D., likely after 2 John.

Backgrounds. While 1 and 2 John deal primarily with Christ, who had been misrepresented by false teachers, 3 John wrestles with a leadership crisis in a local church. On one side were the Apostle John (the elder), Gaius, and Demetrius; and on the other side was Diotrephes, who was attempting to establish his supremacy. The apostle was writing to provide guidance to the church on how to deal with this situation.

Theology and Purpose. At the end of the first century A.D., most of the eyewitnesses to Jesus—including most of the twelve apostles—had passed away. New leaders had to take over, resulting in some difficulties. In 3 John the problem in the

church was not primarily doctrinal but administrative. The study of 3 John should lead us to think about the nature of Christian leadership. According to the New Testament, all believers are part of the royal priesthood and all have received spiritual gifts necessary for the church. A distinction between laity and clergy is foreign to the New Testament. However, God has called some persons to leadership positions in the church, and they should be respected. But church leaders are not infallible and should not pretend to be so. In some cases, there may even be justified reasons for complaints, but these should be presented carefully and lovingly. Leaders must indeed lead out, be shepherds, and most of all be examples for the rest of the body of Christ. They must equip church members to perform the ministry to which they are called. John was writing against conflicts of leadership in the church because of their threat to the unity of the church and their damage to its message.