There are some historical factors that have contributed to the writing of Mark’s Gospel. Earliest Christians believed in the imminent second coming of Jesus. This belief in the second coming derives at least in part from the Book of Daniel late in the Old Testament. Daniel Chapter 12 contains a prophecy that there will be a resurrection accompanied by divine judgment: “some to everlasting life, some to everlasting contempt.”

Some Jews at the time of Jesus believed in this connection between resurrection and final judgment. Paul as a Pharisee would have had this belief. With the resurrection of Jesus, Paul would have expected final judgment. This expectation explains his statements in 1 Thessalonians, Chapter 4, which speaks in the present tense of “we who are alive until the coming of the Lord” and in 1 Corinthians 7:30 of “the time is short…From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not.”

This extremely short view of history begins to be expanded in Mark’s Gospel when we read “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (13:32); that will not happen over a weekend. Though Mark’s Gospel postpones the final judgment he does not envision the extensive history that actually followed. He maintains a saying limiting the future to one generation: “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” (13:30). “These things” include the son of man coming in the clouds (Mark 13:26).

This thirteenth chapter of Mark’s Gospel generates more questions than answers. Yes, the delay of the second coming (parousia) may have triggered the writing of Mark’s Gospel as the author imagined there would be enough time to compose and circulate a Gospel. Was early Christianity wrong about the imminent second coming, resurrection of the dead, and divine judgment? Was Jesus wrong about this?
What does the word “generation” mean? Does this apparent error call all or some of the assertions by the Bible into question and undermine the authority of the Bible?

**Slide 4**
**Slide title:** Answers to the Questions

**Slide content:**
- What Jesus actually said versus what Mark reported
- The meaning of the word “generation” (see Mt. 1:17)

**Narrator:**
Answering these questions will take some serious study. I will offer a few tentative responses. Distinguishing what Jesus said as opposed to what Mark puts in Jesus’ mouth is extremely difficult to figure out and is rarely fully satisfying, as the answer is likely to be highly speculative. People will try to stretch the meaning of the word generation beyond credible limits. Matthew’s Gospel, for example, uses the word generation in his genealogy (Mt. 1:17) to mean what the ordinary meaning of the word is. Both Matthew and Mark use the same word in Greek for generation.

**Slide 5**
**Slide title:** Truth

**Slide content:**
- Has been revised over time
  - A strength for some, a weakness for others

**Narrator:**
The issue of truth is important. Christianity has revised its understanding of things over time. I regard this willingness to revise as a strength. Others may see this as a weakness. Clearly earliest Christianity was mistaken about the imminent second coming of Jesus, but it did not give up attempting to communicate what it thought to be important. Early and later Christian texts allow for revision as time passes.

**Slide 6**
**Slide title:** Threat of Persecution

**Slide content:**
- Facing persecution (4:16-17 and 13:9+)
- Losing life to persecution (8:35)
- “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.” (Mk.13:9)

**Narrator:**
The other historical factor contributing to the writing of Mark’s Gospel is the threat of persecution. Early Christians faced persecution from Romans and Jews, and they all did not expect to have such a hard time. Mark intends to strengthen their commitment. See Mark 4:16, 17, and 13:9+ on how to face persecution, and 8:35 on losing life to persecution. “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them” (Mk.13:9).
Slide 7
Slide title: Jesus as Misunderstood

Slide content:
- Misunderstood by His family (3:21)
- Dishonored by local community (6:4)
- Misunderstood by disciples (6:52, 8:31)

Narrator:
As for a central truth Mark wants to communicate, notice how often Jesus is misunderstood. Mark 3:21 shows his family misunderstanding and his local community not honoring him in 6:4. The misunderstanding of the disciples is common, for example in 6:52. The misunderstanding of the disciples in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 are especially instructive. Take a look at 8:31 of Mark’s Gospel and following. There you have passion prediction followed by misunderstanding followed by teaching on discipleship. This same pattern is repeated in Chapters 9 and 10. When Jesus tells about his coming death it makes no sense to Peter who thinks Jesus is the new king (or messiah). Jesus follows with teaching about self-denial and service. The disciples repeatedly misunderstand. Why repeat these elements? Mark’s Gospel repeats the misunderstanding of the disciples after predictions of suffering and death to warn the reader that it is easy to misunderstand what Jesus is teaching. It is especially easy because talk of suffering and self-denial go against ordinary human aspiration. People do not want to hear this, so it is easy to miss.

Slide 8
Slide title: Jesus Recognized as Son of God

Slide content:
[Picture of Jesus on the cross]

Narrator:
The lack of understanding by the disciples adds to the lack of recognition that Jesus is son of God by nearly everyone in this Gospel. Only God (1:11; 9:7) and the evil spirits (1:24; 3:11) acknowledge Jesus as son of God. For example, in Mark 5:7, the unclean spirit asks, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” The only human being in Mark’s Gospel to acknowledge Jesus as son of God is the Roman centurion at the foot of the cross. The centurion sees Jesus on the cross and declares him to be “son of God.” This is Mark’s way of saying if you want to understand Jesus, you need to understand him in terms of the cross. The cross is a symbol of discipleship and ultimate self-denial. Jesus in the face of danger did not return to Galilee; his mission to spread his understanding of life and God were more important to him than his own safety. He needed to rise above self-concern in order to serve. Self-denial and service are the heart of discipleship according to Mark’s Gospel.