

The Gospel According to ST. MARK

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The earliest extant manuscripts bear the simple title —According to Mark. II Later, as the term —gospel III came to be applied to the story of Jesus' life and ministry, it was incorporated into the title of this book. The title found in the KJV, —The Gospel According to St. Mark, II appears only in late manuscripts.

2. Authorship. The unanimous and consistent testimony of Christian tradition points to John Mark as the author of the Gospel that bears his name. The name Mark is from the Latin *Marcus*, and is the surname of the writer (Acts 12:12, 25). His first name was John (see ch. 13:5, 13). His mother's name was Mary (ch. 12:12). He was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), who at one time had been a resident of the island of Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Mark's home in Jerusalem seems to have been the house in which was the —upper room II (see on Matt. 26:18), where, for a time at least, some of the apostles lived after the resurrection and the ascension (John 20:19; Acts 1:13), and where members of the early church in Jerusalem assembled (Acts 12:12). It was John Mark who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first part of their first missionary journey (ch. 13:5, 13). On a later journey, Mark accompanied Barnabas to the island of Cyprus (ch. 15:36–39). Later he seems to have worked under the direction of Peter and Paul (1 Peter 5:13; Col. 4:10 2 Tim. 4:11). The fact that the Gospel carries the name of so inconspicuous a man as Mark is indirect evidence of its genuineness and of his authorship. Had the book been a forgery, the name of a more well-known person who had been associated personally with Jesus, such as the apostle Peter, would no doubt have been attached to it. There is no valid reason to doubt either the authenticity of the book or that Mark was its author. Papias, bishop of the city of Hierapolis, about 10 mi. (16 km.) from Collossae and Laodicea in Asia Minor, is the first known writer who speaks of Mark as the author of this Gospel. In his *Interpretations*, as quoted in Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* iii. 39. 15; Loeb ed., vol. 1, p. 297), he states:

—_And the Presbyter [most probably the presbyter John] used to say this, —Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them. II II

This statement is in harmony with Peter's reference to Mark as —my son II (1 Peter 5:13).

Papias' report is taken generally to imply that Mark served as a translator for the apostle Peter when he addressed audiences in whose language he was not fluent, apparently on journeys in lands where Aramaic, Peter's native tongue, was not spoken. However, see AA 40. Presumably, Mark translated Peter's gospel account so often that he became familiar with it and thus was prepared to write the gospel narrative under inspiration of the Holy spirit. Most scholars agree that Mark's record is the earliest of the four Gospels.

The Church Fathers are not in agreement as to whether Mark wrote before or after Peter's death (c. A.D. 64–66). Irenaeus of Lyons (c. A.D. 185) declares that Mark's Gospel was written after Peter died (*Against Heresies* iii. 1. 1). Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 190), on the other hand, places the writing of Mark during the lifetime of Peter (Eusebius, *op. cit.*, vi. 14. 5–7; Loeb ed., vol. 2, pp. 47, 49). The latter view appears to agree more closely with available information. But whichever was the case, the writing of this Gospel is doubtless to be placed between the years A.D. 55 and 70.

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Many statements in the Gospel of Mark make evident that it was written for non-Jewish readers. Such words as *kenturiōn* (Latin *centurio*, —centurion; ch. 15:39) and *spekoulator* (Latin *speculator*, —executioner; ch. 6:27) suggest that while written in Greek, the language of culture, it was intended for Romans. Mark might have used the common Greek words for these officers, rather than the Latin, but he seems repeatedly to have chosen Latin words in Greek transliteration, presumably because they would be more familiar to his readers. He explains Palestinian coinage (ch. 12:42), obviously because his intended readers were not familiar with it. Similarly, he explains the Jewish Passover (ch. 14:12) and customs of the Pharisees (ch. 7:3, 4). He translates various Aramaic words and expressions (chs. 5:41; 7:34; 15:34). None of this would have been necessary for a Palestinian reading audience. At the same time the writer was obviously a Jew who knew Aramaic and was familiar with the Old Testament, which, however, he quotes from the LXX translation.

3. Historical Setting. For a brief outline of the historical background of the life and mission of Jesus see p. 272. For a more complete discussion see pp. 41-67.

4. Theme. Mark is the shortest of the Gospels, yet in some respects it is the most vigorous and powerful of them all. Though only two thirds the length of Matthew, it contains a record of most of the incidents related in its longer counterpart. Its style is terse, vigorous, incisive, vivid, picturesque, and often provides significant details not mentioned by any of the other evangelists.

Mark emphasizes Jesus as a Man of action, whereas Matthew presents Him as a Teacher. Thus Mark records almost all the miracles that are reported by both the other synoptic writers. A characteristic word of Mark's is *eutheōs* (or *euthus*), —straightway, or —immediately, which he uses more often than all the other gospel writers together. See on ch. 1:10.

Mark relates the life of Christ largely in chronological order, rather than topically as Matthew does. His emphasis on miracles makes apparent his purpose to highlight the mighty power of God as evidenced by the many —signs and —wonders performed by Jesus. This is Mark's primary testimony to the divinity of Jesus, as that of Matthew is the fact that He fulfilled the predictions of the prophets of old. Matthew proves Jesus the Messiah on the basis that He is the One to whom the prophets bore witness. Mark proves Him the Messiah by the witness of His divine power, which, presumably, would be more convincing to his intended readers—Christians of a Gentile, perhaps Roman, background. See pp. 191, 272-274.