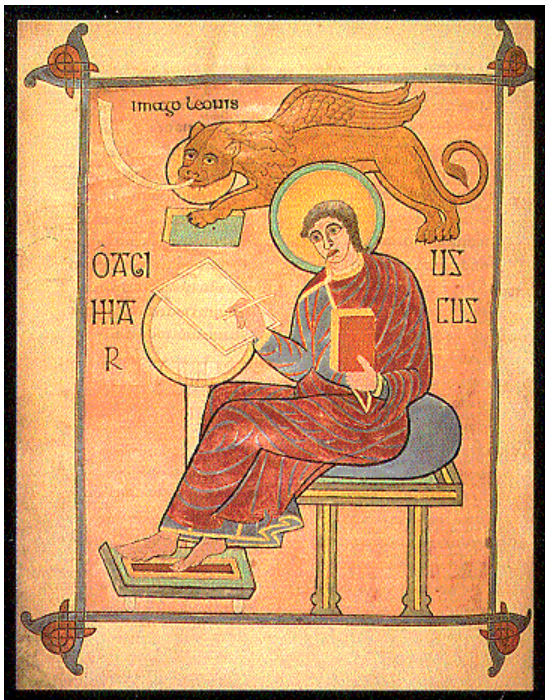


A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Mark's Gospel is the second of the four canonical Gospels of the Christian Church. Not until the beginning of the twentieth century did this Gospel, though nominally equal to the others in authority, arouse the same interest or feelings of attachment as did the other three Gospels. This may be partly from its not bearing the name of an apostle for its author, as the Matthew and John do, partly, also, owing to the fact that Matthew's and Luke's gospels, while they include most of what is found in it, contain much additional material, which is of the highest



value. With the dawn of the twentieth century, however, Mark's gospel has acquired new importance through the critical inquiries of biblical scholars which have led to the conclusion that the two other synoptic Gospels are based upon it, or upon a document which is upon the whole most truly represented in it, so that it possesses the advantage of being an earlier source of information, or at least of bringing us more fully into contact with such a source. The significance of all that we can learn as to the history of the composition of Mark's Gospel is clearly enhanced by this consideration.

(1) Early Account of a Writing by Mark. - According to a fragment of Papias (ap. Eusebius *History Eccl.* III. 39) taken from a work probably written circa A.D. 140, Mark, who was the follower and interpreter of Peter, recorded after the latter's decease the words of Christ and the narratives of His deeds which he had heard the Apostle deliver, but he could not arrange the matter "in order," because he had not himself been a personal follower of Jesus. This account Papias had derived, he tells us, from an informant who had heard it repeatedly given by "the elder," a Christian of the first generation.

There can be little doubt that the work to which Papias himself supposed this story to apply was the Gospel of Mark virtually as we know it. The tradition in regard to this work must have been continuous between his time and that of Irenaeus, who (*circa* A.D. 180) gives a similar account of its composition. It may be noted also that the same view of the origin of the Gospel of Mark appears to have been held by a contemporary of Papias, Justin Martyr. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* (*circa* 106) he cites a fact about the name of Peter from "his Memoirs," and adds also another similar fact about the name given to the sons of Zebedee, just as they are stated in Mark 3: 16-17, and nowhere else so far as we know. He may well have been ready to call the work "Peter's," though he believed that Mark actually composed it, on the ground that the latter recorded what the Apostle said (cf. *ibid.* *circa* 103).

But is our Gospel of Mark also to be identified with the writing by Mark spoken of by "the elder" whose account had been reported to Papias? Some confusion is here more conceivable; while, if it is supposed that such a writing was worked up in our second Gospel, this may seem sufficient to explain the connection of Mark's name with the latter.

In support of this view it is urged, though it is so much less often now than it used to be, that the description "not in order" does not fit our Gospel of Mark, the order in which is from an historical point of view as good as, if not better than, in the other Gospels. But from whomsoever the expression proceeds - whether from Papias, or his informant, or "the elder"- we may feel sure that considerations such as appeal to us from our training in historical criticism are not those which suggested it, but rather the want of agreement between this Gospel and some standard which on altogether different grounds was applied to it. This argument, then, for supposing that the original writing by Mark differed widely in form and contents from the Gospel which now bears his name appears to be without force. The question whether the two differed to any, and if so, to what extent can be decided only from an examination of the Gospel itself.

(2) The Question of the Integrity of the Gospel of Mark. - There are in a good many parts of this Gospel indications that the narrative has been derived from Simon Peter, or some one else who was a personal follower of Jesus in the days of His earthly ministry. It has been widely felt that the account of the call of the first four disciples and of the events which immediately followed (see Mark 1:15-39) at the opening of the Galilean ministry, bears strong marks of coming from Simon Peter. Other passages might be pointed out in which it is reasonable to suppose that this disciple in particular was the source. But we will content ourselves with noticing signs that the reminiscences of some eyewitness are recorded.

(a) Traits appear which are wholly without importance, and upon which no stress is laid in the context, but which it was natural for a narrator who was actually present, and only for such a one to introduce, because he remembered them as associated with the principal events. The following are instances and others might be cited: the mention of "other boats," (Mark 4:36); the half-foolish remark made by Peter when in a dazed condition at the Transfiguration (9:5-6); the young man who, when Jesus was arrested, followed, "having a linen cloth cast about him," (14: 51-52); the fact that Simon of Cyrene was "coming from the country," (15:21).

(b) There is accurate details of local coloring. The references to places and the descriptions of natural features the lake-shore, (1:16; 2:13; 3:7); the hills near at hand, (3:13; 5:5 and 13; 6:46); the desert places among the hills or by the shore, (1:35 and 45; 6:31-32) appear to be accurate; the routes indicated in the journeys that are taken are probable (vii. 24, 31; 8:27; 10:17, 32, and 46; 11:1). Again, the term "village-towns" (1:38) is a remarkably appropriate one (cf. Josephus, B. I. III. iii. 2). There would, indeed, be an exception to the general correctness of the topography if we were compelled to suppose that "country of the Gerasenes" (which is the best reading according to existing manuscript evidence at Mark 5:1) must mean the territory of the city of Gerasa. But it is easy to imagine that some confusion may have arisen in the transliteration of the name into Greek, and that the place really indicated is Khersa, near the middle of the eastern shore of the lake. The pair of references (6:45, 53) which might also be adduced as an exception, will be noticed below.

Further, the conditions of life and thought in Palestine at the time in question are faithfully represented, Aramaic words spoken on some important occasions are preserved (3:17; 5:4; 15:34). And, to mention a point of a different kind, the parts played by different sections among the Jewish people are such as might be expected. The point of view of speakers and actors is throughout that belonging to the time of the ministry of Jesus, not to that when the Christian Church had come into existence.

(c) The good order in this Gospel, *i.e.* the natural development of the narrative, will be indicated below. It has without good reason, as we have seen, been supposed to show that it cannot be the record by Mark referred to by Papias. And in reality it would be difficult to account for this feature except on the supposition that one who had lived through the events had been accustomed, when required to give a comprehensive sketch of the history of the ministry and sufferings of Jesus, to relate the facts in the main as they happened; and that a hearer of his has, to a considerable extent, reproduced them in the same order.

The last consideration seems to show that the general form and structure of the Gospel, and not merely certain portions of it, are original. In point of style, also, there is a large amount of uniformity. The chief exceptions are that, whereas some incidents are related in a very concise manner (e.g. 1: 23-28, and 40-45), there is in other cases considerable amplitude of description (see esp. 5:1-20, 35-43 and 9:14-27). But Mark's own writing might exhibit this variety, according to what he had been told or could remember. Moreover, a tendency to amplitude of language may be noticed here and there in some of the more concise narratives.

Further, it would be unreasonable to suppose that Mark, even if he relied chiefly on what he had heard Peter teach, would refrain from using any other sources of information which he possessed. Some have supposed that the same source document in Greek which was used by the first and third evangelists was also used by Mark. This is highly improbable, but he may have derived particular sayings from the Aramaic source itself of that document by independent translation; and may also have learned both sayings and narratives in other ways. It would seem also that the Discourse on the Last Things (Mark 13) differing as it does both in its greater length and in its systematic structure from other discourses recorded by him, must have come to his hands in a written form. In it some genuine sayings of Christ appear to have been worked up along with matter taken from Jewish Apocalypses and in accordance with an Apocalyptic literary model.

There does not, then, seem to be good reason for thinking that the work which proceeded from the hands of Mark differed widely in character and contents from the Gospel which now bears his name. But there are indications that some passages have been interpolated in it (e.g. in Mark 4) for there is some want of fitness in the inquiry of the disciples as to the meaning of "the parables" after only one has been given, and again a want of agreement between that inquiry and the words of Jesus (5:13), "Know you not *this* parable, and how shall you know all the parables?" We notice further that the two parables in *verses* 26-32 are somewhat loosely appended. It looks as if they were insertions in the passage as it originally stood, and that the references to parables in the plural, together with the statement at verses 33, 34, had been introduced in order to adapt the context to these additions. This view is confirmed by the fact that in Luke (8:4) only one parable, that of the sower, is given or referred to. This evangelist has probably here followed the original form of Mark.

Similarly the collection of sayings after Mark 9:40 (*verses* 41-50) has probably been interpolated. They are thrown together in a way unusual with Mark, who is accustomed to place each important saying in a setting of its own. Here again we note that they do not appear at the corresponding point in Luke, though some of them are given by him in other contexts. The account of the crossing of the lake (6:45-53), after the feeding of the five thousand, furnishes an instance of a different kind. The difficulty as to the position of Bethsaida, or (if εἰς τὸ πέραν, "unto the other side," at verse 45 is taken to refer only to the crossing of a bay at the north-eastern corner of the lake) the discrepancy between "crossing" in this sense and in that of verse 53 would be explained if the narrative (which is not in Luke) may be held to be an interpolation by one not familiar with the localities. Once more,

the account of the feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8: 1-9) resembles that of the feeding of the five thousand (6:35-44) closely in all respects except that of the numbers given, about which differences might easily arise in tradition, and it looks therefore as if it might be a "doublet," *i.e.* another form of the same narrative derived through a different source. And it is not so likely that Mark should have mistaken it for a distinct incident as that an editor of his Gospel should have done so. Some other instances, of greater or less probability, might be mentioned.

In addition to such larger insertions, the text of the original document seems to have undergone a certain amount of revision. Some of the cases in which the first and third evangelist agree against Mark in a word or clause may be best accounted for by their both having reproduced the common source (an example may be seen under 4 below).

As we have found it necessary to distinguish between the original composition by Mark, to whom in the main the work appears to be due, and some enlargement and alteration which it subsequently underwent whereby it reached its present form, these stages must be borne in mind in considering dates that may be assigned in connection with this Gospel. According to Papias, Mark wrote after the death of Peter, *i.e.* after A.D. 64, if we suppose, as it is usual to do, that Peter was martyred in the massacre by the Emperor Nero after the burning of Rome. It would be natural for Mark to set himself to make his record soon after the Apostle's death; and in confirmation of the view that he did so, it may be pointed out that in the form of the prophecy in chapter 8 of the calamities that were to come upon Jerusalem, no details occur of a kind to suggest that it had actually already taken place.

Further, Mark's work may very probably have been used by Luke in its original form. On the other hand, it was known to our first evangelist, Matthew, very nearly in the form in which we have it. The chief revision of Mark would seem, then, to have taken place between the times of the composition of the first and third Gospels, which cannot be far removed from one another. The last twelve verses of Mark 16 were added later still, probably early in the 2nd century, probably to take the place of the ending which had been lost, or which was regarded as defective.

(3) *The Gospel History as represented in Mark.* - After a (I) prefatory passage (chapter 1 verses 1-13) the Gospel deals with (II) *Christ's ministry in Galilee and other parts of northern Palestine*, (1:14 - 9: 50). This portion of the history may suitably be divided into three periods:

(a) *The Early period:* From the opening of the work of Jesus to the first plot to destroy Him (1:14 - 3: 6).

(b) *Middle period:* From the gathering of crowds from all parts and appointment of the Twelve to the sending forth of the Twelve to extend Christ's work and the alarm of Herod Antipas (3:7 - 6:29).

(c) Closing period: From Christ's withdrawal with His disciples after their return from their mission to His final departure from Galilee (6:30 - 9:50).

Throughout we can trace a development as to the following:

(a) The stir created and the attitude of men towards Jesus:

- + (1: 32 -34, and 37) excitement at Capernaum;
- + (3: 8, 45) fame spreads through a wide district;
- + (3: 7, 8) people from distant parts appear in the crowds;
- + (4: 2ff) the word of the Kingdom is received in very various ways;
- + (8: 28) great diversity of opinions as to the claims of Jesus;

(b) The opposition to Him:

- + (1:6 - 3: 22) scribes come from Jerusalem and a more heinous charge is preferred

(c) The formation of a band of disciples and the position accorded to them:

- + (1: 16-20) four are called to follow Him;
- + (2: 14) Yet another;
- + (3: 14) He "makes twelve" including those before called;
- + (6: 7ff) He sends them out to preach and work cures;

(d) The methods which he adopts:

- + (1:21,39 - 3:1) preaches in the synagogues, later more commonly by the lake-shore or on the mountain sides; or He teaches in a house where He happens to be at;
- + (4:1ff) He adopts a new mode of address because a sifting-process was required;
- + (from 6:45 onwards) He mainly devotes Himself to the training of the Twelve, while seeking retirement from the multitude;

(e) In the districts which he visits:

- + (1:38) tour in the neighborhood of Capernaum;
- + (5: 1) He crosses to eastern shore of the lake;
- + (6:6b) A tour which includes Nazareth;
- + (6:45) Bethsaida;
- + (7: 31) Journey to Tyre and Sidon and back through Decapolis;
- + (8:22, 27) He is at Bethsaida and visits neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi;

(f) His self-revelation:

- + (8: 27ff) first unambiguous declaration of His Messiahship.

(III) *The Journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, the Last Days, Passion and Resurrection*, (10: 1 to the end.) He goes first to "the borders of Judea and beyond Jordan" (Perea), and exercises His ministry there, (10: 1-16) In connection with the journey from this region to Jerusalem three striking incidents are recorded:

+ (9:2-13) The Transfiguration;

+ (9:14-32) The Healing of a boy with an evil spirit;

+ (10:46-52) The Healing of the blind The account of the time in Jerusalem includes:

+ (11:27 - 12:40), a series of conflicts with opponents;

+ (chapter 13) The discourse on the Last Things;

The only notes of time in the Gospel occur in connection with the conspiracy to kill Jesus (14:1) and the Last Supper (verse 12).

(4) *The Leading Ideas of St Mark.* - Chapter 1 verse 1, which stands as a title, was probably, even according to the short form of it which is supported by manuscript evidence, due to a reviser of the original. Both Matthew and Luke show signs of having had a somewhat different beginning before them. Nevertheless, that title fitly describes the work. It is emphatically "the Gospel," because it sets forth the person and work of the Christ. The evangelist is conscious of this aim. It appears not only at great moments of the history such as the Baptism (1:2), the confession of Peter (8: 29), the Transfiguration (9: 7); nor again merely in the prominence given to the miracles of Jesus and in particular to the casting out of devils, but also in many of the sayings recorded in it, as in the great series contained in the narratives in chapter 2: 5, - 17 and 19; and again in the reply of Jesus to those who charged Him with being in collusion with Satan (3: 27). The character of the genuine disciples of the Christ and the demands that are made of them form, as it were, the complement to the representation of what He Himself is, and are set forth in other striking sayings, related along with the memorable occasions on which they were spoken: (3: 34, 35; 8: 34-36; 9: 23, 29, and 35-37; 10: 14, 15, and 42-45).