

INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK¹

AUTHORSHIP:

Nearly unanimous: *John Mark*. “In this gospel there is no reference to its author, and yet there is no matter less disputed among New Testament scholars... This name occurs eight times in the New Testament, sometimes simply Mark, or Marcus, sometimes John, and sometimes ‘John, whose surname was Mark,’ or ‘John who was called Mark’ (Acts 12:2, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37-39; I Pet. 5:13; Philemon 23, 24; Col. 4:10; II Tim. 4:11) ... **Mark was cousin to Barnabas (Col. 4:10), and... Peter was his spiritual father (I Pet. 5:13)**... Tradition says that Mark was with Peter in Rome; that he was sent by Peter on a mission to Egypt; that he founded the Church in Alexandria, and became its first Bishop; and that he was martyred there in A.D. 68... Swete tells us that Hippolytus, a Church writer of the beginning of the third century... has a story that Mark had the nickname of ‘stump-fingered’ ...or ‘Mark of the short finger.’ The ordinary preface to the Vulgate Version states that after his conversion to Christianity the Evangelist amputated one of his fingers in order to disqualify himself for the Jewish priesthood, but the preface to another version of the Vulgate asserts that he was born with one short finger... The tradition, in all likelihood, is based on fact [?-mwe].”²

DATE:

Probably A.D. 50-56. Ryrie: “If one denies the phenomenon of predictive prophecy, then the book must be dated after A.D. 70 because of 13:2, but since our Lord could predict the future, this late date is unnecessary. In fact, if Acts must be dated about 61, and if Luke, the companion volume, preceded it, then Mark must be even earlier, since Luke apparently [?-mwe] used Mark in writing his Gospel. This points to a date in the 50’s for Mark. However, many scholars believe that Mark was not written until after Peter died; i.e. after 67 but before 70.”³

Scroggie: “It seems certain... that this Gospel was written between A.D. 46 and A.D. 56, and, as Allen, Nolloth, and Robertson think, the evidence as a whole points to A.D. 50 as the most probable date. If this be so, then Mark is the earliest of the New Testament Writings, with the possible exception of James... In attempting to fix the date of this Gospel, the critics range from A.D. 44 to A.D. 75 ...(but) there is now almost universal agreement that Mark is the earliest of the Gospels.[?-mwe]”⁴

THEME:

“**The theme of the book is *Christ the Servant*.**”⁵ **Another lesser emphasis is *Christ as a man of action*.** “Both the third and fourth Gospels declare the object with which they were written (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:31), but the second Gospel does not explain its design... the writer was guided to the selection of his materials with some object in view, an object which external and internal evidence should disclose... there is much which leads to the view that **Mark wrote for Roman Christians**, such, for instance as the frequent use of Latin words, the explanation of Jewish customs, and the use of the Roman division of the watches (xiii:35) instead of the Jewish division, which the other Evangelists retain (cf. Luke xii. 38)... **Matthew is adapted to the Jewish outlook, and Luke to the Greek, but Mark is adapted to the Roman. All three outlooks were governed by the idea of power... in Mark it is the power of will...** The Romans were people of action rather than of thought, and in addressing them more especially, Mark presents Christ as the mighty Worker, rather than as the profound Thinker, the Man who conquers by doing. Hence this vivid and rapid record, with little of discourse, and much of movement and accomplishment...”

“Clement of Alexandria, who flourished in the latter part of the second century... made a statement in the sixth book of his Institutions (not now extant, but quoted by Eusebius) bearing on this subject, which is of considerable value. It is to the effect that when the gospel was preached to the Romans, ‘*such a light of piety shone into the minds of those who heard Peter that they were not satisfied with once hearing, nor with the unwritten doctrine that was delivered, but earnestly besought Mark (whose Gospel is now spread abroad) that he would leave in*”

¹ Compiled by Mike Edwards, July 1999, Greenville, SC (revised Dec., 2007 & Apr. 2013, St. Vincent, West Indies & Sept. 2017, Madison, Ohio). Note: statements/symbols in brackets [] have been added by me, while those in parentheses () appear as such in the text of the original sources.-mwe

² W. Graham Scroggie, “*Guide to the Gospels*”, pp. 167-168

³ Charles C. Ryrie, “*The Ryrie Study Bible*” (Moody Press: Chicago, Illinois, 1994 expanded edition), p. 1479

⁴ Scroggie, op cit., pp. 170-171

⁵ Ryrie, op cit., p. 1479

writing for them the doctrine which they had received by preaching; nor did they cease until they had persuaded him, and so given occasion for the Gospel to be written which is now called after Mark' ...**Mark presented the Redeemer to the Romans in a manner in keeping with their mode of thought and life, and calculated to win them over to Christianity. He is here seen as the wonder-working Son of God...The Jew was impressed by spiritual power; the Greek, by intellectual and aesthetic power; and the Roman, by practical power.** The Roman believed in the logic of deeds, and so they became the mighty workers of the world, casting up highways across empires, and conquering by force of arms..."⁶

STYLE:

"[Mark contains] only one major discourse (xiii), reported in 37 verses, which is between one-seventh and one-eighth of all Christ's words in this Gospel. What other of His utterances [that]...might rightly be called talks on various subjects...are in no sense comparable with the discourses recorded by Matthew...and Mark's one discourse of any length (xiii), which is the parallel of Matt. xxiv, has, as we have said, but 37 verses, whereas in the whole of Matthew's discourse there are 97 verses."⁷

Ryrie: **"Mark wrote for Gentile readers in general and Roman readers in particular.** For this reason the genealogy of Christ is not included (for it would have meant little to Gentiles), the Sermon on the Mount is not reported, and the condemnations of the Jewish sects receive little attention. As a further indication of his Gentile readership, Mark felt it necessary to interpret Aramaic words (5:41; 7:34; 15:22), and he used Latin words not found in the other Gospels ('*executioner*,' 6:27; '*farthing*,' 12:42)... There are only about 63 quotations or allusions from the Old Testament in Mark as compared with about 128 in Matthew and between 90 and 100 in Luke... **This gospel emphasizes what Jesus did rather than what He said. It is a book of action (the word *ethus*, '*at once*' or '*immediately*,' occurs more than 40 times)."**⁸

The book appeals little to Old Testament Scriptures, as that would mean nothing to a Roman. Nor do you find reasoning and philosophical argument such as you find in Luke, since this book was not written to appeal primarily to the Greek mind. There are Latin words and phrases used [cf. Scroggie, p. 169] hinting at the Roman audience for whom Mark was writing. Chrysostom felt the book was written in Egypt [Alexandria?]. Others argue for Antioch or Caesarea, but "'ancient testimony so far as it bears on the question, is almost wholly on the side of Rome.' [sic] The testimony referred to reaches from Irenaeus of Lyons, in the latter half of the second century...and it is held by most scholars today.[?] This view finds warrant and confirmation in I Peter v. 13, if so be, as is generally believed, '*Babylon*' stands for Rome."⁹

KEY VERSE: 10:45

Ryrie: **"The key verse is 10:45, which divides the Gospel into two major divisions; *the service of the Servant (1:1-10:52)* and *the sacrifice of the Servant (11:1-16:20)*."** Scroggie concurs: "The Plan of this Gospel is very simple, and chap. X. 45, may be regarded as the key to it: '*The Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister – i. 14-ix. 50, and to give His life a ransom for many*' – xi. 1-xv. 47 ...**In the main, though not consistently, the order is chronological,** but Mark's purpose was not to write a complete biography, far less a history, but to show the successive stages through which the ministry of Jesus passed."¹⁰

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK:

As noted above, **Mark's gospel can be divided into two main divisions:**

- 1) **The first ten chapters which describe *Christ's service to others*** in a variety of manners and manifestations, and,
- 2) **The events leading up to and including *His sacrificial death for mankind*,** found in the following five chapters, with the last chapter (16) as a conclusion/epilogue.

⁶ Scroggie, op cit., pp. 183-184, 212

⁷ Scroggie, op cit., p. 212

⁸ Ryrie, op cit.

⁹ Scroggie, p. 171

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 217

Ryrie notes **that the gospel can also be divided or outlined following a *geographical* pattern:**

I. Preparation of the Servant, 1:1-13

II. Preaching of the Servant in Galilee, 1:14-9:50

III. Preaching of the Servant in Perea, 10:1-52

IV. Passion of the Servant in Jerusalem, 11:1-16:20. (Ryrie, op cit)