

3. Survey Notes on the Gospel of Mark

a. An Overview.

Matthew, in a general sense, has presented Christ as the King. Mark in an unspecified but observed sense will present Christ as the Lord's servant.

The traditional view of the origin of Mark comes from Papias who wrote early in the second century: "Mark, who was the interpreter of Peter, wrote down all that he remembered, whether of sayings or doings of Christ, but not in order..." Other second and third century authors agree unanimously that Mark (John Mark of the New Testament) wrote Peter's "memoirs" based on notes taken from Peter's preaching or private discussions. The only question arises concerning whether Mark wrote before or after Peter's death. It seems likely from tradition that he may have used his notes from Peter's teaching to write the book after Peter died.

Several facets of the Gospel of Mark point to Peter's involvement: 1) it begins with Peter's call to discipleship; 2) the Galilean ministry, especially in and near Capernaum, Peter's home town, is prominent; 3) the vivid and full accounts have the feel of an eye witness, such as one of the disciples; 4) incidents placing Peter in a (somewhat) favorable light are omitted (e.g., walking on the water, the benediction at Caesarea Philippi); 5) his denial of the Lord is full and detailed.

Mark is generally considered the earliest of the Synoptic Gospels because of its brevity and alleged "simple" or "primitive" nature. Another reason stems from the synoptic question in general and the relationship between the material in Mark and that in Matthew and in Luke. For example, only eight percent of Mark is unique to Mark (55 of 661 verses), whereas most of Mark (606 verses) is found in some form in Matthew and half of Mark (380) verses in Luke. It is often concluded from this that Matthew and Luke depended heavily on Mark for their material, as well as on an unknown source scholars have labeled "Q" (from Quelle, German for "source").

The date of Mark is therefore integral to this discussion, and any suggestion of it is only tentative, due to the incomplete nature of the materials. The usual reasoning is: "If Luke used Mark and if Luke did not include (at the end of Acts) Paul's trial before Caesar because it had not yet happened, then Acts was written c. AD 61-62, Luke was written some time earlier (cf. Acts 1:1), and Mark had probably been written in the early mid-fifties. (If this theory is true, of course, Luke did not use Mark as we have it, but merely the notes on Peter's sermons.)