

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 2 Reading 1

JFB, “The Gospel According to Mark”

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The Gospel According to Mark

Commentary by DAVID BROWN

THAT the Second Gospel was written by Mark is universally agreed, though by what Mark, not so. The great majority of critics take the writer to be "John whose surname was Mark," of whom we read in the Acts, and who was "sister's son to Barnabas" (Col 4:10). But no reason whatever is assigned for this opinion, for which the tradition, though ancient, is not uniform; and one cannot but wonder how it is so easily taken for granted by WETSTEIN, HUG, MEYER, EBRARD, LANGE, ELLICOTT, DAVIDSON, TREGELLES, &c. ALFORD goes the length of saying it "has been universally believed that he was the same person with the John Mark of the Gospels. But GROTIUS thought differently, and so did SCHLEIERMACHER, CAMPBELL, BURTON, and DA COSTA; and the grounds on which it is concluded that they were two different persons appear to us quite unanswerable. "Of John, surnamed Mark," says CAMPBELL, in his Preface to this Gospel, "one of the first things we learn is, that he attended Paul and Barnabas in their apostolical journeys, when these two travelled together (Act 12:25; 13:5). And when afterwards there arose a dispute between them concerning him, insomuch that they separated, Mark accompanied his uncle Barnabas, and Silas attended Paul. When Paul was reconciled to Mark, which was probably soon after, we find Paul again employing Mark's assistance, recommending him, and giving him a very honorable testimony (Col 4:10; 2Ti 4:11; Phm 1:24). But we hear not a syllable of his attending Peter as his minister, or assisting him in any capacity. And yet, as we shall presently see, no tradition is more ancient, more uniform, and better sustained by internal evidence, than that Mark, in his Gospel, was but "the interpreter of Peter," who, at the close of his first Epistle speaks of him as "Marcus my son" (1Pe 5:13), that is, without doubt, his son in the Gospel--converted to Christ through his instrumentality. And when we consider how little the Apostles Peter and Paul were together--how seldom they even met--how different were their tendencies, and how separate their spheres of labor, is there not, in the absence of all evidence of the fact, something approaching to violence in the supposition that the same Mark was the intimate associate of both? "In brief," adds CAMPBELL, "the accounts given of Paul's attendant, and those of Peter's interpreter, concur in nothing but the name, Mark or Marcus; too slight a circumstance to conclude the sameness of the person from, especially when we consider how common the name was at Rome, and how customary it was for the Jews in that age to assume some Roman name when they went thither."

Regarding the Evangelist Mark, then, as another person from Paul's companion in travel, all we know of his personal history is that he was a convert, as we have seen, of the Apostle Peter. But as to his Gospel, the tradition regarding Peter's hand in it is so ancient, so uniform, and so remarkably confirmed by internal evidence, that we must regard it as an established fact. "Mark," says PAPIAS (according to the testimony of EUSEBIUS, [Ecclesiastical History, 3.39]), "becoming the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, though not in order, whatever he remembered of what was either said or done by Christ; for he was neither a hearer of the Lord nor a follower of Him, but afterwards, as I said, [he was a follower] of Peter, who arranged the discourses for use, but not according to the order in which they were uttered by the Lord." To the same effect IRENAEUS [Against Heresies, 3,1]: "Matthew published a Gospel while Peter and Paul were preaching and founding the Church at Rome; and after their departure (or decease), Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, he also gave forth to us in writing the things which were preached by Peter." And CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA is still more specific, in a passage preserved to

us by EUSEBIUS [Ecclesiastical History, 6.14]: "Peter having publicly preached the word at Rome, and spoken forth the Gospel by the Spirit, many of those present exhorted Mark, as having long been a follower of his, and remembering what he had said, to write what had been spoken; and that having prepared the Gospel, he delivered it to those who had asked him for it; which, when Peter came to the knowledge of, he neither decidedly forbade nor encouraged him." EUSEBIUS' own testimony, however, from other accounts, is rather different: that Peter's hearers were so penetrated by his preaching that they gave Mark, as being a follower of Peter, no rest till he consented to write his Gospel, as a memorial of his oral teaching; and "that the apostle, when he knew by the revelation of the Spirit what had been done, was delighted with the zeal of those men, and sanctioned the reading of the writing (that is, of this Gospel of Mark) in the churches" [Ecclesiastical History, 2.15]. And giving in another of his works a similar statement, he says that "Peter, from excess of humility, did not think himself qualified to write the Gospel; but Mark, his acquaintance and pupil, is said to have recorded his relations of the actings of Jesus. And Peter testifies these things of himself; for all things that are recorded by Mark are said to be memoirs of Peter's discourses." It is needless to go farther--to ORIGEN, who says Mark composed his Gospel "as Peter guided" or "directed him, who, in his Catholic Epistle, calls him his son," &c.; and to JEROME, who but echoes EUSEBIUS.

This, certainly, is a remarkable chain of testimony; which, confirmed as it is by such striking internal evidence, may be regarded as establishing the fact that the Second Gospel was drawn up mostly from materials furnished by Peter. In DA COSTA'S'S Four Witnesses the reader will find this internal evidence detailed at length, though all the examples are not equally convincing. But if the reader will refer to our remarks on JF & B for Mar 16:7, and JF & B for Joh 18:27, he will have convincing evidence of a Petrine hand in this Gospel.

It remains only to advert, in a word or two, to the readers for whom this Gospel was, in the first instance, designed, and the date of it. That it was not for Jews but Gentiles, is evident from the great number of explanations of Jewish usages, opinions, and places, which to a Jew would at that time have been superfluous, but were highly needful to a Gentile. We can here but refer to Mar 2:18; 7:3-4; 12:18; 13:3; 14:12; 15:42, for examples of these. Regarding the date of this Gospel--about which nothing certain is known--if the tradition reported by IRENAEUS can be relied on that it was written at Rome, "after the departure of Peter and Paul," and if by that word "departure" we are to understand their death, we may date it somewhere between the years 64 and 68; but in all likelihood this is too late. It is probably nearer the truth to date it eight or ten years earlier.

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