

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 2a Mark as Author

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Hello. This is Unit 2 of BIB203, The Life of Christ, New Testament 1. We are going to be looking at the authors of the Gospels this week. In this particular clip, we will be looking at Mark as author. Each one of these clips, each one of these segments will be an introduction to each one. We're going to start with Mark and we're going to end with John. So we're going to be dealing with chronological and historical setting for each author. And so I want to tie this, before we get started, to what we did in Unit 1. In Unit 1, we dealt largely with the synoptic problem, Synoptic Gospels: Mark, Matthew, and Luke, in that chronological order. We discussed the various methodologies that scholars have used since the late 18th, early 19th century to attack the problem of the Gospels in terms of their interrelationship and their discovery that Mark is responsible for the other two Gospels in terms of its content and how it is used, first by Matthew and then by Luke.

This week in Unit 2, we are going to be looking at Mark as author first, and then we'll follow that with Matthew. So here goes. With respect to Mark, again, chronological and historical setting, the Gospel of Mark, as with all the other Gospels, is anonymous. That is to say that we read in our English Bibles the Gospel according to Mark or simply Mark or the Gospel of Mark and we assume as English readers, some of us anyway, that those names were appended to those Gospels. But in point of fact, at the point of composition, they were not. There were no names appended to those Gospels. They were simply understood by the respective audiences that such and such an evangelist composed such and such a Gospel. It was only later that that oral tradition of authorial ascription became written tradition. And so with Mark, for example and as an illustration, you have the title *Kata Markon*, a Greek prepositional phrase basically meaning "according to Mark." The title was probably added sometime in the 2nd century, probably early in the 2nd century, so after 100.

It is the earliest of the Gospels. We have established that fact through a review of the synoptic interrelationships of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. It was quite likely written in Rome. We had the earliest witness. Again, you will recall from Unit 1, the earliest witness is Papias who arguably lives from 60 to about 130 and he was bishop of Hierapolis, which was in southwestern Asia Minor, which was about 10 to 12 miles from Colossi and Hierapolis. And a historical tidbit: By this point in history, Colossi no longer exists. It was destroyed in an earthquake in the early 60s. Papias' testimony is documented, as we've said before, in Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* or Church History. That is a 4th century work, as we noted before, and that is where we have the Papias tradition regarding the evangelist Mark.

So what Papias says again (it bears repeating) is this: "The presbyter or the elder also said this. Mark, having indeed become Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately the things said or done by Christ. That is, as much as he remembered, because he neither heard the Lord nor followed him. But later, as I said, he followed Peter, who modified the teaching according to the need, but did not set the discourses of the Lord in order, so that Mark did not sin. Thus, he wrote some things as he remembered, for he gave attention to one thing, to not neglect what he heard or lie about anything. These then are the things which Papias narrated about Mark."

So you have Eusebius' historical judgment in play. He quotes what Papias said about Mark being the interpreter of Peter, and he puts his historical judgment on that. What is that historical judgment in particular? What he's saying there is that the presbyter that Papias is quoting is quite likely the apostle John, although there is a debate on that issue as to whether you're actually dealing with the apostle John or you're dealing with another John who is simply called John the Elder. To be fair, there are many

who would lean towards the opinion that it is simply an unknown John, unknown to us, who is John the Elder. But again, it remains a matter for debate.

Now, that means that the Papias tradition extends back to the first generation of believers. This evidence is bolstered by other Christian authors of the 2nd and the 3rd century that pick up where Papias left off and basically substantiate what he had to say about it based on the tradition that he used, his tradition, and other traditions about authorship. Those would include Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. Now, that's the early church tradition about Mark. And of course, the early church fathers that I just mentioned all hold to Marcan authorship. Now, modern criticism, on the other hand, rejects the historical tradition. It labels it as secondhand evidence. Modern criticism tends to want to go back to the historical sources and critically judge each and every factoid or datum of evidence in order to create a reconstruction of how things probably went.

So according to some scholars, the gospel has no Petrine flavor, Petrine meaning "of Peter." So it has no Petrine flavor. There seems to be no familiarity with Palestinian Judaism or the geography of Palestine in general. So what I've just said there was some scholars don't believe that Peter had any influence on it. They don't believe that Mark's Gospel reflects what we now know of Palestinian Judaism. And there doesn't seem to be any knowledge of Palestine. The name Markos or Markon was a common one. In other words, Mark was a common name back there. That's another criticism that they have. And so this makes it possible to postulate authorship by someone with the same name. Of course, so that basically constitutes a denial of Mark as author. Others suggest that Papias invented the claim for Marcan authorship as an apologetic defense. He invented it out of whole cloth. He had no basis for suggesting that Mark was the author.

But on the other side of the argument, so an argument for Marcan authorship affords us a couple of observations. One, Mark is well-known to the early church because no further descriptions are given besides the mention of his name. So someone like that is known to his audience and no one needs to go about providing proof or establishing authorship. Jerome, the church father, identifies Markos as that John Mark that is referenced in the New Testament. And Jerome is close to those traditions because a review of the life of Jerome will tell us he's a 5th century church father, a Latin church father or a Western church father, and he spends time in Jerusalem learning Hebrew and Aramaic, and he eventually has the most significant hand in the publication of the Latin vulgate when it first comes out. So he's there. He's close to the traditions. He rubs shoulders with people who still have those traditions in mind. He is a well-read man. He studies. And Jerome's historical judgment is that this Markos is John Mark mentioned in the New Testament.

And so he receives, first mentioned in Acts 12:12. That's where we first see John Mark. He is identified as the son of a woman who is named Mary, at whose home believers met. This is during the Herodian persecution of the church. That would be Herod Agrippa the First who beheads James, the apostle, the brother of John, and puts Peter in prison. Paul and Barnabas (Paul is still called Saul at that point in the history of the church), they go to Jerusalem. They are probably there while all of this is occurring. And of course, when they returned to Syria and Antioch, north of the Palestinian region, they take John Mark with them. Mark is also called the cousin of Barnabas. That is in Colossians 4:10. So reading Colossians 4:10 into Acts 11-12 where John Mark is mentioned, we can see the logic of the author of the Book of Acts, Luke, in stating that John Mark accompanied Saul and Barnabas back to Antioch because there is a relationship there between Mark and Barnabas. John Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their

first missionary journey, but upon reaching Pamphylia on the coast of Asia Minor, he decided to return to Jerusalem. Paul declined to allow him to accompany both he and Barnabas on the second missionary journey which led to the separation between Paul and Barnabas.

Mark is also mentioned in Philippians 24 [sic Philemon 24]. He is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:11 as a useful fellow worker to Paul. So there is some reconciliation that is taking place at that point, and that would be about two decades later historically. And then you also have 1 Peter 5:13 depicting him as Peter's son. That's not a biological link, however. When Peter calls him "my son," there's a close relationship that has developed over time, which then feeds back into the Papias tradition, does it not? Think about 1 Peter 5:13. "The church which is at Babylon greets you, and so does Mark my son." 1 Peter 5:13, which fits quite nicely with the Papias tradition, Mark being the interpreter of Peter. So you can link those ideas together, and doing that gives strength to the Papias tradition in terms of historical value. Later tradition, as Mark living at Alexandria, Egypt as a bishop. And this is according to Jerome. So Jerome did some investigating and he was unable to unearth the fact that Mark was a bishop at Alexandria. Irenaeus corroborates that Papias tradition regarding Mark as interpreter and disciple of Peter. And so those are just two examples of corroboration.

When you look within the gospel of Mark itself, general consensus, which has been challenged somewhat by modern criticism, states that Mark 14:13 and 14:51 are autobiographical references to Mark. Critical tradition of modern criticism states the opposite, that they are not autobiographical references to Mark because of what Papias says about Mark not having been an eyewitness and a follower of Christ. So there is an attempt to look at the Papias tradition and to draw out by inference from that tradition that Mark was not an eyewitness and a follower of Christ, and therefore, Mark 14:13 and 14:51 are not actually references to him, which is an argument that does need to be considered on the merits alone. That's a fair argument to make. But on the other side of that argument, it is possible to argue that this is an autobiographical allusion, especially with the latter reference which is 14:51. You have a young man who is following at a distance of sorts and people lay hands on him in the context of the arrest of Jesus, and he leaves his garment behind and he runs away from them naked. He's probably not fully naked. He's probably just unclothed. He has undergarments. But there's no reason to identify him with the earlier reference of 14:13 which simply references a man carrying a jar of water, especially if John Mark lives in Jerusalem, although he could have moved.

So that's how all of these kinds of debates and arguments are worked together. 14:51 is really our focus. The young man who runs away with his undergarments, that would be the force of the word "naked." So if we say that that is not a reference in 14:51 to Mark, then the mention of it in the first place is difficult to explain. So it seems best to simply say this is probably an autobiographical reference of sorts. So that would mean then that Mark was not a follower and an eyewitness of Jesus as such, but he was aware of who Jesus was. He was not an apostle. That's what it means. He's not a follower or an eyewitness. He's not a disciple. He's not someone that Jesus selected after praying all night to God and selecting 12 apostles. Mark was not among that number. He was not, as they said back then in those days, 2000 years ago, he was not a *shalach*. He was not a sent one. He was not an authorized bearer of tradition. But he certainly did know who Jesus was and hung around those who followed and were eyewitnesses of Jesus.

So the charge that Mark lacks knowledge of the topography cannot be sustained upon a careful reading of the Gospel material. That can only be argued from a radical historical perspective. It doesn't make

sense to discount the historical tradition that we have available, although that is the right of anyone who wants to enter into these kinds of investigations. Modern criticism also alleges that Mark's Gospel, like the other Gospels, came about through an extended editorial process. So Marcan community wrote Mark, or Matthean community wrote Matthew, or Lucan community wrote Luke, or Johannine community wrote John. Again, I want to be clear. This is not the viewpoint of this particular instructor. I do hold to the view that Mark did indeed write Mark. We do have a substantiated historical tradition to that effect. And it's not just through one line of historical tradition. It's through several lines of historical tradition. It seems fair to take it on its merits, like a well-trained historian would. There are personal touches to the gospel of Mark that strongly suggest the testimony of an eyewitness. If we take eyewitness in its technical sense, then that would refer to Peter, which then would argue for a Petrine flavor to the gospel of Mark. The disciples in the gospel of Mark are treated with a critical eye. Their flaws are not hidden. In fact, they are exposed. So it's probably best to take the Papias tradition as historically probable to a high degree, as I've said.

The place of writing. Early tradition leaned heavily towards Rome. Irenaeus suggests this. No, he doesn't just suggest it. He states it that it was written in Rome. Clement of Alexandria states that too. The anti-Marcionite prologue mentions that too, along with a reference to 1 Peter 5:13. Other choices for place of writing are Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus. Caesarea has also been suggested. And then, of course, you have Egypt. But Rome seems to be the best option because that is strongly attested. Most of the lines of the historical tradition that we have dating back two millennia state Rome as the provenance, the place of writing.

One opinion states that Mark was written about the year 68. More broadly, the Gospel has been dated from the 40s to the 70s. Those who argue for a date in the 40s suggest that Peter may have traveled to Rome after being released from prison, as depicted in Acts 12:17. Those who suggest the 50s dating argue that evidence exists for Peter's presence in the mid-50s. Mark's presence in Luke-Acts seems to strengthen this because it's very close to the first missionary journey which begins in 46 or 47. So that's a very strong argument. Most scholars argue for a date in the 60s and they argue this from internal considerations pointing to suffering as a context and as a theme in the gospel. And that's a redaction critical observation: suffering in the context of the Gospel of Mark. One strand of tradition holds to Mark in authorship after Peter's death. Another holds authorship prior to Peter's death or his martyrdom. Many New Testament historians hold to a date between 67 and 69. Some date it to the 70s because of Mark 13. And they tie it to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70. But when we take all of the evidence and put it together, it seems best to argue for a date in the late 50s or the early 60s.