

The earliest statement concerning the Gospel of Mark is that of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, who wrote a book now lost, *Exegesis of the Lord's Oracles* (ca. A.D. 140), but known to us through quotations made by Eusebius. At one point he cited the testimony of an elder, who was evidently an older contemporary:

And the Elder said this also: "Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatever he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord, but not however in order." For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow him, but afterwards, as I said, Peter, who adapted his teachings to the needs of his hearers, but not as though he were drawing up a connected account of the Lord's oracles. So then Mark made no mistake in thus recording some things just as he remembered them. For he took forethought for one thing, not to omit any of the things that he had heard nor to state any of them falsely.

The testimony that the author of the Gospel was intimately associated with the ministry of the apostle Peter is presented not as Papias's opinion but as the word of an earlier authority. It is therefore probable that Papias has preserved a tradition that can be traced at least as far as the beginnings of the second century. The passage as a whole appears to be intended to explain the character and authority of Mark's Gospel. It affirms that it is based upon proclamation and catechesis, and that its authority is apostolic since Peter was both an apostle and an eye-witness to the events of which he spoke. While the content of Mark's Gospel is viewed as derived substantially from Peter, there is a recognition of the initiative and independence of Mark as an evangelist, who did what Peter failed to do when he prepared a composition consisting of the sayings and deeds of the Lord.¹² By placing in the foreground

¹² Cited by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* III. xxxix. 15. The passage has been often discussed and its terminology debated. See H. A. Riggs, "Papias on Mark," *Nov Test* I (1956), pp. 160-183; J. Kitzinger, "Das Papiasszeugnis und die Erstgestalt des Matthäusevangeliums," *BZ* 4 (1960), pp. 19-38; H. E. W. Turner, "Modern Issues in Biblical Studies: The Tradition of Mark's Dependence upon Peter," *ExT* 71 (1960), pp. 260-263; T. Y. Mullins, "Papias on Mark's Gospel," *Vigiliae Christianae* 14 (1960), pp. 216-224; W. C. van Unnik, "Zur Papias-Notiz über Markus (Eusebius, *H. E.* III. 39, 15)," *ZNW* 54 (1963), pp. 276f.; N. B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, 1963), pp. 10-15.

¹³ On the comprehensive character of τὰ λόγια in Papias see R. Gryson, "A propos du témoignage de Papias sur Matthieu. Le sens du mot λόγος chez les Pères du second siècle," *EphThLouv* 41 (1965), pp. 530-547.

INTRODUCTION

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the statement that Mark wrote "accurately," and by concluding with an attestation to the trustworthiness of the Gospel, Papias displays a high regard for Mark's achievement.

An independent witness appears to be provided by the Anti-Marcionite Prologue attached to the Gospels in many Old Latin MSS (ca. 160-180 A.D.).¹³ Although the preface to Mark is fragmentary, it provides the new information that Mark wrote his Gospel in Italy after the death of Peter:

... Mark declared, who is called "stump-fingered", because he had rather small fingers in comparison with the stature of the rest of his body. He was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy.

This tradition provides the earliest testimony in support of the Roman origin of Mark, and takes its place as a significant witness from the period between Papias and Irenaeus.

The testimony of Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 175) is recorded in a section in which he speaks of all the Gospels.¹⁴ After stating that Matthew wrote while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and establishing the church, he adds:

And after the death of these Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also transmitted to us in writing the things preached by Peter.

Irenaeus thus adds his voice to the tradition that the specific background for the publication of the Gospel was the apostolic preaching of Peter, and affirms with the Anti-Marcionite Prologue that Mark undertook to transmit the proclamation in writing only after the apostle's death.

The Muratorian Canon, which contains a list of the books recognized as authoritative by the Church of Rome in the period A.D. 170-190, is a badly mutilated fragment. The initial sentence is a broken phrase which clearly refers to Mark since it is followed by a reference to Luke as the third of the Gospels. The sentence reads:

"... at some things he was present, and so he recorded them."

¹³ See D. de Bruyne, "Les plus anciens prologues latines des Évangiles," *Revue Bénédictine* 40 (1928), pp. 193-214; R. G. Heard, "The Old Gospel Prologues," *JThS* n.s. 6 (1955), pp. 1-16.

¹⁴ *Adv. Haer.* III. i. 2. See on this passage N. B. Stonehouse, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-7.