

# The Holy Gospel of St. Mark

*“Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads.” (Genesis 2:10)*

## The Four Gospels:

The New Testament contains the four Holy Gospels according to St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John. Gospel means the “good news” or the “good tidings”. These four Holy Gospels are not mere historical books, but rather a foursome true and complete picture of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His ministry, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

It was said that “a statue is better than a picture for it can be viewed from all angles; the same is for the foursome picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, witnessed by four Evangelists, that enable the viewer to enjoy its beauty from all points of view.” Again, it was said, “the person of the Lord Christ is like a vast ocean, and the four Gospels are likened to floodlights shining over this unique person.”

The church moreover relates the four Holy Gospels to the four living creatures that Ezekiel saw in his revelation (Ezek. 1:1), to four main covenants be-



tween God and man, and St. Iraneus called it “the one Gospel with the four faces”.

## Studying the Four Holy Gospels:

In order to fully study the four Holy Gospels, one must determine the following: its author, race of the believers it was written to, the date and place of composition of the Holy Book, its major themes, the purpose and the goal of writing it, its characteristics, and finally its authenticity and canonicity. These aspects will be analyzed one by one.

### 1) WHO wrote it?

John (Hebrew name) called Mark (Latin surname), according to our Coptic Church’s tradition, was one of the 70 apostles. He was the son of Aristobulus and one of the Mary’s, a relative of both Apostles Peter and Barnabas, born into a rich family and very well educated (religiously & secularly).

He accompanied St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. Barnabas on their evangelizing trips.

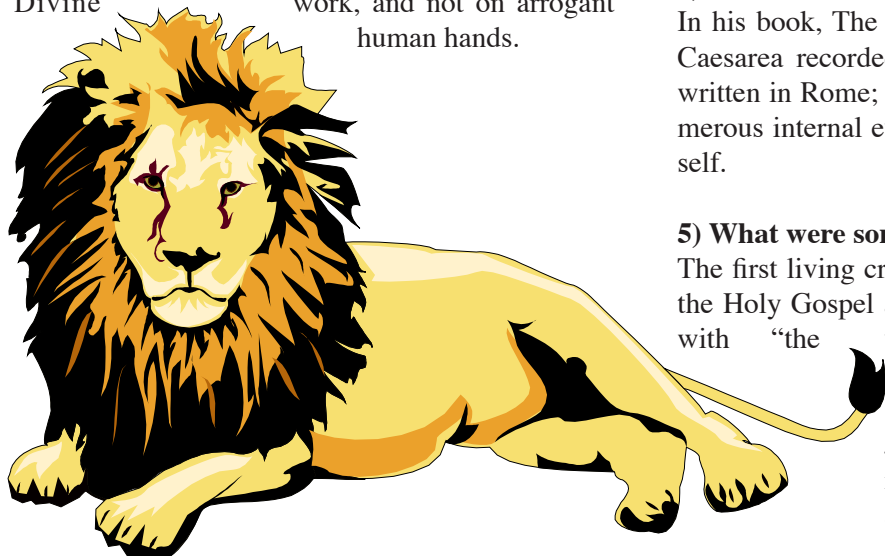


Many important events, such as the Last Supper and Pentecost, took place in St. Mark's house. He went to Egypt in 61 A.D. where he instituted the Church of Alexandria.

After the martyrdom of St. Paul and St. Peter in 67 A.D., he went back to serve in Egypt where he was martyred in April of 68 A.D.

## 2) TO WHOM was the Holy Gospel written?

It was originally written to the Roman world. The Romans were men of power and were very proud of human might and prowess. Having ruling authority, the Romans believed solely in power and violence, as an indication of life and maturity. It's not surprising then when we see the Lord Jesus Christ, in the Holy Gospel of St. Mark, depicted as the conqueror of evil and sin, the miracle wonder maker, and the powerful refuge of humanity in need. If the Romans were occupied by their empire that covered the entire known world at the time, St. Mark's Holy Gospel attracted them to a different kind of kingdom that depends on the power of the Spirit and Divine work, and not on arrogant human hands.



Proof that he was writing to the Romans lay throughout the Holy Gospel:

- i. he used to translate the Aramaic words in his Holy Gospel (Ch.3:17, 5:41, 7:11, 7:34, 15:22, 15:34)
- ii. he did not translate the Latin words he used (Ch.6:37, 12:15, 15:39,44,45; he usually used Latin terms in its Greek forms)
- iii. he explained the Jewish traditions (Ch. 7:2-4, 14:12, 15:6), places (the Jordan River -1:5, the Mount of Olives -11:1, 13:3), denominations (7:26), & currency (12:42)
- iv. he quoted much less than St. Matthew and St. Luke from the Old Testament. (that the Romans wouldn't have been familiar with)

## 3) What DATE was it written?

There is a consensus among the Biblical scholars that this Holy Gospel is the oldest among the 4 Gospels, only preceded by the Greek version of that of St. Matthew. They also believe that St. Matthew and St. Luke were well acquainted with the Holy Gospel of St. Mark & used it as a source & reference to their Holy Gospels. The date has been estimated to be around 60 or 61 A.D.

## 4) In what PLACE was it written?

In his book, The History of the Church, Eusebius of Caesarea recorded that he believed it to have been written in Rome; this opinion being supported by numerous internal evidences within the Holy Gospel itself.

## 5) What were some of its MAJOR THEMES:

The first living creature that is like a lion symbolizes the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark and it begins with "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (1:3). It refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5), to His effective ministry, and to His kingly might and authority. He is portrayed as the



servant of mankind, mighty, conqueror of the devil, miracle maker. The Lord Jesus Christ defeated Satan by His Holy Cross and love, and thereby granting us a path of salvation.

#### 6) What was its **PURPOSE**?

- a. he wrote the Holy Gospel to introduce the Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles as being the Son of God who became the Son of Man and who overcame the evil powers of the world (1:11, 5:7, 14:61,62, 8:83)
- b. he focused in his Holy Gospel on the miraculous deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ as proof of His Divinity, which is why he didn't elaborate that much on the Lord Jesus Christ's teachings (he only mentioned 5 parables and only one discourse in Ch.13)
- c. for the same reason, several times it's noted that he refers to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ without actually recording them (1:21-2, 1:39, 2:13, 10:1, 12:35)
- d. he let the Lord Jesus Christ's acts speak by themselves about the power of His Divinity (1:11, 1:34, 5:7, 9:3, 9:7)

#### 7) What were its **CHARACTERISTICS**?

- a. Structure: There are two distinct divisions: 1) The Lord Jesus Christ's ministry in Galilee (Ch.1-9) 2) The Passion Week in Jerusalem (Ch.11-16). He uses Chapter 10 to connect the 2 parts by recording several incidents that happened in between. As it can be seen, the events during the last week of the Lord Jesus Christ's life are recorded in 1/3rd of this Holy Gospel.
- b. Substance: Although it's the shortest of the 4 Holy Gospels, St. Mark narrates the substance of the Holy Gospel in great detail. He offers his version of the Lord Jesus Christ's life in a graphic, chronological, and swift way. Though

he didn't mention five of the miracles recorded by St. Matthew, and twelve by St. Luke, he added nine not mentioned by them.

- c. Style: St. Mark always intended to portray the events in a very colorful, graphic, meticulous, and living way. Though his style appears simple and spontaneous, it's very vivid and bright. He sometimes used repetition to collaborate the details of his narration (Ch.1:23, 13:1, 13:53, 14:68). He was also keen to elaborate on details regarding: Names (2:14,3:6), Places (4:1,7:31), Numbers (5:13,6:7), Colors (6:39,9:3), Thoughts (2:3-11), and Feelings and Emotions (of the disciples-10:24,32 and of the Lord Jesus Christ-1:24,2:5,8:12,7:34,10:14,10:21)

#### d. Language (wording):

- He tends to use certain Greek words, like the one which means: much or many and immediately (at once/then)
- He prefers to use the present and the past continuous tense more than the past tense
- He uses some words which are not mentioned anywhere in the other books of the New Testament including ones still used in the common Greek language

#### 8) Is it **AUTHENTIC** and **CANNONIC**?

It is a well-accepted fact, supported by external and internal testimony that St. Mark is the author of the second Holy Gospel, but there were some doubts and disputes about his sources due to some misunderstanding or misinterpretation of some of the sayings of the early church fathers. All these claims however are fable, irrelevant, and personally motivated, and are discussed and refuted in detail in H.H. Pope Shenouda's book written about St. Mark. ✠

