



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

An Introduction

Bishop Youssef



# Introduction

- According to the unanimous testimony of the early Church Fathers, who gave each of the four Gospels their titles and placed them in their canonical order, The Gospel according to St. Matthew was the first Gospel to be written and the Gospels according to St. Mark and St. Luke were written afterward, followed much later by the Gospel according to St. John
- They testify that the Gospel according to St. Matthew was first written in Hebrew and later translated into Greek, while the other Gospels were written only in Greek, the international language of the times



# Introduction

- Therefore, some scholar not counting the first manuscript of the Gospel according to St. Matthew consider the Gospel according to St. Mark the first gospel to be written
- Some other scholars counting the first version of the Gospel according to St. Matthew consider it the second gospel to be written





# Introduction

- The only disagreement scholars had was not about the inspired writer of the Gospel of Mark, who they identified as John-Mark the son of Aristopolis and Mary, but the few who disputed whether the Gospel according to St. Mark was written before or after the Gospel according to St. Luke (i.e., St. Clement of Alexandria)
- Therefore, it is likely the second and third Gospels were written very close together with the Gospel according to St. John being the last Gospel to be written
- The Gospel according to St. Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels



# Introduction

- The correct way to refer to any gospel is to say, ‘The Gospel according to ...’
- Because saying “the Gospel of Matthew’ or ‘The Gospel of Mark’ may lead to the impression that there is more than one Gospel
- But in fact there is only one Gospel written by more than one person
- The proper translation to the title of the Gospel should be as follows: “The Gospel written by St. Mark”, or “The Gospel according to St. Mark”



# The Author

- Mark was the pupil and companion of two great apostles, Peter and Paul
- He studied Greek, Latin and Hebrew and excelled in them, and became well educated in religion
- He studied the Law and the history of the prophets
- Because of that wealth of knowledge, some thought he was a translator to St. Peter during his missionary
- St. Mark was a Jew from the Levite Tribe
- He preached both Jews and Gentiles, but mainly among the gentiles





# The Author

- St. Mark was one of the seventy apostles chosen by the Lord for ministry, as testified by Origen and by St. Epiphanius
- St. Mark attended the wedding of Cana of Galilee where Jesus did His first miracle, changing the water into wine, John 2
- He was the man carrying the pitcher of water who met the two disciples sent by Lord Jesus to prepare the Passover, Mark 14:13-14; Luke 22:10-11
- He was also the young man who left his linen cloth and fled naked during the incident of the arrest of the Lord, Mark 14:52



# The Author

## His Name:

- Mark had two names, John, a Hebrew name which means “God is gracious” and Mark a Latin name which means “Hammer”
- On three occasions, his two names were mentioned together
- It was either said, John who was named Mark, or John who was known as Mark





# The Author

## His Family

- St. Mark was born in 'Cyrene,' one of the cities of Pentapolis in Libya, in a town called 'Ebryatolis,' from Jewish parents related to the tribe of Levi
- He was raised in a religious family, many of its members were the acquaintance to Lord Christ Himself
- His father's name is 'Aristopolis,' a cousin of the wife of St. Peter the Apostle
- His mother 'Mary', was a woman of Jerusalem who later became a prominent member of the congregation in that city



# The Author

- She offered her house to the Lord to eat the Passover with His disciples in the upper room
- Her house became the first church in the world, consecrated by the Lord Himself through His holy presence and His practicing of the Sacrament of the Eucharist
- In that same upper room, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, Acts 2:1-4 and in it the disciples assembled
- It was to her house that Peter went upon his miraculous deliverance from prison, Acts 12:12-17



# The Author

- His mother Mary also hosted Jesus in her house and was among the women who served Him
- It was mentioned that some barbaric tribes attacked the family's properties in Cyrène, at the time of Augustus Caesar, that forced them to emigrate to Palestine
- By the time Lord Jesus Christ began His teaching, the family was already settled there
- St. Mark was a relative of Barnabas, the Apostle, nephew or cousin, Colossians 4:10
- His uncle Barnabas, or his cousin, was one of the first who sold property and lived a shared life with the Apostles, Acts 4:36-37





# The Author

## His Mission

- The apostle began his ministry with St. Peter the Apostle in Jerusalem and Judea
- Through Barnabas he came into closer contact with Paul, and he accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey as an attendant or assistant
- He left them at Perga, in Pamphylia, and returned to Jerusalem, much to the displeasure of Paul, Acts 13:5-13
- For this reason Paul refused to take him on the next journey



# The Author

- There was a contention over the matter at the time, with the result that Paul and Barnabas parted company, Barnabas taking Mark with him to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas, Acts 15: 36-40
- But the estrangement was only temporary
- Paul afterward had great kindness for Mark, and not only ordered the churches to receive him, Colossians 4:10, but sent for him to be his assistant, with this encomium, *He is profitable to me for the ministry*, 2 Timothy 4:11; and he reckons him among his fellow-workers, Philemon 24
- Peter called him, his son
- He also assisted Peter in his work in Babylon, 1 Peter 5:13



# The Author

- There is no more mention of St. Mark in the book of Acts, as he headed to Egypt to establish the Church of Alexandria, after going first to his home of birth in Pentapolis, Libya
- From there he set forth to the Oasis region, then to Upper-Egypt
- Later on he entered Alexandria in the year 61 A.D.
- St. Mark founded the church at Alexandria, in Egypt
- He came to Alexandria for the first time approximately 48 AD
- St. Mark preached in Judea, Lebanon, Syria, Antioch and in Cyprus





# The Author

- He reached Paphos, Pamphylia, Rome, Colossi , Venice and Aquila
- He was martyred in 68 AD when pagans of Serapis (the Serapion-Abbis Greek Egyptian god ) tied him to a horse's tail and dragged him through the streets of Alexandria's district of Bokalia for two days until his body was torn to pieces
- The Church celebrates his martyrdom on the 8th of May each year
- His head is in a church named after him in Alexandria, and parts of his relics is in St. Mark Cairo's Cathedral



# The Author

- In 827 his relics were removed to Venice, where a magnificent church was built in his honor, a worthy monument to the present day
- St. Mark established a Theological School to stand against the school for the pagans and to combat their ideas
- He designated St. Justus to manage the school who later became the sixth bishop of Alexandria
- He wrote the Holy Liturgy for St. Anianus and the priests to use in praying



# Authorship

- **St. Mark**, who wrote this Gospel, is called by St. Augustine, the abridger of St. Matthew; by St. Irenæus, the disciple; and according to Origen and St. Jerome, he is the same Mark whom St. Peter calls his son
- Like the other Gospels, the Gospel of St. Mark is technically anonymous in that the author does not identify himself
- The writers of the four Gospels and Acts of the Apostles did not claim credit for their work and do not bear the name of an author
- The Gospel writers and the writer of Acts believed they were writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the work was His





# Authorship

- It is from the testimony of the early Church Fathers that we know the names and identities of the inspired writers of those books
- According to the testimony of the early Fathers of the Church, and most modern Biblical scholars, the inspired writer of the Gospel of St. Mark was the son of a Jewish parents
- He carried the combined Hebrew and Roman name John-Mark, Acts 12:25, 15:37; 2 Timothy 4:11



# Authorship

- The oldest surviving testimony that Mark was the sacred writer of the second Gospel is that of St. Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor (95-120/130 AD)
- The same testimony that Mark was the writer of the second Gospel was given by Origen of Alexander, second head of the School of Theology at Alexandria
- This tradition was confirmed repeatedly by the succeeding Church Fathers, including St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo
- No other author than John Mark of Jerusalem has ever been associated with, or suggested for, the Gospel according to St. Mark



# The Gospel's Symbol

- Images of St. Mark usually portray him writing this Gospel in the company of a lion, the first living creature that surround the heavenly throne of God in the Holy Book of Revelation, Revelation 4:6-8
- The Church Fathers assigned one of the four "living creatures" to each of the Gospels
- St. Jerome assigned Mark the image of the lion because Mark presents Jesus as the promised Davidic king of the tribe of Judah, whose symbol was a lion, Genesis 49:9; Revelation 5:5





# The Gospel's Symbol

- It is possible that because of the beginning of this Gospel, he described a roar of a lion, *The voice of one crying in the wilderness*, Mark 1:3
- Or because that this Gospel represented Lord Jesus Christ in His Majesty and His Kingdom, as He was "The lion of the tribe of Judea"
- It might also refer to the lion that Saint Mark was able to tame in the name of the Lord
- Early Christian art reflected diverse opinions about the portrayal of the evangelists



# The Gospel's Symbol

- However, by the 7<sup>th</sup> century St. Jerome's iconography of the lion had come to dominate the Western visual tradition
- It is noticed that the people of Venice, took St. Mark as their intercessor, and adopted the lion as a symbol
- They have a big statue for a winged lion in St. Mark Square in their city
- Artists since then have been competing in visualizing the lion of St. Mark, tamed and quiet, where St. Mark eliminated the beast in him, but kept his courage!



# Date and Place of Writing

- It is not certain when St. Mark wrote his account of the Gospel
- We do know that it was written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD
- Theophylact (a great biblical commentator who lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries) claims the Gospel was written in 43 AD
- St. Irenaeus states that it was written after the death of St. Peter and St. Paul, who were martyred approximately 64 AD, during the persecution of the Roman emperor Nero





# Date and Place of Writing

- Most scholars believe this Gospel was written somewhere between 55-70 AD, with the majority of scholars believing it was written between 64-68 AD
- According to St. John Chrysostom, this gospel was written in Egypt, but other scholars claim it was written in Rome



# Recipients

- The Gospel according to St. Mark was undoubtedly written for Roman Christians that used the Latin language
- Quotations from the Old Testament are relatively few, 1:2, 7:6,10, 11:17, 12:19, 14:27, especially as compared with Matthew
- Aramaic words and expressions are usually translated, 3:17, 5:41, 7:11,34, 15:22,34
- Jewish customs are explained, 7:2-5, 14:12, 15:42
- There is a frequent use of Latin expressions, like "legion," "centurion," "quadrans," and others



# Recipients

- He was keen on presenting the Lord Jesus Christ in His continuous deeds rather than in His sermons or speeches
- St. Mark talked to them of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a man of real authority because the Romans were people who believed in power and authority
- St. Mark particularly emphasized the Lord's approach toward the Gentiles, 7:24-30, 11:17, 13:10, 16:15





# Purpose & Characteristics

- The purpose of the Gospel according to St. Mark, as he himself states, is to show the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, 1:1
- This Gospel owed its power and wonderful success to the personality of Jesus Christ, who, by His deeds, His miracles, proved Himself the Son of God with power, 3:11, 5:7, 15, 39, and brought the kingdom of God, 1:14, 9:1, 10:15,25, 12:34
- The miracles of Jesus Christ are therefore emphasized, the doctrinal discourses being given in brief form only



# Purpose & Characteristics

- The distinctive features of the Gospel according to St. Mark are its conciseness, yet comprehensive style, with clear description
- Also the rapid shifts or quick changes of scene
- St. Mark moves quickly from one episode in Jesus' life and ministry to another, often using the adverb "immediately"
- Of the miracles which he relates two are distinctive of this Gospel, that of the healing of the deaf, 7:31-37, and that of the blind man, whom Jesus healed by slow stages, 8:22-26



# Purpose & Characteristics

- A most interesting feature of the Gospel are the retirements of Jesus, during which He prepared Himself for a new stage in His work as Redeemer principally by devoting Himself to prayer
- St. Mark also wrote to encourage Christians to be faithful disciples, particularly under persecution
- The Church had experienced terrible persecution under the emperor Nero in 64 AD, even losing St. Peter and St. Paul





# Purpose & Characteristics

- St. Mark prepares Christians to endure further persecution by telling of Christ's suffering and how He had predicted His followers would endure similar suffering
- The most important reason St. Mark wrote was to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is God
- In this Gospel, St. Mark shows the Father proclaiming Jesus as His Son at Christ's Baptism and Transfiguration
- He also shows Jesus' divinity by having the centurion announce his belief



# Purpose & Characteristics

- This book presented Jesus to us as a Teacher, moving in every direction, either teaching in the synagogue and the temple, 1:21, 6:2, 12:35, 14:49, or to the multitude, 2:13, 6:34, 10:1, or His disciples, 6:30
- The word “teach,” (in Greek), is mentioned 15 times in this Gospel, far more than in any other book in the New Testament
- The Lord Christ was called “Teacher” 17 times, not only by the Master Himself, 14:14, but by His disciples, the multitude, and even His adversaries the Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees, and the Herodians



# Purpose & Characteristics

- He presented Jesus Christ as a “sufferer,” exhorting them to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings, 8:34, 9:31, 10:32
- Therefore this gospel, in its essence, is not a parade of the life of the Lord, but rather a gospel of victory over the powers of evil, and free the creation of their authority, through enjoying the Person of the Teacher as the conqueror and victorious!
- Christ in this Gospel is the Servant of mankind; all Mighty; Conqueror of the devil; and Miracle maker
- Christ came to Perform miracles





# Purpose & Characteristics

- If this Gospel is characterized by being very concise, it is at the same time characterized by detail and clarity
- It mentions Matthew, the tax-collector, as the son of 'Alphaeus', 2:14; the blind Bartimaeus as the son of 'Timaeus', 10:46; Simon, the Cyrenian, as the father of 'Alexander' and 'Rufus', 15:21
- And in his narration of the miracle of feeding the multitude, he was particular in saying that they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties, 6:39-40



# Purpose & Characteristics

- He was also particular in proclaiming the feelings of the Lord Jesus Christ, as someone who witnessed His actions, acknowledging Him as a Lover of mankind
- He reveals how He partook of our emotions and feelings, as someone very close to us; saying, that He was “*moved with compassion*”, 1:41; “*..looked (at the young man and loved him*”, 10:21; “*took the children in His arms*”, 9:36
- It is the Gospel of Service, that which presents our Lord to us as in the form of a servant, obedient even unto death, Philippians 2:7-8



# Emphases

- **The cross**, Both the human cause, 12:12, 14:1–2, 15:10, and the divine necessity, 8:31, 9:31, 10:33–34, of the cross are emphasized by St. Mark
- **Discipleship**, Special attention should be paid to the passages on discipleship that arise from Jesus' predictions of His passion, 8:34, 9:1,35, 10:31,42–45
- **The teachings of Jesus**, Although Mark records far fewer actual teachings of Jesus Christ than the other Gospel writers, there is a remarkable emphasis on Jesus Christ as teacher





# Emphases

- **The Messianic secret,** On several occasions Jesus warns His disciples or others to keep silent about who He is or what He has done, 1:34,44, 3:12, 5:43, 7:36, 8:30, 9:9
- **Son of God,** Although St. Mark emphasizes the humanity of Jesus Christ, 3:5, 6:6,31,34, 7:34, 8:12, 10:14, 11:12, he does not neglect His deity, 1:1,11, 3:11, 5:7, 9:7, 12:1–11, 13:32, 15:39



# The Gospel Outline

- The preparation for Jesus Christ's ministry, 1:2-13
- His ministry in Galilee, 1:14-9:50
- His journey to Jerusalem, 10:1-52
- His ministry in Jerusalem, 11:1-13:37
- His suffering and death in Jerusalem, 14:1-15:47
- His resurrection and appearances, 16:1-13
- His great commission and continued work from heaven, 16:14-20
- Jesus Christ came from heaven to serve, and returned to heaven to serve!



# St. Mark and St. Peter

- Certain scholars tried to credit the Gospel according to St. Mark to the Apostle Peter, considering St. Mark to be just a scribe or an interpreter for his relative St. Peter; and that this Gospel is nothing but memoirs of St. Peter or sermons that St. Mark heard him give while they were together in Rome which he recorded after the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul
- This point of view is totally rejected by the Orthodox Church
- These scholars deny his fellowship to the Lord during the period of the Lord's ministry on earth and claim that he became Christian only after the resurrection at the hands of St. Peter





# St. Mark and St. Peter

- They claimed that the Gospel according to St. Mark was written by St. Peter
- They attempted to credit all St. Mark's preaching, even that in Egypt and the Five Western Cities to St. Peter
- Strange was the fact that they tried to falsify the history of our fathers and our church
- All the references pointed that St. Mark was the young man who followed Lord Christ the night He was arrested



# St. Mark and St. Peter

- This view was based on Papias's claim that St. Mark had never heard or met the Lord but accepted the faith by following St. Peter
- This view, adopted by certain scholars, is wrong, as confirmed by several Church Fathers who studied the history of the Church and confirmed the opposite view
- If St. Mark was merely a recorder of St. Peter's memoirs or his sermons after his martyrdom, there would be no need to hide it
- St. Mark would have certainly mentioned it as a matter of honesty and humility



# Discussion

- What do we know about John Mark - the author of this gospel?
- What strengths did John Mark demonstrate in his life?
- What weaknesses did John Mark demonstrate in his life?
- What lessons can we learn from him?
- What is the purpose of the gospel according to St. Mark?
- What is the message of this gospel?