

## **Reliability of the Gospels – Part 01: Who wrote the four gospels? And How do we know?**

### **Summary**

- Manuscripts
  - Although the original copies were unlikely to have names written on them, the copies which have been preserved unanimously agree in the titles of the gospels. There is no sign of doubt or debate.
  - This is in contrast to another NT book, Hebrews, which was disputed and variously attributed to Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Clement and others.
  - If the names were invented, we might expect only prominent names in the early church or the apostles. We would not expect lesser figures such as Mark and Luke.
- Tradition
  - That is, testimony handed down from one generation to the next from the earliest days of the church.

### **Irenaeus (c. AD 122-202).**

- Bishop (overseer) of Lyon.
- "in his youth, he was a hearer of Polycarp" Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History 5.5.8
  - Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna
  - "instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ... always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down". Irenaeus. Against Heresies. 3.3.4
  - "the church of Smyrna... records that Polycarp was placed therein by John" Tertullian. Prescription against Heretics. 32.2
- Against Heresies. 3.1.1
 

"We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith... Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia."
- Against Heresies. 3.11.7
 

"So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these [documents], each one of them endeavours to establish his own peculiar doctrine... Since, then, our opponents do bear testimony to us, and make use of these [documents], our proof derived from them is firm and true."

**Papias (c. AD 60-130)**

- Bishop (overseer) of Hierapolis.
- "a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp" Irenaeus. Against Heresies. 5.33.4
- Wrote a book called Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord (now lost apart from quotations)
  
- Quoted by Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History 3.39.15-16.

"And the elder used to say this: 'Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately everything he remembered, though not in order, of the things either said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, followed Peter, who adapted his teachings as needed but had no intention of giving an ordered account of the Lord's sayings. Consequently Mark did nothing wrong in writing down some things as he remembered them, for he made it his one concern not to omit anything that he heard or to make any false statement in them.' Such, then, is the account given by Papias with respect to Mark.

"But with respect to Matthew the following is said: 'So Matthew composed the oracles in the Hebrew language and each person interpreted them as best he could."

**Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150-215)**

- referenced by Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History 2.14-16  
".during the reign of Claudius [God] led Peter... to Rome...  
"Peter's hearers... were not satisfied with hearing once only, and were not content with the unwritten teaching of the divine Gospel, but with all sorts of entreaties they besought Mark, a follower of Peter, and the one whose Gospel is extant, that he would leave them a written monument of the doctrine which had been orally communicated to them. Nor did they cease until they had prevailed with the man, and had thus become the occasion of the written Gospel which bears the name of Mark.  
"And they say that Peter — when he had learned, through a revelation of the Spirit, of that which had been done — was pleased with the zeal of the men, and that the work obtained the sanction of his authority for the purpose of being used in the churches. Clement in the eighth book of his Hypotyposes gives this account, and with him agrees the bishop of Hierapolis named Papias. And Peter makes mention of Mark in his first epistle which they say that he wrote in Rome itself, as is indicated by him, when he calls the city, by a figure, Babylon, as he does in the following words: 'The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, salutes you; and so does Marcus my son.'  
"And they say that this Mark was the first that was sent to Egypt, and that he proclaimed the Gospel which he had written, and first established churches in Alexandria."