

CHAPTER 1

The Author of Mark in History

For many centuries each of the four gospels has been known as “the Gospel according to . . . Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.” Only the Fourth Gospel identifies its author as the Beloved Disciple, one of the important characters in the story of Jesus. This disciple is anonymous insofar as he is never given a name. But John 21:24 says of him: “This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true” (see also 13:23; 18:15, 16; 19:25–27; 20:2–10; 21:7, 20–23). However, even with the Fourth Gospel, not until late in the second century was this story of Jesus associated with one of the Twelve, John, the son of Zebedee.¹ The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke never allude to the authors,² and like the Gospel of John, probably had the names “Matthew,” “Mark,” and “Luke” added to them late in the second century.³

Which Mark?

If there are no indications within the gospel itself of the identity of a figure named “Mark,” one must look to other places where such evidence might be found. Minor characters from the early days of the Christian mission with the name “Mark” are found elsewhere in the New Testament. Especially important is a disciple called “John Mark” who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. He first appears as a son of a certain Mary in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Peter returned to the home of John Mark in Jerusalem, after he was miraculously delivered from prison during the persecution of King Herod

that led to the slaying of James (12:12–17). The spread of further persecution led Barnabas and Saul (as he is called at that stage of the story) to go back to Antioch, and they took John Mark with them (12:25). However, during that first missionary journey, after preaching in Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas set sail to Perga in Pamphylia (modern southern Turkey), but John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (13:13).

The so-called Council of Jerusalem decided that the gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles (15:1–29). After the council, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch (vv. 30–35) and prepared for their second missionary journey (vv. 36–41). However, Paul and Barnabas could not agree over John Mark. Paul was unwilling to associate him with the mission, as he was dissatisfied with his departure from the group during the first missionary journey (see 13:13). Thus the two original apostles to the Gentiles (Paul and Barnabas) separated:

And Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed (Acts 15:37–40).

This is not an impressive start to the career of John Mark. It is possible that nothing more is heard of that particular character from the earliest years of the Christian communities.⁴ Nevertheless, the name “Mark” continues to appear in letters of Paul, or in letters that came from the period shortly after Paul that looked back to his authority:

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. (Phlm 23–24)

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, receive him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. (Col 4:10–11)

Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me. (2 Tim 4:9–11)

There is an immediacy about these passages, with their references to people associated with the life and work of Paul. A certain homogeneity also exists across these three references to Mark, the coworker of Paul in his mission to various places in Asia Minor.⁵

However, there is a dissonance between the role of John Mark in the life of Paul as it is reported in the Acts of the Apostles, and the activities and associates of Paul, as they are found in his letters.⁶ It is not obvious that the John Mark of Acts is the same Mark mentioned in the Pauline letters. It is also important to know that the name “Mark” (Latin: Marcus) was a very common name in the Roman world, something like John or William in our own time.⁷ Nevertheless, these traces of a Mark in the early years of the Christian mission should be kept in mind.

Why Mark?

There is no obvious religious, traditional, political, or even ecclesiastical reason why the Mark mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, or any other Mark, for that matter, should have been associated with one of the gospels in the second century. However, the Christian church of the second century, which had begun to establish itself as a worldwide institution, and was developing its own sacred book as part of its religious identity, looked back to apostolic figures to give authority to its scriptures. Judaism, which had produced Christianity, was inspired and governed by its unique sacred scriptures, known to us as the Old Testament, much of which, according to Jewish tradition, went back to the figures of Moses, King David, and the great prophets.⁸ Likewise, the early church turned readily to Matthew, John, and Luke. A gospel story gained authority through its attachment to members of the twelve apostles, as is the case with Matthew and John (see Mark 3:13–19; Matt 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16). The association made between the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles has a New Testament motivation. Paul mentions Luke as his faithful traveling companion (see Phlm 24; Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11), and at a certain stage in the text of the Acts of the Apostles, a type of travel diary emerges, written by a firsthand witness to the events who associates himself with the action. These are called “we passages” (see Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). The church fathers were quick to make the link between the Luke of the Pauline letters and Paul’s fellow-traveler in the Acts of the Apostles. Modern scholars have strengthened this association by highlighting the presence of a theme of traveling in both the gospel (see especially Luke 9:51–19:44) and Acts (see especially Acts 13–26).

No such connection can be made between any Mark and the life of Jesus within the New Testament. But we do have a supposedly firsthand witness of an association between Peter, one of the Twelve, and Mark, in 1 Peter. This letter from “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” written to “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (1 Pet 1:1), signs off :

By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God; stand fast in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; *and so does my son Mark*. (5:12–13)

The second-century church quickly accepted 1 Peter into its official list of inspired Scriptures, and regarded the Peter of 1:1 as Simon Peter from the Gospels and Acts. Tradition associated Peter with Rome, and his eventual martyrdom there. The use of the name Babylon to refer to Rome in the Book of Revelation (see, especially, Rev 18:1–24) further strengthened the impression that 1 Peter was a letter written from Rome by Peter, the “rock” of Matt 16:16–18. Precisely these beliefs led to the rapid acceptance of 1 Peter into the Christian canon. This letter, therefore, associated Mark with Peter in Rome, and Mark is described as “my son,” a term of endearment that indicated a close relationship.⁹

The earliest historian of the Christian church, Eusebius of Caesarea (born about 260 C.E.) drew on a number of written documents that existed prior to the writing of his *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius’ *History* runs from the beginnings down to the victory of the Emperor Constantine over Licinius in 324. He disclaimed any originality, and his history (as well as his other works) is at times little more than a string of quotations. This practice, while not producing gripping prose, has nevertheless preserved for us many writings that would otherwise not be in existence. One such document that Eusebius quotes in his *History* is the work of Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis who, about 130 C.E., wrote a five-volume work titled *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*.¹⁰ Papias wrote of the relationship between Peter and Mark, and the production of the Gospel of Mark. As cited by Eusebius, he wrote as follows, in his own turn citing the authority of “the elder” (John), and then taking over the narrative to make his own remarks:¹¹

This also the elder [*John*] used to say. When Mark became Peter’s interpreter [ἑρμηνευτής; *hermēneutēs*], he wrote down accurately [ἀκριβῶς; *akribōs*], though by no means in order [οὐ μέντοι τάξει; *ou mentoi taxeī*] as much as he remembered of the words and deeds of the Lord; [*what follows is most likely from Papias, who has cited “the elder” thus far, and now makes his own observations on the tradi-*

tion linking Peter and Mark] for he had neither heard the Lord nor been in his company, but subsequently joined Peter as I said. Now Peter did not intend to give a complete exposition of the Lord's ministry but delivered his instructions to meet the needs of the moment [or "in anecdotal form": πρὸς τὰς χρείας; *pros tas chreias*] but not making, as it were, a systematic arrangement [συντάξις; *syntaxis*] of the Lord's oracles [λογίων; *logiōn*]. It follows, then, that Mark was guilty of no blunder if he wrote, simply to the best of his recollections, an incomplete account. [Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15]¹²

The witness of 1 Peter 5:13, and the association of Mark and Peter by Papias,¹³ led to the logical step, by later authorities, of locating that association with the city of Rome (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.6), Irenaeus (ca. 130–200), and Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215).¹⁴ However well or poorly Eusebius may have excerpted it from his source, the evidence of Papias merits consideration. It shows that the tradition of the Gospel of Mark having its origins in the witness of Peter, written in Rome by a person named Mark, was firmly established by the middle of the second century. This tradition may have been received by Papias, and could thus reach back into the last decade of the first century.¹⁵ It remained unquestioned for centuries. One reason for this, apart from general acceptance of tradition concerning these questions, was perhaps because no one was particularly interested in the *personality* of the author of the Gospel of Mark. There was more interest in the authenticity of the Jesus tradition. As Clifton Black has shown, largely following the work of Josef Kürzinger, it is possible that Papias himself was not primarily interested in affirming Markan authorship of a Petrine gospel, but rather in witnessing to the faithful recollection and transmission of the Jesus tradition.¹⁶ Given the widespread acceptance, by the middle of the second century, of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, a lack of interest in the details of the Markan story and the personality of its author is understandable. Because almost all the Gospel of Mark was contained in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, it fell into disuse. As Morna Hooker remarks: "Since almost all of Mark's material is found in either Mark or Luke, it is remarkable that the Gospel survived."¹⁷

Yet, it has survived. No doubt the traditional link, made between Mark and Peter, a major figure among the apostles, is a fundamental reason for that survival, despite its being largely ignored by both the Greek and Latin patristic reflections of the third and fourth centuries,¹⁸ and also the lack of its widespread use in the church across the Christian centuries since then. As we will see in the following chapter, the modern

and contemporary fascination with the Gospel of Mark devotes little attention to the witness of Papias, and the link between the Apostle Peter and the Mark of 1 Pet 5:13. Although an increasing number of commentators are returning to the traditional links among Mark, Peter, and Rome, they are doing so on somewhat different grounds.

Still the question posed at the beginning of this section remains: Why Mark? We have already seen that there are links with the apostolic tradition that most probably led to the second-century association of the apostles Matthew and John with the two gospels connected with their names. There are also suggestive links within the New Testament that led the second-century church to claim that the Gospel of Luke was the work of the traveling companion of Paul during the account of his journeys in the Acts of the Apostles. Both books seem to come from the same author, and are directed to the same patron (see Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1). Our search to discover the link between the name “Mark” and the gospel bearing his name is more tenuous. Why did Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius make that link?

In the end, the two questions posed by this chapter run together: “Which Mark?” and “Why Mark?” cannot be separated. I suspect this is the case because behind the Gospel of Mark lies the memory of a figure, an original storyteller, whose name was indeed Mark. Who he was, what place he occupied in an early Christian community, and whether he was the John Mark of the Acts of the Apostles or the Mark of the Pauline letters is beyond the range of our knowledge. We do not have enough data at our fingertips to be able to claim clear answers to those questions. One fact remains clear: Papias, Clement, Irenaeus, and Eusebius looked to a figure with the name Mark as the author of the gospel. From there arose the further suggestions that linked him with Peter, acting as his secretary, interpreter, or translator in Rome. Whatever one might make of the link with Peter, and the association with Rome, the name Mark might be based in a fact of history. As Clifton Black expressed it:

The reason for the Second Gospel’s attribution to Mark is not in the least bit clear. The Gospel never makes such a claim. Little is explained by the argument that the Gospel was so ascribed because of the presumed author’s derivative prominence, through association with Peter and Paul: Why then did not second- and third-century Christians employ a customary expedient and simply assign the book’s composition to one of the apostles? . . . Moreover, in almost every early tradition that we know, both within and beyond the New Testament, “Mark” cuts a decidedly second- or third-rate figure. . . . Even if it proves beyond our ability to recover completely, something’s afoot in all of this.¹⁹

Perhaps the best explanation is that there was, in the earliest tradition (prior to 1 Peter and Papias) the memory of a person named Mark who wrote a story that proclaimed the good news that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (see Mark 1:1), and that his death and resurrection had changed the way God related to the world (see 16:1–8). In the end, the answer to the question “Why Mark?” may lie in the vague memory, based in fact, that the Gospel of Mark was the story of Jesus written by an otherwise unknown character from the early decades of the Christian story, and his name was Mark.²⁰ The early Christian church had little interest in the Gospel of Mark. Nor did it have any interest in the history or the personality of its original author.²¹

He would have continued to remain largely unknown and uninvestigated, had it not been for the dramatic turn of events in the nineteenth century that brought the Gospel of Mark to center stage in gospel criticism. This turn of events, generally regarded as the birth of the historical-critical approach to the Bible, will be discussed in the following chapter. Because of this change of approach to biblical texts, a radical change in the type of questions that were being asked of the gospels led to Cinderella’s transformation into a princess. Our investigation of “Mark” can now turn from our attempts to trace the identity of this shadowy figure. In the following chapter we will focus our attention more closely on the gospel attributed to him. It is this story that offers best witness to the mind, the heart, and the spirit of its author.²²

Where and When?

Is it possible to trace the time when and the place where the Gospel of Mark first saw the light of day? Christian tradition accepted the evidence of Papias, transmitted by other church fathers (especially Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria [ca. 150–215]), that Mark wrote the gospel that bears his name, recording Peter’s incomplete exposition of the Lord’s ministry. This would mean that the Gospel of Mark appeared some time in the 60s of the first century, as Peter was most probably martyred during the persecutions that took place under Emperor Nero (64–65 C.E.).

Critical scholarship in the first decades of the twentieth century severely questioned this long-standing tradition. As we will see in the following chapter, in 1901 Wilhelm Wrede demonstrated Mark wrote his story for theological rather than historical reasons. In 1906, Albert Schweitzer laid to rest the many nineteenth-century attempts to write a life of Jesus using the Gospel of Mark as the source for the historical

outline of Jesus' career. These two epoch-making studies threw into serious question the traditional association of the Gospel of Mark with Rome and Peter, an association that assured a close link with the words and events of the life of Jesus. Yet aspects of the Gospel of Mark have led other scholars, both classical and contemporary, to insist that the gospel was written in Rome and that it betrays a Petrine interest.²³ The earlier critical scholars looked to features like the gospel's inelegant Greek style, the use of Latin loanwords and Mark's seemingly poor knowledge of Palestinian geography as indications of its Roman provenance. More recent scholars comb through the narrative itself to find hints in the apocalyptic nature of the story, to trace the experiences and social location of the community behind the text that can be read between the lines. Against that more general background, they find a relationship between the Christology and the theology of discipleship found in the gospel that may best address a situation of Roman persecution.²⁴

It is impossible to be sure about when and where the Gospel of Mark first saw the light of day, but three elements need to be taken into account and held together in these discussions.²⁵ First, the syntax and loanwords that indicate a Roman setting must be explained. For example, the word "legion" appears in a Greek form in 5:9 (λεγιών; *legiōn*). The Greek used for "soldier of the guard" or "executioner" in 6:27 (σπεκουλάτωρ; *spekoulatōr*) is a transliteration of a Latin word. In 12:14, the Latin word "census" (κῆνσος; *kēnsos*) is used to refer to the tax that was paid to Rome. Roman coins are mentioned without any explanation in 6:37 and 14:5, δηνάριον; *dēnarion* (a day's salary), and in 12:42, κοδράντης; *kodrantēs* (a penny). As well as these Latin words, Mark's clumsy Greek is sometimes understood as having been influenced by a Latin (and therefore Roman) background.²⁶ There is much that is Roman in the Gospel of Mark, from words to a form of Greek that may reflect a writer of Greek who was also familiar with Latin, the language of Rome.

Second, there is a concern in the Gospel of Mark for the Gentile mission. Jesus heals a demoniac in Gentile territory, and tells him to go to his hometown to announce what the Lord has done (see 5:1–20). After a bitter encounter with Israel (7:1–23) Jesus journeys outside the borders of Israel to the region of Tyre and Sidon, to bring healing to a Syrophenician woman (7:24–30). His passage from the region of Tyre and Sidon back to the eastern side of the lake deliberately keeps him in Gentile lands (see 7:31). There he heals a Gentile, and for the first time in the narrative his actions are recognized by Gentiles as the work of the expected Messiah (7:31–37). He nourishes Gentiles, who "have come a long way" (8:1–10). As he defuses anxiety about the end of time, in the

midst of many false signs, he tells his disciples: “the gospel must first be preached to all the nations” (13:10). The end will come, however, and at that time the Son of Man “will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (13:27). At his death, in the temple the veil that hid the holy of holies from the rest of the world is rent asunder (15:37–38), and a Roman centurion confesses that Jesus was the Son of God.²⁷

Third, the discourse in Mark 13 presupposes that Jerusalem has fallen.²⁸ Many details *look back* to that dramatic experience for both Israel and the early Christian Church: false prophets (see 13:5–6, 21–22), wars and rumors of wars (see 13:7, 14–20), events that took place at the fall of the temple (13:14). Mark 13 is “rather like a window which allows a close view of Markan circumstances.”²⁹ The final lengthy discourse that Jesus delivers to a group of disciples at the end of his ministry is an important indication of the situation in the life of the Markan community that gave birth to the gospel. In the light of Mark 13, therefore, the gospel must have reached its final shape in the period during or just after 70 C.E., as the horror and significance of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple made their impact on the Markan community.³⁰

These three elements leave us with some hard facts, which can, in turn, lead to a suggestion about the time and place of the Gospel of Mark. I would regard the following details as hard facts:

1. A familiarity with the Roman world, its language, and its mode of government lies behind the Gospel of Mark.
2. Wherever the gospel was written, the author and the community for whom he was writing the Jesus story were concerned about the mission to the Gentiles.
3. The community is exposed to suffering and persecution, and its members are probably being discouraged by the failure of some to commit themselves, unto death, for the gospel of Jesus Christ.³¹
4. Mark’s gospel was written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

The traditional location of Rome still deserves consideration, but the background to Mark 13 of the fall of Jerusalem suggests somewhere geographically closer to these events. Were the Roman Christians in need of severe warnings not to heed false prophets who were rising up in the midst of the postwar chaos to declare that the end time had come (see 13:5–6, 21–22)? The Roman Christians may have been suffering persecution, but they lived at the center of the known world. Was it

necessary to tell Roman Christians that they must calm their apocalyptic fever, because before the final coming of the Son of Man the gospel had to be preached to all the nations (see 13:10)? How real were *all* the threats of 13:11: “They will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake” (13:9)? The Gospel of Mark does not create the impression that the storyteller and the community receiving the gospel had a special interest in Rome or the Romans.³² Roman characters, even in the passion narrative where they could have been drawn more deeply into the story, remain peripheral. They are present when the story demands it, especially in the passion narrative (15:1–47). Matters Roman, whether they are Latin loanwords or Roman characters, remain extrinsic to the Markan story. The power of Rome, bringing with it coins, soldiers and methods of government, was present all across the Mediterranean basin. Similarly, the suggestion that Mark’s rough Greek reflects a Latin background remains to be proven. Mark writes in rough but powerful and readily understandable Greek. There was no need to be in Rome to find such expressions and practices. Without the long-standing *tradition* concerning the Roman origins of the Gospel of Mark, there is little else that forces a reader to think that this is a gospel concerned with matters Roman.³³

It seems impossible to determine an exact location, a region, or a city where the gospel might first have seen the light of day, and thus I can speculate and suggest only a possible scenario. The might of Rome was felt in many parts of the Mediterranean world, and powerfully so in the recalcitrant states of Syria and Palestine. The traditional location of the origin of Mark in the city of Rome leaves too many questions unresolved, and thus (excluding Rome) I would agree with Morna Hooker:

All we can say with certainty, therefore, is that the gospel was composed somewhere in the Roman Empire—a conclusion that scarcely narrows the field at all!³⁴

The field could be narrowed to the extent that the place in the Roman Empire that produced the Gospel of Mark must have been reasonably close to Jerusalem. Reports of “wars and rumors of wars” (see 13:7) are reaching the ears of the Markan Christians. They know what the author means when he writes of “the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be” (v. 14). They are wondering: Is this the moment for the return of the Son of Man (vv. 7, 10, 13)? They are told—not yet, but that day will come. Be ready, and watch (vv. 24–37). For these reasons, the

Markan community may have been located somewhere in a broad area that might be called southern Syria.³⁵

The dating of the gospel also plays a part in determining its likely place of origin. A date late in or probably after 70 C.E., yet before 75 C.E., is called for.³⁶ This date allows time for both Matthew and Luke, who wrote some time between 80 and 90 C.E., to use the Gospel of Mark as one of the sources for their gospels. Almost thirty years after the death of Jesus, wherever the precise location of the Markan community might have been, these early Christians were involved in a mission to the Gentiles. Several places in the gospel provide evidence of this mission (see, for example, 5:1–20; 7:24–8:10; 13:10). This aspect of the Markan narrative may tip the balance in favor of southern Syria,³⁷ but we cannot be sure of the ethnic mix of Palestine in the 70s of the first Christian century. Northern Palestine may also have provided a missionary setting. However, this would make Mark's vagueness about Palestinian geography difficult to explain.³⁸

Conclusion

This initial exploration of Mark shows the speculative nature of our search for the evangelist. To the question "Which Mark?" the permanence of the name Mark in the tradition *may* point to a person from the early church who both bore that very common name, and also wrote the Gospel of Mark. This suggestion is further strengthened when one answers the question "Why Mark?" From its earliest records down to our own time the Christian tradition has insisted on a figure with the name of Mark. Whether he was one of the several Marks who appear in the pages of the New Testament, or another figure who never appears there, is beyond the range of our knowledge.

However, without certainty, it is possible, and even probable, that someone with the name Mark was the final redactor of this gospel. The expression "final redactor" is important, but so is its association with the term "gospel." To speak of our Mark as a final redactor does not mean that he simply strung traditions together, generating a sequence of reported events without any care for a specific order or without any narrative or even theological design for his story. Mark was not just an editor. He wrote a gospel. That means he was an evangelist: he regarded his task as a proclamation of the good news. The original appearance of the gospel somewhere in northern Palestine or southern Syria may best explain a large number of the features of this gospel. It would have been written at the time of the Jewish War, or at least sometime shortly after

the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple (70 C.E.). In the end, however, it is Mark's understanding of what God did for humankind in and through Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God, that is transmitted through this story of Jesus. This is what led to this gospel's immediate inclusion within the Christian canon, and the ongoing reading and listening to this story that has taken place within the Christian community for almost two thousand years.

Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of this question, see F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 6–9.

2. Some interpreters suggest that the young man whom the authorities try to seize in Gethsemane at the arrest of Jesus, and who runs away naked (see Mark 14:51–52), was the evangelist. This proposal explains how the details of Jesus' solitary prayer in Gethsemane were recorded. Mark was there. See, for example, B. Saunderson, "Gethsemane: The Missing Witness," *Bib* 70 (1989): 224–33. However, even if this interpretation were correct, it would only prove that the evangelist was an eyewitness to the events, not that his name was Mark. For a full survey of the discussion, see C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 427–29.

3. For a different opinion, see M. Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 64–84. Hengel points out that the author used the Greek expression εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) in an innovative fashion. The word was already widely used in Greek literature, in the LXX, and by Paul, prior to the Gospel of Mark. Its basic meaning is "good news." However, it had never been used to describe a "life story." In Mark 1:1 it is used to describe the book that follows: an account of the ministry, the death, and resurrection of Jesus, Messiah, and Son of God. Hengel claims that this usage introduced a new literary form into early Christian literature, and that it may have led to the book's being called "the *euangelion* according to Mark" at a very early stage. The titles given, at a later stage, to Matthew, Luke, and John, imitated the application of the name "Mark" to a document that did not reveal the name of its author.

4. See C. Clifton Black, *Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 25–49, for a detailed study of John Mark's role in Acts. While not discounting a historical John Mark, Black rightly sees the figure as a foil to Luke's presentation of the principal characters. The presence of Mark in the story "subtly discloses or confirms the values and purposes of Barnabas, Paul, and even God, who through the Holy Spirit initiates and sustains their missionary program" (p. 43).

5. See Black, *Mark*, 50–60, on these references to Mark. Black concludes that there is a "coherence of the figure of Mark in the Pauline tradition" (p. 60).

6. A few critical problems emerge here. The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles form a two-volume work by the same author, known to us as Luke, and was sent to a "reader" (who may or may not be a fictitious creation of the author) named Theophilus (see Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–2). These books have an

important theological program driving the narrative. Through them, the author traces a relentless journey (not without its difficulties and suffering) fulfilling the Old Testament world of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna (Luke 1–2), from Galilee to Jerusalem, to Jesus’ ascension to heaven, via the cross and the resurrection (Luke 3–24). Acts continues the story into the world of the apostles and the first disciples. They receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1–2), and are witnesses to Jesus as the Christ, first in Jerusalem, then in all Judea and Samaria, and finally (especially by means of the journeys of Paul) to the ends of the earth (Acts 3–28. See Luke 24:44–49; Acts 1:8). Acts closes with Paul preaching the kingdom and the Lord Jesus Christ boldly in Rome (Acts 28:30–31). The author certainly had good information, but—given the theological program determining much of the story—when it comes to rediscovering the historical events that surrounded Paul’s life, it is better to use the material that can be gleaned from Paul’s letters, rather than Acts. Second, all accept that Paul wrote Philemon. Many (including myself) would say the same for Colossians (but not Ephesians), and a good case can be made for the authentic Pauline character of the personal notes in 2 Timothy, one of the so-called Pastoral Epistles. On this, see M. Prior, *Paul the Letter-Writer and the Second Letter to Timothy* (JSNTSup 23; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989); L. T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 438–51.

7. See, among many, B. B. Thurston, *Preaching Mark* (Fortress Resources for Preaching; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 4: “It was one of the most common names in the Empire.”

8. I will consistently use the traditional nomenclature “Old Testament” and “New Testament.” For some, the use of “Old Testament” is problematic, but no less so than other designations such as “Hebrew Bible” or “First Testament.” I retain the use of “Old Testament” in this study, but the adjective is used in the sense of “ancient” rather than superseded.

9. Contemporary scholarship is reacting against earlier historical criticism that sometimes claimed that 1 Peter was a pseudonymous letter, possibly to be dated in the second century, without any association with Rome or Peter. It is nowadays increasingly suggested that 1 Peter, although not written by the historical Peter, was probably written in Rome (“Babylon”) after the death of Peter in the mid-60s, by an author or authors who reflected the Petrine tradition (a Petrine circle). For excellent treatments of these questions, see P. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 1–50; J. Elliott, *1 Peter. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 118–38, and the summary in Black, *Mark*, 60–66.

10. Eusebius, like most authors, had his own prejudices and cited sources that suited them best. It is also likely that he modified them according to his agenda. There is, therefore, some concern over the accuracy of his use of Papias, or at least concerning the way he may have edited Papias’s original work. See Black, *Mark*, 84–86.

11. The sequence of the passage is not always clear. I will add some clarifying comments in italics and in brackets. For a thorough and up-to-date study of the witness of Papias, see Black, *Mark*, 82–94.

12. The translation is my own, guided by the interpretative suggestions of S. Kealy, *Mark’s Gospel: A History of Its Interpretation* (New York: Paulist, 1982), 12, and Black, *Mark*, 83.

13. The exact nature of that association is debated, as the Greek word *hermēneutēs* is open to a number of interpretations: secretary, interpreter, translator.

14. Unique to the patristic witness to Markan authorship, however, is that there is little or no interest in the references to the possible New Testament associations with John Mark or the Pauline Mark, not even to 1 Pet 5:13. See, on this, Black, *Mark*, 77.

15. See Black, *Mark*, 87–88.

16. See Black, *Mark*, 89–93. Kürzinger (followed, with some reservations, by Black) suggests that this collection of sayings of the Lord may not have indicated (for Papias, whatever Eusebius made of it) the Gospel of Mark. Much depends on what one makes of the expression πρὸς τὰς χρείας (*pros tas chreias*). Recent interest in the literary form of the *chreia* stresses the use in Greco-Roman literature, to refer to synthetic anecdotes. Much is made of their formative influence in the development of the Christian tradition. See R. C. Tannehill, ed., *Varieties of Synoptic Pronouncement Stories* (*Semeia* 20 [1981]: 1–141), and V. K. Robbins, ed., *The Rhetoric of Pronouncement* (*Semeia* 64 [1994]: i–xvii, 1–301). Thus the idea of Mark gathering Peter’s reminiscences “to meet the needs of the time” as the only possible meaning for πρὸς τὰς χρείας (*pros tas chreias*), can be questioned. A definitive collection of Kürzinger’s voluminous work on Papias can be found in J. Kürzinger, *Papias von Hierapolis und die Evangelien des Neuen Testaments: Gesammelte Aufsätze, Neuauflage und Übersetzung der Fragmente, Kommentierte Bibliographie* (Eichstätter Materialien 4; Regensburg: Pustet, 1983). The collected and annotated bibliography is the work of E. König and M. Vinzent.

17. M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 7. See also R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 1–14; Kealy, *Mark’s Gospel*, 7–57; E. Masseaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus* (trans. N. J. Belval and S. Hecht; ed. A. J. Bellinzoni; New Gospel Studies 5; Macon: Mercer, 1993); B. D. Schildgen, *Power and Prejudice: The Reception of the Gospel of Mark* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999).

18. See the excellent sifting and summarizing of the evidence in Black, *Mark*, 114–91, especially the perceptive pages on “a Patristic conspectus” (pp. 183–91). Perhaps the most celebrated and most cited patristic evaluation of the Gospel of Mark (discussing the relationship between Mark and Matthew) comes from Augustine: “Mark appears only as his follower and abbreviator” (*De consensu evangelistarum* 1.2 [PL 34:1044]: “Marcus eum subsequutus tamquam pedisequus et breviator eius videtur”).

19. Black, *Mark*, 11–12.

20. See Black, *Mark*, 224–50. He states, as one of his conclusions: “The Second Gospel bespeaks the handiwork of a creative traditionist, arguably a stylist and religious thinker of merit, who may have been named Mark. Nevertheless, the author’s identity is irrecoverable, and the historicity of that ascription cannot be verified” (p. 239).

21. The third edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (eds. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1038, suggests (on the basis of Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.14.1; 16.1) that Mark went from Rome to Alexandria and became its first bishop, and points to the close association between Mark and Venice.

22. As we shall see in the following chapter (see below, pp. 19–43), literary theory distinguishes between a “real author” who actually took writing implements in hand and wrote a text, and an “implied author” whose voice can be heard throughout the text. See further W. Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 278–80.

23. Among the important older commentators who made this claim, see V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (2d ed; New York: St. Martin’s, 1966), 26–31; W. L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 21–23. Among more recent scholars see, for example, Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, 1–30; J. Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (5th ed.; EKKNT II/1–2; 2 vols.; Zürich/Ner kirchen-Vluyn: Benziger Verlag/Neukirchener Verlag, 1998–1999), 1:34–35; J. R. Donahue and D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (SP 2; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 41–46.

24. It is important to recognize that the recent return to interest in Rome as the origin of the Gospel of Mark does not simply repeat the patristic and older presentation of this argument. On this, see Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 41–46. For a more complete survey, see Black, *Mark*, 224–50. After a thorough review of the question, Black concludes, “In any case, the association between Mark’s Gospel and Rome, drawn by most patristic interpreters and perpetuated by some of their modern counterparts, is, if not proven, then at least not improbable” (p. 238).

25. These issues must be raised, as they are neglected by some reader-oriented studies. See, for example, B. van Iersel, *Reading Mark* (trans. W. H. Bisscheroux; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988), 15: “The fact that the author time and time again warns his audience so seriously of the danger of persecutions says much about their situation but little or nothing about the time when the book was written.” As one element among several, it may be a very helpful indicator of when the book was written.

26. See J. Marcus, “The Jewish War and the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 441–46.

27. See Marcus, “The Jewish War,” 453–54; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HTKNT II/1–2; 2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1976–1977), 1:10–11.

28. See Marcus, “The Jewish War,” 446–48. As Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:14, remarks: “Thus, the dating of the Gospel of Mark depends upon the interpretation of Mark 13.” (Here and throughout I have translated into English quotations from French and German works.) Not all would agree that Mark 13 reflects the destruction of Jerusalem, and most suggest it reflects Israel’s prophetic tradition. See, for example, G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), and Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, 14–28. For R. A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark’s Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 129–36, the discourse has no connection with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. It is built on Israel’s prophetic tradition, and focuses on the struggle of Jesus’ freedom movement against the repressive violence of the Roman rule.

29. W. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 110.

30. On the importance of 13:14 (“the desolating sacrilege where it [he] ought not to be”), see the fine study of W. A. Such, *The Abomination of Desolation in*

the Gospel of Mark: Its Historical Reference in Mark 13:14 and Its Impact in the Gospel (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999).

31. See J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 28–29.

32. For a strong case, arguing that Markan Christology is a direct response to the divine claims made by the Roman imperial tradition, see Evans, *Mark*, lxxx–xciii.

33. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, 121–48, argues that the so-called apocalyptic elements and the exorcisms, especially the expulsion of Legion in 5:1–20, are directed to peasant people subjected to Roman imperial power, and are aimed at arousing a renewal movement among the people in Galilean village situations. Even if Horsley is correct, his theory would locate the origins of the Markan gospel(s) in Galilee, not Rome. On the naming of demons with military terms, insisting that Legion has nothing to do with the occupying power, see the perceptive remarks of K. Berger, *Identity and Experience in the New Testament: A Historical Psychology* (trans. C. Muenchow; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 49–51.

34. Hooker, *St Mark*, 8. See also D. Lürhmann, *Das Markusevangelium* (HNT 3; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987), 7: “Mark and his reader may have lived anywhere close to or distant from Palestine, perhaps in Syria. However, this cannot be proved. It may have been anywhere from the Mediterranean as far into the East as the Iran and Iraq of today.”

35. See Marcus, *Mark*, 33–37. See also, R. I. Rohrbach, “The Social Location of the Markan Audience,” *BTB* 23 (1993): 114–27.

36. See also Marcus, *Mark*, 37–39, who suggests a time not earlier than 69 C.E. and not later than 74 C.E. For Evans, *Mark*, lxii–lxiii, it was written *during* the Jewish War, and not after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

37. Marcus, “The Jewish War,” 460–62, suggests “one of the Hellenistic cities” (perhaps even Pella) on the basis of the Gentile mission. As he says elsewhere, “A provenance close to Palestine, but not in it, is thus an attractive possibility” (J. Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom* [SBLDS 90; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986], 10). On literary grounds (reader-response), M. A. Beavis, *Mark’s Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4:11–12* (JSNTSup 33; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), suggests a Greco-Roman missionary context for the Markan community. See especially pp. 157–76.

38. See Marcus, *The Mystery*, 10.