

WESTERN WISDOM BIBLE STUDY

The Gospels

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BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF JESUS

THE FIRST evidence we have of the New Testament being a complete collection of inspired writings dates from about three hundred years after the time in which the Disciples lived, although separate books may be traced to much earlier dates. The principal apostolic writings are the four Gospels. A second collection was formed of the works of the other Disciples, and to these were added later the Acts, and the Epistles of Paul. The Epistles of John, James, Jude, and the Book of Revelation were not included until a much later date. These composed the third collection.

Before the compilation of the Gospels, there were shorter memoirs of the life of Christ Jesus. There were also many other letters attributed to the Disciples, which are now considered apocryphal. One of these letters was a deeply esoteric treatise written by Matthew in Hebrew, of which the present Greek translation is a mere fragment. This work is often referred to by the early Church Fathers.

Papias, a disciple of Polycarp, who was one of the most advanced of the pupils of John, states that Matthew wrote his first Gospel in Hebrew, and that everyone translated it as he was able. This was during the time Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome, also founding a church there. Jerome says that this Gospel was preserved in the library of the church in Caesarea. Different versions of the manuscript were made and passed from church to church.

The Syrian and Arabic copies of this

Gospel of Matthew read: "Here ends the copy of the Gospel of Matthew, which he wrote in the land of Palestine, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in the Hebrew language, eight years after the ascension of Jesus the Messiah into heaven, and in the first year of the Roman Emperor, Claudius Caesar."

Jerome and Origen called this The Gospel to the Hebrews because it was written in the Hebrew language. It was referred to by early writers as *The Gospel of the Twelve*. Justyn Martyr, in A. D. 133, mentions this book as *The Recollections of the Apostles* and affirms that it contains much information not included in the present Gospels.

The fragments of the original Gospels owe their preservation to the earliest Christian communities, founded, in some instances, by various of the Twelve Disciples themselves, or their immediate disciples. The first instruction was by word of mouth, but in course of time the account of the words and deeds of Christ Jesus were written down, often in the form of Epistles, which passed from one church to the other. Among these accounts was the "Memorabilia" to which Justin Martyr refers.

The Gospels in their original form were not divided into chapters as now, but were composed of certain readings applicable to the Sabbath and certain feast days. Their readings were not mere repetitions of the Scriptures, however, as are the church readings of the present day. These early Christians had been instructed in *the power of the Name of Christ Jesus*, a kabbalistic doctrine of great antiquity. They knew the secret of the spoken word, and how to use it as an instrument of Spirit.

Various churches possessed different memoirs: Caesarea used that of Matthew; Jerusalem that of Peter and later of James the Just, also Luke and the Virgin Mary. The "Recollections of Peter" were first written in notes and used in these churches before Mark gathered them together to form his Gospel. From Antioch to Rome they celebrated the Mysteries connected with the Life of Christ Jesus.

The "Gospel of the Lord" was the basis of the work formulated by Luke. This Gospel was written during the time that he was a disciple of Paul, and during the active founding of the churches in Asia Minor. Luke was also a disciple of the Virgin Mary. "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart"—words forming a part of his record of her. The Gospel of Luke contains the most intimate and tender details of the life of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. These Luke had received directly from Mary.

Luke wrote his Gospel and the Book of Acts about 64 A.D. He was an educated Greek, learned both as a physician and artist. He met Paul at Troas and became one of his most faithful disciples, acting as his amanuensis as Mark did for Peter. After the death of Paul he worked in Greece and Egypt. It is said that he kept with him constantly a picture of Christ Jesus and another of the Virgin and performed many works of healing and conversion by the aid of their magical properties. Tradition also has it that the Madonna was first painted by Luke, and it is claimed that this same picture is still extant and on view in the Vatican. Luke is supposed to have suffered martyrdom some time between 75 and 100 A. D.

Every student of the ancient wisdom knows that the Gospels contain formulas of Initiation. The early Christian teachers, Clement of Alexandria, head of the most celebrated of the early Christian Schools, and Origen, his first disciple and successor, often refer to the

secret teachings of Christ Jesus as being reserved for the few—"milk for babes and meat for strong men," as Paul expresses it. Even Augustine has said: "That which is called the Christian religion existed among the ancients from the beginning of the human race; at the coming of Christ Jesus, true religion began to be called Christianity.

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, and Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, both disciples of John, mention the "Inner mysteries of Jesus," which were generally known and observed by those who were faithful and worthy during the first and second centuries after Christ Jesus. Origen writes: "The Scriptures have one meaning which is apparent to all men, and another which escapes the notice of most men. The spiritual meaning of the Scriptures is not known to all; to His own disciples did the Master open up all things."

The Christ came as the great Way-Shower for all mankind; consequently the events in His life embrace all the steps in the evolutionary progress of the masses, and also outline the definite stages of Initiation for the guidance of the few who choose to take the more direct path and to accomplish in a short time, as did the first disciples, that which humanity as a whole will not realize until ages hence.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the first of the four, the Christ is quoted as saying: "My secret is for Me and for the Children of my house." A similar statement is made by John: "No man cometh unto me except my Father calleth him," meaning that none are able to receive the Christ Mystery without a long period of preparation. This is most often unconsciously received. Generally it is through the travail of sorrow and pain that the illumination comes which draws one to the sacred heart of the Christ. "Before the feet can stand in the presence of the Master, they must be washed in the blood of the heart," affirms a beautiful precept of instruction for all true aspirants.