

Who Were the Evangelists?

Explanation

The New Testament begins with its four incomparable Gospels. These books comprise the four corners of the sacred written record of the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ. Each Gospel presents an amazingly beautiful and spiritually compelling account of the life and death, words and deeds, suffering and triumph of the Savior.

The charts in this section are designed to help readers understand the contents and purposes of these Gospels: how they differ from each other, and how they are the same; where they overlap, and where they are unique.

A first key of understanding often comes by recognizing the personality of the writer. Chart 7-1 gives information about the four Gospel writers. Among the interesting details about their educational, social, and economic backgrounds, it appears that before their conversions, Matthew and John were Jewish, Luke was Greek, and Mark (the Latin name Marcus) may have been Roman. Thus, these writers personally represent the three main cultures in the world of the New Testament.

References

Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, "The Powerful Voices of the Gospels," *New Era*, January 1973, 36–43.

Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, eds., *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986).

Who Were the Evangelists?

The writers of the four Gospels are called *evangelists*, a term derived from the Greek and Latin words for gospel, *euangelion* and *evangelium*.

MATTHEW

One of the twelve apostles, Matthew is sometimes called Levi (Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27). Mark describes him as a son of Alphaeus, making him perhaps the brother of the lesser James. He was employed as a local tax official of Capernaum. He may have been a man of means since he is said to have given up all that he possessed to follow the Savior. Tradition holds that Matthew spent time in Antioch from where he may have written his gospel during the 70s A.D.

LUKE

Paul's "fellow laborer" in his missionary efforts, Luke is not only the author of the final synoptic gospel but the historian of the early missionary efforts of the apostles as recorded in Acts. Luke's adeptness in using formal Greek historiographical style, as well as his name, suggest Luke's Greek origins. His profession as a physician (Col 4:14) accords with the tradition that Luke was a highly educated Greek convert. Much of Luke's information in both Acts and the Gospel of Luke no doubt derives from his companion Paul. The composition of these works is generally dated to the 70s A.D.

MARK

Mark, or John Mark, was converted to Christianity at Jerusalem where early Christians gathered at the home of Mark's mother, Mary (Acts:12:12). He served as a missionary companion of Paul and Barnabas during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 12 and 13). His most noted missionary service, however, was as a companion of Peter (see IPt). According to Papias, while associated with Peter, Mark recorded the apostles' words and teachings as a foundation for his written gospel. Probably composed at Rome in the late 60s A.D., the gospel of Mark is considered reflective of Peter's views. Tradition holds that after Peter's death, Mark journeyed to Alexandria where he was instrumental in establishing the Christian community in Egypt.

JOHN

John is known by four names: John the Beloved Disciple, the Apostle John, John the Evangelist, and John the Revelator. John's title as evangelist derives from his composition of the fourth Gospel, in which he refers to himself as the beloved disciple. The Gospel was probably the last of John's writings, following Revelation and the earlier epistles. Its composition may be as late as the first decade of the second century A.D. Clearly it was written to remind an increasingly confused Christian world of the true identity and character of Jesus Christ. The first disciple called by Jesus, John remained one of the leading apostles and, after the death of Peter, presided from Ephesus over the Church of Christ until his translation (D&C 7).