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# THE SECRET GOSPEL OF MARK

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## INTRODUCTION

(Adapted from the introduction in "*The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings*," Bart D. Ehrman, 1998, Oxford University Press).

The *Secret Gospel of Mark* is a longer edition of Mark's Gospel that has been known only since 1958, when Morton Smith (an American scholar) found a 17<sup>th</sup> Century edition of the Letters of Ignatius, to which an 18<sup>th</sup> Century scribe had copied a letter, allegedly from Clement of Alexandria. In this letter, Clement states that Mark had produced two versions of his Gospel: one for the laity and a longer one for the elite; he then quotes two of the 'extensions' that he claims are authentic and dismisses others. We include the Greek text of this letter here, along with a translation based on [that of Smith](#).

Smith found the letter while cataloguing manuscripts in the library of the Greek Orthodox monastery of Mar Saba (southeast of Jerusalem); it is important to note that nobody except Smith has ever actually seen this fragment - Smith published [photographs](#) of the three pages but the original remains inaccessible.

## AUTHORSHIP AND PROVENANCE

The *Secret Gospel of Mark* is one the most hotly debated Christian texts discovered in modern times. Did Clement of Alexandria actually write the letter, preserved only in the single, 18<sup>th</sup> Century MS (to which nobody except Smith has had access). Is it a modern forgery? Or is it an ancient forgery?

## THE SECRET GOSPEL OF MARK

+ εκ των επιστολων του αγιωτατου κλημεντος του στρωματεως· θεοδωρω·

καλως εποιησας επιστομισας τας αρρητους διδασκαλιας των καρποκρατιανων· ουτοι γαρ οι προφητευθέντες αστερες πλανηται· οι απο της στενής των εντολων ο δου εις απερατον αβυσσον πλανωμενοι των σαρκικων και ενσωματων αμαρτιων· πεφουσιωμενοι γαρ εις γνωσιν· ως λεγουσι· των βαθεων του σατανα· λανθανουσιν εις τον ζοφον του σκοτους του ψευδους εαυτους απορριπτοντες· και καυχωμενοι ελευθερους ειναι· δουλοι γεγονασιν ανδραποδωδων επιθυμιων· τουτοις ουν αν τιστατεον παντη τε και παντως· ει γαρ και τι αληθες λεγοιεν· ουδ ουτω συμφωνοιη αν αυτοις ο της αληθειας εραστης· ουδε γαρ παντα ταληθη αληθεια· ουδε την κατα τας ανθρωπινας δοξας φαινομενην αληθειαν προκριτέον της αληθους αληθειας της κατα την πιστιν·

των τοινυν θρυλουμενων περι του θεοπνευστου κα τα μαρκον ευαγγελιου τα μεν ψευδεται παντελως· τα δε· ει και αληθη τιναπεριέχει ουδ ουτως αληθως παραδιδοται· συγκεκραμενα γαρ ταληθη τοις πλασμασι παραχαράσσεται ωστε· τουτο δη το λεγομενον· και το αλας μωρανθηναι·

ο γουν μαρκος· κατα την του πετρου εν ρωμη διατριβην· ανεγραψε τας πραξεις του κυριου· ου μεντοι πασας εξαγγελων· ουδε μην τας μυστικας υποσημαι νων· αλλ εκλεγομενος ας χρησιμωτατας ενομισε προς αυ ξησιν της

From the letters of the most holy Clement, the author of the Stromateus. To Theodore.

You did well in silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians. For, these are the 'wandering stars' referred to in the prophecy, who wander from the narrow road of the commandments into a boundless abyss of carnal and bodily sins. For, priding themselves in knowledge, as they say, 'of the deep things of Satan', they do not know that they are casting themselves into 'the nether world of the darkness' of falsity and, boasting they are free, they are slaves of servile desires. Such men must be opposed in all ways and altogether. For, even if they say something true, one who loves the truth should not, even so, agree with them. For, not all true things are the truth, nor should that truth which merely seems true according to human opinions be preferred to the true truth, that according to the faith.

Now of the things they say about the divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark, some are complete falsifications, and others, even if they contain some true elements, are not reported truly. For, the true things being mixed with inventions, are falsified, so that, as the saying goes, even the salt loses its savour.

As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all of them, nor yet hinting at the secret ones, but selecting what he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were

των κατηχουμενων πιστεως· του δε πετρου μαρτυρησαντος· παρηλθεν εις αλεξανδρειαν ο μαρκος· κομιζων και ταυτου και τα του πετρου υπο μνηματα· εξων μεταφερων εις το πρωτον αυτου βιβλιον τα τοις προκοπ τουσι περι την γνωσιν καταλληλα συνεταξε πνευματικωτερον ευαγγελιον εις την των τελειουμενων χρησην· ουδεπω ομως αυτα τα απορρητα εξωρησατο· ουδε κατεγραψε την ιεροφαντικην διδασκαλιαν του κυριου· αλλα ταις προγεγραμμεναις πραξεσιν επιθεισ και αλλας· ετι προσεπηγαγε λογια τινων ηπιστατο την εξηγησιν μυσταγωγησειν τους ακροατας εις το αδυτον της επτακις κεκαλυμμενης αληθειας· ουτως ουνπροπαρεσκευασεν· ου φθονερωσ ουδ απροφυλακτως· ως εγω οιμαι· και αποθνησκων κατελιπε το αυτου συγγραμμα τη εκκλησια τη εναλεξανδρεια· οπου εισετι νυν ασφαλως εν μαλα τηρειται· αναγιγνωσκόμενον προς αυτους μονους τους μνουμενους τα μεγαλα μυστηρια·

των δε μι αρων δαιμονων ολεθρον τω των ανθρωπων γενει παντοτε μηχανωντων· ο καρποκρατης· υπ αυτων διδαχθεις· και απατηλοις τεχναις χρησαμενος· ουτω πρεσβυτερον τινα της εν αλεξανδρεια εκκλησίας κατεδουλωσεν ωστε παρ αυτου εκομισεν απογραφον του μυστικου ευαγγελιου· ο και εξηγησατο κατα την βλασφημιον και σαρκικην αυτου δοξαν· ετιδε και εμιανε· ταις αχραντοις και αγιας λεξεσιν αναμιγνυσ αναιδεστατα ψευσματα· του δε κραματος τουτου εξαντληται το των καρποκρατιωνων δογμα·

τουτοις ουν· καθως και προειρηκα· ουδεποτε εικτεον· ου δε προτεινουσιν αυτοις τα κατεψευσμενα συγχωρητεον του

being instructed. But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former book the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge. Thus, he composed a more spiritual Gospel for the use of those who were being perfected. Nevertheless, he yet did not divulge the things not to be uttered, nor did he write down the hierophantic teaching of the Lord, but to the stories already written he added yet others and, moreover, brought in certain sayings of which he knew the interpretation would, as a mystagogue, lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven veils. Thus, in sum, he prepared matters, neither grudgingly nor incautiously, in my opinion, and, dying, he left his composition to the church in Alexandria, where it even yet is most carefully guarded, being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries.

But, since the foul demons are always devising destruction for the race of men, Carpocrates, instructed by them and using deceitful arts, so enslaved a certain presbyter of the church in Alexandria that he got from him a copy of the secret Gospel, which he both interpreted according to his blasphemous and carnal doctrine and, moreover, polluted, mixing with the spotless and holy words utterly shameless lies. From this mixture is drawn off the teaching of the Carpocratians.

So, to them, as I said above, one must never give way; nor, when they put forward their falsifications, should one concede that

μαρκου ει ναι το μυστικον ευαγγελιον· αλλα και μεθ ορκου αρνητεον· ου γαρ απασι παντα αληθη λεκτεον· δια τουτο η σοφια του θεου δια σολομωντος παραγγελλει αποκρινου τω μωρω εκ της μωριας αυτου· προς τους τυφλους τον νουν το φως της αληθειας δειν επικρυπτεσθαι διδασκουσα· αυτικα φησι· του δε μη εχοντος αρθησεται· και· ο μωρος εν σκοτει πορευεσθω· ημεις δε υιοι φωτος εσμεν· πεφωτισμενοι τη εξ υψους ανατολη του πνευματος του κυριου· ου δε το πνευμα του κυριου· φησιν· εκει ελευθερια· παντα γαρ καθαρα τοις καθαροις·

σοι τοινυν ουκ οκνησω τα ηρωτημενα αποκρινασθαι· δι αυτων του ευαγγελιου λεξεων τα κατεψευσμενα ελεγχων· αμελει μετα το· ησαν δε εν τη οδω αναβαινοντες εις ιεροσολυμα· και τα εξης εως· μετα τρεις ημερας αναστησεται· ωδε επιφερει κατα λεξιν·

<sup>34a</sup> και ερχονται εις βηθανιαν και ην εκει μια γυνη ης ο αδελφος αυτης απεθανεν· και ελθουσα προσεκυνησε τον ιησουν και λεγει αυτω· υιε δαβιδ ελεησον με· οι δε μαθηται επετιμησαν αυτη· και οργισθεις ο ιησους απηλθεν μετ αυτης εις τον κηπον οπου ην το μνημειον· και ευθυς ηκουσθη εκ του μνημειου φωνη μεγαλη· και προσελθων ο ιησους απεκυλισε τον λιθον απο της θυρας του μνημειου· <sup>34b</sup> και εισελθων ευθυς οπου ην ο νεανισκος εξετεινεν την χειρα και ηγειρεν αυτον·

the secret Gospel is by Mark, but should even deny it on oath. For, 'Not all true things are to be said to all men'. For this reason, the Wisdom of God, through Solomon, advises, 'Answer the fool from his folly', teaching that the light of the truth should be hidden from those who are mentally blind. Again, it says, 'From him who has not shall be taken away', and, 'Let the fool walk in darkness.' But we are 'children of light', having been illuminated by 'the dayspring' of the spirit of the Lord 'from on high', and 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is', it says, 'there is liberty', for 'All things are pure to the pure'.

So, to you, I shall not hesitate to answer the questions you ask, refuting the lies by the very words of the Gospel. For example, after, "And they were in the road going up to Jerusalem," and what follows, until "After three days he shall arise," the secret Gospel brings the following material word for word:

<sup>34a</sup> "And they come into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and said to him, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightaway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And, going near, Jesus rolled away the stone from the entrance of the tomb. <sup>34b</sup> And straightaway, going in where the young man was, he stretched forth his hand and

<sup>34a</sup> The text of this paragraph is found after Mk 10:32-34 (the passage cited in the letter); the verse divisions here are of my own creation.

<sup>34b</sup> In place of 'straightaway', Ehrman has 'immediately' (as also in v. 34a).

κρατησαστης χειρος· ο δε νεανισκος εμβλέψας αυτω ηγαπησεν αυτον και ηρξατο παρακαλειν αυτον ινα μετ αυτου η· <sup>34c</sup> και εξελθοντες εκ του μνημειου ηλθον εις την οικιαν του νεανισκου· ην γαρ πλουσιος· και μεθ ημερας εξ επεταξεν αυτω ο ιησους· και οψιας γενομενης ερχεται ο νεανισκος προς αυτον· περιβεβλημενος σινδονα επι γυμνου· και εμεινε συν αυτω την νυκτα εκεινην· εδιδασκε γαρ αυτον ο ιησους το μυστηριον της βασιλειας του θεου· εκειθεν δε αναστας επεστρεψεν εις το περαν του ιορδανου·

επι μεν τουτοις επεται το· και προσπορευονται αυτω ιακωβος και ιωαννης· και πασα η περι κοπη· το δε γυμνος γυμνω και ταλλα περι ων εγραψας ουκ ευρισκεται· μετα δε το· και ερχεται εις ιεριχω επαγει μονον·

<sup>46b</sup> και η σαν εκει η αδελφη του νεανισκου ον ηγαπα αυτον ο ιησους· και η μητηρ αυτου και σαλωμη· και ουκ απεδεξατο αυτας ο ιησους·

τα δε αλλα τα πολλα α εγραψας ψευσματα και φαινεται και εστιν· η μεν ουν αληθης και κατα την αληθη φιλοσοφιαν εξηγησις ...

raised him up, taking him by the hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. <sup>34c</sup> And, going out of the tomb, they came into the house of the young man; for, he was rich. And, after six days, Jesus told him what to do and, in the evening, the young man came to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night; for, Jesus was teaching him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And, when he departed thence, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.”

After these words follows the text, “And James and John come to him,” and all that section. But “naked man with naked man,” and the other things about which you wrote, are not found.

And after, “And he comes into Jericho,” he adds only,

<sup>46b</sup> “And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them.”

But the many other things about which you wrote both seem to be and are lies. Now the true explanation, which accords with the true philosophy ... §

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<sup>34c</sup> Before ‘over his body’, Ehrman adds ‘thrown’.

<sup>46b</sup> This addition occurs in the middle of Mk 10:46.

§ At this point, the text of the letter breaks off in the middle of a page.