

STUDIES IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649384105

Studies in the four Gospels by William G. Moorehead

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM G. MOOREHEAD

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FOUR GOSPELS**

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BY

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PHILADELPHIA
THE WESTMINSTER PRESS

1900

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PREFACE

THIS book is not an Introduction to the Four Gospels, much less is it a Commentary on them. It is intended to be just what its title indicates: Studies. Its aim is to point out as clearly and briefly as possible what is conceived to be the main design of the Spirit of God in these precious records. Whether that design has been rightly interpreted, and whether it has been adequately set forth, it is left to the reader's judgment to determine.

In the prosecution of these Studies, many books have been consulted. References to them in the text are scanty, chiefly because it seemed undesirable to burden the pages with them. Here, however, it seems proper to mention those which have been of special help, viz.: Bellett, Jukes, Gregory, and Thompson, on the Four Gospels; and the commentaries of Wescott, Reynolds,

Alford, and Brown; the Expositors' Bible and the Cambridge Bible. No single book has been more serviceable than the little volume of President Henry G. Weston on the Gospel according to Matthew.

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INTRODUCTION

GOSPEL means good news. There is but one gospel—the glad tidings of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. From the earliest times, however, the term has been applied to each of the four narratives which together form the “four-sided gospel,” as Origen called it. In the oldest copies of the New Testament the title is simply, “According to Matthew,” “According to Mark,” etc., which seems to import, not that these are four separate works, but that the one gospel has been committed to writing by the evangelists in this fourfold account. Augustine speaks of “the four gospels, or rather the four books of the one gospel.”

Evangelical Christians hold, on what they consider good and sufficient grounds, that the four gospels were written by the men whose names they bear. The primitive Church invariably ascribed them to these four men, nor has the most laborious and searching examination shown

that the tradition concerning their authorship has ever varied. There is unmistakable evidence that in the third quarter of the second century (A. D. 150-175) these four gospels as one collection were generally received and read by Christians as Scripture in their assemblies for the worship of God.

The time of their composition cannot be determined with any degree of certainty; it can be only approximately stated. Somewhere between A. D. 50 and 65 the synoptics, as Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called, were written. The Gospel by John dates from a later period. Probably in the decade between A. D. 80 and 90 it was published by the servant of Christ whose name it bears.

On taking up these incomparable narratives for study several things arrest attention :

1. No one of them nor all of them combined form a biography of Christ. This is apparent from their limits. Bagster's Bible prints the four in 82 pages, the Oxford in 104, the Revision (8vo.) in 88 pages. In the Bagster, Matthew has but 23 pages; Mark, 15; Luke, 25; and John, 19. Less than one hundred pages are devoted to that life which at once is the most strangely human and yet the most superhuman, the most natural and yet the most supernatural that the world has ever seen. It is indeed most true that the Holy Spirit can and does place before us all

we need to know with a brevity which no human writer can successfully imitate: and this is not the least part of His glory that the written Word comes to men in a compass suited to the least amount of leisure, of capacity, and of means. But it is manifest from their limits as well as from their contents that the gospel records were not designed to be a life of Christ, else why do the evangelists pass over in silence the thirty years of our Lord's earthly sojourn? And why, after giving a detailed account of the events and circumstances attending His birth, do they omit all reference to His life in Nazareth, save the one brief incident of His visit to Jerusalem when twelve years old (Luke ii. 42-50), and dwell exclusively on His public ministry? It is with His redemptive work they are concerned, with His Messianic deeds and words they deal, for their one aim is to set Him forth as the promised Deliverer, the one supreme Saviour, for whose advent the saints of the olden time looked and longed, and the one in whom men must find salvation. Of all the gospels the same design may be predicated which John testifies was his aim: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through His