

The Gospel of Mark

Written by Administrator
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Many people are convinced that Mark was the source for the other Gospels, Matthew and Luke. Trying to understand why I write down from several books their insight and the reader could decide for himself.

From the Book "The New Testament, its background, growth, and content" by Bruce M. Metzger.

"During the past century and a half an enormous amount of research has been devoted to the study of the four Gospels. The earlier stages of this investigation involved the literary analysis of the written Gospels. At the close of World War I attention was shifted to the preliterate stages of the Gospels, and what is called form criticism was applied to the units of tradition about Jesus that had circulated by word of mouth before they were incorporated in written Gospels. More recently the pendulum of scholarly research has begun to swing away from preoccupation with the oral period of the transmission of Gospel materials and now concentrates on examining the Gospels as unified compositions by literary authors, each with its own emphasis and point of view. A summary of the contributions of each of these three methods of research must now be given.

Literary criticism of the Synoptic Gospels.

When the text of the synoptic Gospels is set forth in parallel columns it can be readily seen that there is very extensive agreement in content, arrangement, and even in wording. The substance of 606 of the 661 verses of Mark reappears in somewhat shortened form in Matthew, and about 350 of the 661 verses of Mark reappear in Luke. Stated in another way, of the 1,068 verses of Matthew about 500 contain the substance of 606 verses of Mark, while rather more than half of Mark's material (about 350 out of 661) is embodied in Luke's 1,149 verses. Furthermore, Matthew and Luke have each about 235 verses in common, comprising chiefly discourse material, which are not in Mark. Not only do all three synoptic Gospels have a great deal of material in common, they also show in undeniable agreement in other points. For example, occasionally citations are made from the Old Testament in a form which is identical in all three synoptics, though differing from both the Hebrew original as well as the Greek translation of the Old Testament (e.g., Matthew 9:1-17; Mark 2:1-22; Luke 5:17-39), or even mere transitional phrases (e.g., Matthew 8:16; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:40 and Matthew 19:13, Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15)

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It is obvious from these data that there is some kind of literary relationship among the synoptic Gospels. Of several possible relationships, the one which has approved itself to most scholars is the priority of Mark. This is the theory that Matthew and Luke followed Mark's historical narrative, making its language fundamental to their own accounts, arranging its material to conform to their own purposes in writing, and adding material from other sources oral and written. In support of this view it is customary to point not only to the implications of the data set forth above, but also to the following features which suggest the primitive character of Mark's Gospel.

(a) When the sections of Mark and Luke differ in sequence, Matthew agrees with Mark; but when the sections of Mark and Matthew differ in sequence, Luke agrees with Mark. Furthermore, Matthew and Luke never agree in sequence against Mark.

(b) In style and language Mark is decidedly less polished than Matthew and Luke, and it would be contrary to all analogy that well-written documents should be so revised as to produce a crude one.

(c) Phrases in Mark which are difficult or might be misunderstood are absent from the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke. For example, the statement in Mark 2:26 that Abiatar was high priest when David entered the house of God is contrary to the account in I Samuel 21:1-7, and is omitted in the parallels, in Matthew 12:3 and Luke 6:3. Again the command, "Do not defraud" which is included in a list of the commandments in Mark 10:19, is deleted by Matthew and Luke in their parallel accounts, as being inappropriate among the Ten commandments.

(d) In the early church there was an increase of respect for the apostles, who came to be regarded as the pillars of the church. Matthew and Luke often soften Mark's blunt and sometimes uncomplimentary statements regarding these leaders of the church. For example, Matthew omits Mark's statement about their hardness of heart (Mark 6:52), their unseemly dispute as to who of them was the greatest (Mark 9:33 ff) and their inability to comprehend Jesus' teaching (Mark 9:32). Luke softens Mark's account (Mark 14:71) of Peter vigorously cursing, transforming it in a gentle disavowal, "Man, I do not know what you are saying." (Luke 22:60. Luke also omits Jesus' stinging rebuke of Peter, when He said, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8:33).

(e) A natural development of reverence for Jesus in the primitive church is reflected in the Gospels by such details as the following. Only once does Mark use "The Lord" to refer to Jesus

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(Mark 11:13); Matthew, however, uses it nineteen times and Luke sixteen. On the other hand, both Matthew and Luke suppress or weaken references in Mark to such human emotions of Jesus as grief and anger (Mark 3:5) and amazement (Mark 6:6), as well as Jesus' unrequited love (Mark 10:21); they also omit Mark's statement that Jesus' friends thought he was beside Himself (Mark 3:21)

(f) The later Gospels omit what might imply that Jesus was unable to accomplish what he willed; for example, Matthew and Luke do not repeat Mark's statement that Jesus "Could no longer enter a town" Mark 1:45 or that "he meant to pass by them" (Mark 6:48). Furthermore, they also omit questions asked by Jesus which might be taken to imply His ignorance. For example, the questions in Mark 6:38; 9:16,21,33 are absent from both Matthew and Luke and the questions in Mark 5:9,30 8:12 and 14:14 are all omitted by Matthew.

(g) Side by side with the softening in Matthew and Luke of what might lessen the majesty of Jesus' person is a readiness to heighten what illustrates it. Whereas Mark says that: "They brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons..... and he healed many.....and cast out many demons." (Mark 1:32,34), Matthew reports that "They brought him many who were possessed with demons, and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick." (Matthew 8:16). In accord with the implication of the phrase "with a word" in the last reference, more than once in telling of Jesus' miraculous work Matthew uses the word "instantly", thereby insisting that the healing took place immediately. (e.g. Matthew 15:28; 17:18). Likewise, according to Matthew the fig tree which Jesus cursed withered at once, and the disciples were amazed at the sudden whitening (Matthew 21:19-20), whereas Mark indicates that they did not notice the whitening until the next day (Mark 11:20-21).

(h) Here and there the phrasing adopted by Matthew and Luke in reporting Jesus' words seems to reflect a later stage of theological understanding than that in Mark. For example, in the parable of the wicked tenants, according to Mark 12:8, when the owner of the vineyard to get some of the fruit, the tenants "Took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard." Matthew and Luke, however, finding in the parable a parallel to what happened to Jesus when He was crucified outside the city walls, alter the sequence of clauses so as to read, "they cast Him out of the vineyard, and Killed Him." (Matthew 21:39; Luke 20:15)

These examples, which will be appreciated most fully if they are examined by consulting a harmony which gives the text of the Gospels in parallel columns, are more than sufficient to prove that Mark's Gospel is the most primitive of the synoptics, and that where the three report the same incident, Matthew and Luke seem to have depended upon Mark's account, occasionally modifying its words in accord with their own purposes.

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Almost as widely held in synoptic research as the priority of Mark is the view that the material common to Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark, was derived from a common source. This material, as was mentioned above, embraces about 235 verses and contains chiefly sayings of Jesus, though some narrative material, including the miraculous healing of the centurion's servant is present as well. It is customary to refer to this hypothetical source by the symbol Q (standing for the German word Quelle, meaning source). Though several scholars believe that this material circulated only in oral form, most hold that it was reduced to writing, perhaps in Aramaic and then in Greek, before it was utilized by Matthew and Luke.

From the Book "A lively hope" by Richard Neitzel Holzapfel.

Early telling of the story of the Passion.

In all likelihood, the story of Jesus' suffering and death was already committed to writing before any of the Gospels were written; one such source may have been used by both Mark and Luke. As one scholar notes: "Certainly, the telling of the stories of Jesus' death was a central concern Christian long before, any Gospels was written.

More likely, Paul also was acquainted with the story of the cross, as described in Corinthians and that he was summarizing a well-known and oft-repeated story of Jesus' suffering and death to the early saints living in the Roman port city on the Peloponnesian coast of Greece (see 1 Corinthians 1:18).

Note the following aspects (which include the story of the resurrection as a natural conclusion to the Passion narratives) found in Paul's writings, usually ascribed to have been written BEFORE any of the Gospels narrative: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the SAME NIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS BETRAYED TOOK BREAD: and when he had given thanks, He brake it, and said, take eat: This is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the New Testament in my blood: thi do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and finally: "I delivered unto you first of all that I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and

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that He was seen of Cephas, than the twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).

Additionally, while Paul does not focus on Jesus' mortal ministry, he makes numerous allusions and references to the events described in the Passion narratives of the four Gospels (all written after his probable execution in Rome): his sufferings (Philippians 3:10); the cross (Philippians 2:8); the crucifixion (Galatians 2:20; 3:1; 1 Corinthians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 13:4); being hung on a tree (Galatians 3:13); his death (1 Thessalonians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 11:26 15:3 Romans 4:25 5:8-10 6:3); his burial (1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 6:4) The significant truth that the Jews....killed the Lord Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 2:14-15; and his being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14)

The many citations and allusions to the book of Psalms in the Passion narrative and in Peter's discourses as recorded in the early chapters of the book of Acts show how firmly Jesus' disciples believed that his suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation were truly; "according to the scriptures" and thus part of the father's plan to save the world (see John 3:16).

To conclude, in the judgement of most New Testament students, the oldest Gospel book is Mark. It was apparently written by John Mark (see Acts 12:12) With the help of Peter, or, more likely, based on Peter's teachings. Quoting Papias, the second century bishop of Hierapolis (in modern Turkey), a third century bishop of Caesarea named Eusebius wrote:"Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the teachings said or done by Christ. For this reason it is sometimes called "Peter's memoirs" making Mark more of a faithful recorder than an author.