

THE BEGINNINGS OF GOSPEL STORY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649286508

The beginnings of gospel story by Benjamin Wisner Bacon

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BENJAMIN WISNER BACON

**THE BEGINNINGS
OF GOSPEL STORY**

Bible. N.T. Mark. English.

THE MODERN COMMENTARY

THE BEGINNINGS OF GOSPEL STORY

A HISTORICO-CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO THE SOURCES AND
STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK,
WITH EXPOSITORY NOTES UPON
THE TEXT, FOR ENGLISH
READERS

BY

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NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON TORONTO, AND MELBOURNE
HENRY FROWDE

1909

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TO MY COLLEAGUES
OF
YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

185946

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PREFACE

No man can pretend to have seriously examined the historical basis of the Christian faith who has not to some extent applied the ordinary processes of historical criticism to the Gospel of Mark, the earliest extant embodiment of the evangelic story. The present volume is offered as an example and aid to serious and impartial but non-technical investigation in this field.

The form adopted combines critical analysis of the substance with exegesis in detail. It is chosen for the purpose of exhibiting the results of the higher criticism.

The recent general acknowledgment that in Mark we have the oldest canonical Gospel, an embodiment of the accepted outline of Jesus' career, already stereotyped when "Matthew" and "Luke" were written, has brought forth a succession of splendid contributions to the purely exegetical interpretation of this Gospel. To say nothing of the great German authorities, our own Gould and Swete have added greatly to the resources of philological exposition, and Menzies has given new light from the historical side. But that which the intelligent layman most requires has not been placed within his reach. The richest fruits of modern biblical study have come from the field of the higher criticism. Documentary analysis of the sources has been eagerly pursued by authorities such as Wernle, Schmiedel, Weiss, Wellhausen, Harnack, Loisy, Sir John Hawkins, Burton, and Burkitt. The recent lives of Christ by Nath. Schmidt, O. Holtzmann, Bousset, and the preliminary studies by Sanday, have shown that the real interest of our time lies no longer in the exact apprehension of the sense the writer of 70-90 A.D. may have given to the evangelic tradition. We no longer attempt to say, Thus the sacred writer conceived the event to have been, therefore thus it was; for we have four sacred historians, no two of whom conceive the event in just the same way. The point of real interest for our time is at least a generation earlier. What was the event which gave rise to the story? Through what phases has the tradition passed to acquire its canonical forms? Such have been the burning questions of modern scholars in respect to the historic origins of the Christian faith, and

the intelligent layman is entitled to expect that he shall not be put off with mere exegesis. He will not be satisfied to be told, Such, and such, is the sacred writer's meaning. He demands an opinion on the question, Was it so, or was it not so? What was the common starting-point from which the varying forms of the tradition diverge?

It has been the endeavor of the present commentary to give an answer to such questions with absolute frankness, without mental reservation, in terms intelligible even to the student unfamiliar with Greek and ignorant of the course of technical discussion, leaving it to the reader himself to decide whether the discussion of such questions is serviceable to religious faith.

To meet the requirements just stated two things were necessary: 1. The adoption of a form permitting the introduction of historico-critical discussions into the heart of the commentary itself. 2. The rigid exclusion of the mechanism of processes and technicalities in favor of plainly stated results.

That which is designed to meet the requirements of historical and literary criticism is compacted in the ordinary commentary into a single comprehensive Introduction, wherein the endeavor is commonly made to treat in one mass all the phenomena of the book which have a bearing on its date and authorship, the derivation, character, and intended application of its contents, and the history of its transmission. For persons whose training and familiarity with the text do not enable them to carry in mental vision the entire contents of the Gospel, such an Introduction is too cumbersome. At best the critical discussion is separated by whole chapters from that portion of the text with which it is concerned. The present subdivision of the text into its logical parts, accompanied by paraphrases and by general historico-critical comments on the contents of the particular section, is designed to make it more practicable for the lay reader to acquaint himself with the real questions of literary and historical criticism.

The rule, "results, not processes," is imposed by the demand of the reading public. In technical journals such as *The American Journal of Theology*, the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, the *Harvard Theological Review*, and the *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* will be found articles presenting in greater technical detail the author's reasons for many conclusions here advanced for acceptance or rejection on their prima facie merits. Let the state-