

**THE GOSPEL OF JESUS:
CRITICALLY
RECONSTRUCTED FROM
THE EARLIEST SOURCES**

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The Gospel of Jesus: Critically Reconstructed from the Earliest Sources by Clayton R. Bowen

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BY
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TO
HENRY HERVEY BARBER D.D.
TEACHER FRIEND FATHER
EXPOUNDER AND EXEMPLAR
OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed.”

With these words a Christian writer of the end of the first century prefaced his version of the familiar gospel material, written to assist inquirers to more accurate knowledge of the work and word of Jesus. There were in existence a considerable number of written versions of the gospel, which this writer had carefully studied, but no one of which he found perfectly satisfactory. There was the brief manual of Mark, telling the story of Jesus simply and directly. There was a collection of Jesus' chief teachings and discourses; perhaps there were several such collections. We no

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longer know just how many or what documents were at this writer's disposal. But though each had its excellence, each was, he felt, in some measure deficient. They would serve him as sources, for he himself was not a first-hand witness of these matters; but by so using them he hoped to produce a version combining the advantages of all, and free from the defects of any.

The resultant work we know, and can by analysis discover the editor's literary methods. He used as his basis the work of Mark, the best narrative source available. Into Mark's story he inserted the material from the discourses, together with such material as he cared to use from his other documents. He added also, from the oral tradition, what a modern editor would call "material now first published." These various elements he combined, with what measure of literary skill he possessed, into a single unified account, making such omissions, additions, changes of wording and of order, and other original contributions as his conviction and understanding dictated. Thus he made what he believed to be the truest and most helpful version of the Christian message which had yet appeared, and was devoutly grateful that he might do something to bring the personality and the word of Jesus (which together made up "the gospel") nearer the apprehension of those who might read. This

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was apparently the usual procedure among those early Christians who wished to put the gospel into documentary form. The Gospel according to Luke has its parallel, so far as literary method is concerned, in the Gospel according to Matthew; in the second century Tatian does the same thing in his "Diatessaron," including now an additional source, the Gospel according to John.

There seems no reason why a similar method should not be followed in modern times. The present text is the result of an attempt to do, on the basis of the Synoptic Gospels, exactly what "Luke" or "Matthew" did on the basis of Mark and such other sources as were in their possession. The text of Mark and the other primitive documents is no more inviolable now than it was then. Editorial judgment in matters of omission, change of wording and of order, choice between differing presentations of the same material, and especially in discriminating between what is probably historic and what is probably legendary, has of necessity been freely exercised. The chief part of the more obviously legendary material is collected in an appendix. The text, therefore, offers what, in the editor's judgment, is the closest approximation to a definitely historical presentation of Jesus' work and word which can be constructed from our existing sources. No extra-canonical material has been added.