

they had to tell the facts of the life of Jesus. Perhaps brief outlines circulated early in different groups of churches. How soon and in what form the personal disciples of Jesus began to write their reminiscences of the Lord, we cannot say, but as death thinned them out, the need would make itself felt to have such reliable written records.

TIME OF FIRST RECORDS—Before Luke many had undertaken to give an account of these events, but Luke claims to have more accurate knowledge than others, and to be in a position to give a trustworthy record of the beginnings of Christianity, Luke 1: 1-4. Our written gospels were published after most of the epistles (letters) of the New Testament were in circulation, but the Gospel of which our gospels are the record was preached before there were any epistles. So there is good reason for the gospels standing first in the New Testament.

CHANGE IN MEANING OF WORD—Their titles, which were probably added by a later hand, run, "The Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, etc. "; that is, Matthew, etc., wrote this record of the gospel of Christ. As time went on the word gospel came to mean, in addition to its old sense, the written record of the gospel of Christ. In this sense we often speak of Mark's Gospel.

THE FOUR GOSPEL SURVIVALS FROM A NUMBER—Only four out of the written gospels have been deemed worthy by the Christian church of a place in its sacred literature. Of course, it may be that materials from some shorter written gospels or collections of Christ's words and works are embedded in our four, having been used in their composition by the authors of our gospels as they stand now. In the second century, apocryphal gospels full of crude stories began to appear, but they never became serious rivals of our four. It seems that the claim of our four gospels to be apostolic testimony to the facts of Christ's life was not disputed. Yet there were hostile critics in the early centuries who might have had pleasure in attacking them.

TWO TYPES—SYNOPTIC AND JOHANNINE

The most casual reader soon discovers that our fourth gospel is very different from the other three. These are often called the synoptic (root—to see together) gospels because they all give the same general view of our Lord's ministry. Apart from the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke, they begin with the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee after the death of John the Baptist.

THE SYNOPTIC VIEW OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

Galilee remains the chief scene of His labors till His journey to Jerusalem before His death. Towards the close of the Galilean

ministry the disciples at Caesarea Philippi make the great confession that Jesus is the Christ, which is followed by the Transfiguration. These gospels also agree in regard to the institution of the Lord's Supper, and the day and hour of Christ's death. Not only is the substance of many paragraphs throughout the gospels the same in all three, but the similarity often extends to words and minor details. The discourses of Jesus also treat chiefly of the kingdom of God, its righteousness, conditions of entrance, legislation, its future, and the fortunes of the disciples. Much of this is illustrated by the use of parables.

To account for these similarities and differences is the well-known synoptic problem, one of the hardest in New Testament criticism, into which it is unnecessary for us to go at present.

LESSON III.

THE JOHANNINE PORTRAITURE OF CHRIST

In the Gospel according to John the scope of Christ's life and teaching is unique. The nature of the Baptist's ministry, the first call of the disciples, the early work of Jesus in Jerusalem and Judaea, and the journey through Samaria are peculiar to this gospel. The ministry of Jesus, most of which is spent in Jerusalem or Judaea, requires three years instead of the one within which it may possibly be brought in the synoptics. There is no mention of the temptation, the transfiguration, the agony in the garden, the expulsion of demons, or the institution of the sacraments. The discourses of Jesus given are profound and deal with the mysteries of Christ's person. Parables are not employed, allegories take their place. The Gospel is not a mosaic of written or oral narratives or words, but is the personal testimony of an eye-witness, and is full of the tender reminiscence of one who loved intensely Him whose wondrous character he is calling to memory.

A great scholar has said, "There are really only two gospels—one of the flesh, in three forms; and one of the spirit. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story of Christ's life on its more human side; John pierces the divine depths from which that human life issued."

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Some reasons for regarding Mark as the earliest gospel:

Most of the narratives, discourses and parables of Jesus in Mark are found either in Matthew or in Luke or in both; but Mark is too vivid and true to details which are peculiar to him, to be merely an epitome of the other two. Why would an abreviator have omitted so many important incidents and sayings? On the other hand, if Mark was