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GOSPEL GEOGRAPHY FICTION, FACT, AND TRUTH*

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PROFESSOR Santayana has made the sage remark that philosophical problems are of two kinds, soluble and insoluble, and that the soluble ones usually seem to be unimportant, the important ones insoluble. This psychological reaction to a sense of frustration and bafflement often attacks the interpreter of the Bible, not least of all in the face of its geographical problems. Their importance usually seems to be in inverse ratio to the ease of their solution.

However, this is not always true. There are, indeed, geographical problems connected with the Gospels upon which immense labor has been spent without arriving at any definite conclusions. Some of them, surely, are of little importance, while some which do appear to be of importance will eventually yield to the proper method of attack. Others are insoluble. The purpose of this survey is to attempt a discrimination between those which are important and those which are not, and between the soluble and insoluble ones, and also to suggest methods of approach to those possible of solution.

A work which has undertaken a most thorough investigation of the geographical data in the synoptic Gospels is Karl Ludwig Schmidt's *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* (Berlin, 1919). Schmidt began his studies in Deissmann's New Testament seminar in Berlin in the last semester before the first World War. He completed them during his convalescence from wounds

* The Presidential Address delivered at the meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, December 30, 1940, at Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

suffered in the field. Apparently he had never visited Palestine itself and his results suffer also from a persistent application of the cyclotron to the atoms of gospel story.

The study seems to have begun under the influence of Albert Schweitzer's *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, the 1913 edition of which is quoted at length in the *Vorwort* (pp. vii f.). Apparently Schmidt was much more attracted by Wrede's "consistent skepticism" than by Schweitzer's "consistent eschatology," and he rightly applies Schweitzer's scornful criticism of the "psychological extra-fare train," which allows the traveler through the Gospels to avoid all station stops, to Schweitzer's own conclusions. The result is one of the first form-history studies, which treats the Gospels as mere collections of *diēgēseis*, to use Schleiermacher's term, without any connections except those manufactured by the evangelists out of their own imaginations.

Schmidt concluded that "only now and then, by consideration of the inner character of a story, can we fix its chronological and local situation. In general there is no life of Jesus in the sense of a developing life story, but only single stories, pericopes which are set into a framework." He modifies this sweeping indictment in the *Vorwort* (p. vi). It must not be thought that there are no topographical or chronological data. But "taken as a whole, only crumbling fragments of an itinerary can be worked out" of the Gospels.

It was this conclusion which, long ago, I set myself to investigate in a series of studies, some published, much still unpublished. What I wish to do here is to summarize the results of my investigations, and, so far as is possible, to suggest how fiction, fact, and the still more important element of truth in these narratives may be disentangled.

I. MARK

1. The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry (Mark 1 1—6 29). In view of the universally admitted priority of Mark, any scientific study will begin with that Gospel, taken by itself with no harmonizing combinations. The picture of the movements of Jesus

in the first six chapters of Mark is intelligible and topographically reasonable. The site of John's baptizing is in the 'Arābhāh east of the Jordan.¹ When Jesus begins his ministry, Capernaum is his center. He walks by the lakeside, he goes back into the mountains, he tours through Galilee, he sails across the lake. If, however, one attempts to plot exact itineraries, he finds that the data fail him. In most of the sections of Mk 1 1—6 29, there is nothing to determine clearly either geographical or chronological connection. Except in a general and indefinite fashion there is no development to indicate what is early and what is late. As Matthew's rearrangement proves, the various sections can be shuffled into a different order without affecting the total impression of the narrative.

The particular movements of Jesus during all of this period are without specific aim so far as Mark seems able to say. In many instances the evangelist does not know where the incident took place. Jesus is represented as desiring to reach as large a number as possible. He is driven from place to place to escape the miracle-crazed crowds of the curious, but Mark knows no reason for his going to Nazareth when he did or for his crossing over to Gergasa after a day of teaching by the sea, nor is there any suggestion of definite itineraries in the tours of evangelization. One can only conclude that Mark attempted to construct no itineraries because he had no definite data. He had accounts of incidents and teachings which he arranged as best he could. The first section of Mark fully bears out Schmidt's judgment.

2. The Northern Journeys (Mark 6 30—9 1). The second section is quite different. From many points of view this part of Mark, which describes Jesus' attempts to escape the multitudes and to retire with his disciples to peace and quiet, is among the most important in all of the sources of the life of Jesus. Nearly all "biographers" of Jesus find here some clue to the outward forces or inward compulsions which sent him eventually to Jerusalem and to the cross. The problems of the sources are as difficult as they are important, for the data are confused and contradictory. This is likewise true of the geographical notices,

¹ Cf. *JBL*, LIX, 1940, 113-31.

which, moreover, are of much value in constructing a background against which to draw the more significant elements of the picture.

In this section the geographical outline of Jesus' movements is much fuller than in the previous accounts. There are no journeyings to and fro without definite aim. The rendezvous of the disciples after their preaching tour is not indicated but, since it is by the lake, may be assumed to be Capernaum. When the little group starts away to seek a quiet, uninhabited place, the imagination can easily follow them on the sea and the crowds on the shore and anticipate the outcome when the men on foot outstrip the boat on the water. A site for the gathering and the wilderness feast may easily be found either north or south of Tell Hûm. After the feast, Mark's picture of their movements is perfectly clear. The disciples start for Bethsaida. A contrary wind prevents their reaching the northeastern shore and in some manner Jesus joins them before they are driven back to the Plain of Gennesaret.

Then, according to Mark, they attempt once more to escape the crowds and the caviling Pharisees, this time by going into Gentile territory. There follows the strange journey northward to Tyre and the return to the Sea of Galilee by going farther north to Sidon, then east across the Jordan and back through the Decapolis to the shores of the lake, where again a miraculous feast in the wilderness takes place.

As many scholars have pointed out,² there is a very marked duplication in the two sections, Mk 6 33—7 37 and Mk 8 1—26. In both sections crowds gather, a multitude is fed, the disciples cross the sea by boat, and in the first section fail to reach Bethsaida. Then Jesus disputes with Jewish leaders, gives instructions to the disciples alone, departs for Gentile territory, arriving at Bethsaida in the second section, and finally he heals a man under somewhat similar circumstances. The very close parallelism of the two series of incidents and the evident duplications in

² Erich Klostermann, *HNT, Das Markusevangelium*, 2d ed. Tübingen, 1926, 85; R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels*, London, 1935, 114 f.; Maurice Goguel, *Vie de Jésus*, Paris, 1932, 342 f. and note 2; C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2d ed., London, 1927, I, 173 f.

certain of the stories lead to the almost certain conclusion that a considerable part of one or the other series is unhistorical. The two incidents which are almost exact duplicates are the feeding of the multitudes and the cures of the deaf and dumb man in the one case and of the blind man in the other.

In nearly every instance the account in the second series is clearly less vital, and it often shows decided poverty of material or confusion of thought, for example, in the dispute with the Pharisees (8 11-13) and the instructions given to the disciples (8 14-21). The cure of the blind man (8 22-26) takes place in a "village," a term which no one would use of Bethsaida, if Josephus' account of Herod Philip's building activities is correct.

The difficulty of Mark's account of the movements of Jesus "into the territory of Tyre" and back by way of Sidon and the Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee is equally patent. This is like going from Chicago to New York by way of Minneapolis and Toronto. The journey Mark describes is not impossible or even difficult. The entire trip from the Sea of Galilee and back to it again could now be done by automobile within a day. In ancient, as in modern, times, paths from village to village could easily be followed by a group of peasants; but, although the journey is not impossible, Mark's account of it seems to indicate that he did not understand all that it implied. In any case it is most improbable.

If Jesus returned to the lake through the Decapolis, he must have arrived on the eastern shore, perhaps not far from Gamala or Hippos. The gathering of a crowd here (7 33; 8 1) is sometimes taken to be the result of the preaching of the cured demoniac, but that is only an imaginative piece of homiletical inference. The whole account in 7 32-8 10, although staged outside of Galilee, sounds strongly like the stories of Jesus' activities on the western shore. Finally the sudden appearance of "*the boat*" (8 10) shows almost certainly that the account of the feeding of the four thousand has been artificially displaced from Capernaum and the western shore where "the boat" was in constant attendance. The fact that the voyage of the boat after the feeding of the four thousand may be supposed to have ended at the Plain of Gennesaret, as does that after the feeding of the

five thousand, is an additional argument for the identification of the two accounts.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that the northern journey to Tyre and Sidon is a construction of the evangelist. He probably thought it suitable to place the miracle story of the Syro-Phoenician woman in Phoenician territory. He found among his sources two cycles beginning with a miraculous meal in the wilderness. In order to make a place for the second, the northern journey was manufactured.

What actually happened may have been as follows: Jesus, with his disciples, attempts to escape the multitudes, but a crowd follows him and they eat together somewhere out in the open on the western shore of the sea.³ Then Jesus and his disciples attempt a second time to seek retirement by going into Gentile territory in the neighborhood of Bethsaida. They are driven back by a storm to the Plain of Gennesaret. After a conflict with the Jewish leaders they sail again for Bethsaida and this time make a successful escape. Here some seemingly miraculous cure was wrought. Then follows an actual journey into non-Jewish territory near Caesarea Philippi during which Jesus may have met the Syro-Phoenician woman, although it is unnecessary to suppose that she lived outside of Galilee.

3. The Last Journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (Mark 9 2—11 11). From Bethsaida on Mark tells a consistent story of Jesus' movements, which imply a journey northward toward Caesarea Philippi, westward past the site of ancient Dan, and then southward through Galilee to Jerusalem. Not all of the geographical notices are definite. But the account of the last journey through Galilee incognito, with a halt in Capernaum, and thereafter down the Jordan valley, a route rarely followed by Galilean pilgrims, is entirely plausible. It is a point of no little significance that one of the most important fords of the Jordan occurs just at the northern border of Judean territory near the ancient Korea where the Wâdî Fâra runs into the valley. Mark's statement (10 1) that Jesus came into the borders of Judea and beyond Jordan must mean that he crossed over by the ford at ed-Damieh

³ The evidence on this point will be presented later in the discussion of Matthew and Luke. Cf. *JPOS*, X, 1930, 32-58.

and went along the eastern bank of the Jordan, where a road must always have run, down to the fords opposite Jericho. This brings him without any geographic difficulties to Jericho, and thence along the line of the Roman road to the Mount of Olives.

It may well be that some of the incidents related between Mk 10 1, where Jesus crosses over into Perea, and 10 46, where he reaches Jericho, do not belong on the eastern side of the Jordan. But whether these items belong in the context in which they are placed or not, the geographical notices in themselves are entirely reasonable and the account suitably prepares for the triumphal entry from the east into the Holy City.

4. Jerusalem (Mark 11 12—16 8). In Jerusalem Mark's topographical notations, though never detailed and informative, are never contrary to what may be known. Aside from the fact that Bethany and the Mount of Olives are located on the east side of the Kedron valley facing the temple, there are no definite topographical allusions in the Jerusalem section of Mark's Gospel, except to Golgotha. Unfortunately data are wanting by which to locate the place of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. Until further excavation is made, and perhaps even after that is done, it will not be possible to settle the question as to that site. Mark makes no attempt to locate the place of Jesus' trial before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, or before Pilate. The praetorium (Mk 15 16) would be wherever the procurator set up his judgment seat. The more probable site is the great Herodian palace by the Jaffa Gate at the so-called "Tower of David," but to determine this location, like that of Golgotha, the data are insufficient. Though it is impossible to fix these sites, there is nothing inconsistent in any of Mark's allusions to them. They were doubtless well known when he wrote and he felt no need to specify their relations. In the intelligence of his references to them, he stands in decided contrast especially to Luke, as will appear later.

II. THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE SECOND SOURCE

After Mark the second chief Gospel source is to be interrogated. The result is disappointing. The geographical notices found in Q, that is in the parallel parts of Matthew and Luke to which

there are no equivalents in Mark, are meager in the extreme. Possibly the Second Source in its complete form contained much more, but it is useless to attempt to disentangle the original materials from the Marcan notices and from the editorial additions and changes by which the various sources were fitted together.

1. The Scene of John's Ministry. The use of the phrase "all the neighborhood of the Jordan" (*πᾶσα ἡ περίχωρος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου*, Lk 3 3; Mt 3 8) in both Luke and Matthew, although for different purposes, seems to point to its presence in their common source. There it must have been used in its Old Testament sense to describe the "circuit of the Jordan" (*hak-kikkar hay-yardēn*), the region just north of the Dead Sea. Luke has repeated it somewhat in its original sense, although he misunderstands it and contrasts it with "the wilderness" (*ἡ ἔρημος*) instead of identifying the two.⁴ The Second Source paragraph where Jesus discussed John (Lk 7 24=Mt 11 7) unmistakably locates his ministry "in the wilderness," not in the whole of the Jordan valley. It thus decisively negatives the editorial changes made by Luke and Matthew and goes far to prove that "the wilderness" and "all the neighborhood of the Jordan" mean the 'Arābhāh, north of the Dead Sea and east of the Jordan.

The story of the Temptation, therefore, began with Jesus by the Jordan in the 'Arābhāh (Lk 4 1=Mt 4 1; cf. Mk 1 13). But the high mountain of Matthew (4 8), omitted by Luke (4 8), is quite undefined as to locality and in any case it is hard to know whether the evangelists took this journey and that to the pinnacle of the temple at Jerusalem (the Holy City, Mt 4 5) seriously.

2. Cities Where Jesus Preached. It is not until Luke 7 1 (=Mt 8 5) is reached that Q presents any further concrete and dependable geographical information. Then Jesus enters Capernaum to cure the centurion's servant. In all of Q no other incident or saying is placed in its exact topographical context, and this notice adds nothing of value. Four sayings of Jesus, however, indicate four cities which had been specially favored by his presence, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in Galilee, and

⁴ Cf. McCown, "The Scene of John's Ministry," *JBL*, LIX, 1940, 113-31.

Jerusalem. In the case of three of these the words of Jesus as reported in Q, if they are authentic, are invaluable as a supplement and correction to the impression left by Mark. It would never have been known that Jesus had taught among the black, basalt-built houses of Chorazin, if Q had not reported the woe upon the city. He would have been supposed merely to have passed through Bethsaida once, according to the brief notice of Mark (8 22) which, for some inexplicable reason, Matthew suppresses, and which Luke misplaces (9 10). According to the Synoptic picture, Jesus preached in Jerusalem only for a few days at the close of his life. It is usually held, but is not necessarily true, that the lament over the city in Q (Lk 13 34 f. = Mt 23 37 ff.) cannot be authentic unless he had repeatedly proclaimed his message there. The woe on Capernaum (Lk 10 15 = Mt 11 23) is intelligible only in the light of the numerous Marcan allusions to Jesus' presence there. Thus Q and Mark in this as in other matters supplement and confirm one another. Otherwise Q, strictly taken, has no geographical allusions which are of any value.⁵

III. GEOGRAPHY IN MATTHEW

In the first Gospel the geographical atmosphere is more unreal and less clear than Mark's. It appears to have been borrowed from Mark and not to be based upon first-hand knowledge. The geographical notices of Matthew's Infancy Narrative have little meaning for the modern student except for their clear proof that the writer believed Jesus to have been born in Bethlehem. Matthew, the perfect scribe, in the parts he drew from Mark, has apparently followed no consistent course. Sometimes he adds to the geographical notices in order to make them more precise, sometimes he attempts to correct Mark's data, sometimes he omits. But there is not a single case where it can be plausibly argued that he had data unknown to Mark and to the Second Source or where he has really improved upon Mark.

⁵ A third original source, according to Streeter's attractive, but unproved theory, would be "L." It can best be discussed in connection with Luke.

1. Lack of Geographical Interest. Where events happen does not interest Matthew. Only from the Second Source is he able to supply three definite items: the centurion of Capernaum (8 5), the wilderness locale of John's preaching (11 7f.), and the fact of Jesus preaching in Chorazin and Bethsaida (11 21). His alteration of the order of events in Mark's account of the ministry about Capernaum (Mk 1 21-35) does not call for special comment for, as already noted, these incidents had no certainly fixed place in the gospel narrative. However, he cannot add a definite locale for the cure of the leper (8 1), the "Sermon on the Mount," or any of the incidents left without a home or country. After various cures, all of which may have happened at Capernaum, but which are not specifically localized, Jesus goes out on a preaching tour (9 35), sends out the Twelve (10 5), goes on another preaching tour (11 1), passes through the fields on the Sabbath (12 1=Mk 2 23), and enters the synagogue (12 9=Mk 3 1), all without the mention of any place.

In 12 15 Jesus mysteriously or miraculously became aware of the plot of the Pharisees to kill him and "withdrew from thence," but where he had been is in no way indicated. Matthew's indifference to locality is specially illustrated by his telling of the story of the visit of Jesus' family. Nowhere has it been hinted that Jesus was within a house, for Mt 12 22 omitted Mk 3 20. Yet suddenly Jesus' family "stand without." Not until Jesus leaves the house (13 1) does the reader learn that he has been in one.

In 13 1, when Matthew returns again to follow Mark (4 1), Jesus' work is once more given a definite locality, "by the sea," but there is nothing to prove that he is near Capernaum, although that may be assumed without contradicting any available evidence. Matthew's account of the parables and their interpretation, like Mark's, is not at all clear as to what was spoken to the crowds and what to the disciples alone.

2. Lack of Geographical Feeling. At the very beginning stands a small editorial modification in the account of John the Baptist's ministry which betrays the superficiality of the editor's understanding of the situation. "In the wilderness of Judea" (3 1) is a misimprovement of Mark's "in the wilderness," and the

addition, from the Second Source, of the phrase, "all the neighborhood of the Jordan" (3 5), in the account of the regions from which John's audience came, reveals no suspicion that its true meaning is the uninhabited 'Arābhāh east of the river's mouth.⁶

Matthew may be quite right in putting in the clause, "leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea" (4 13), but his reason for so doing was that it allowed him to introduce one of his "testimonies," that from Is 9 1 regarding the coming of the light to Zebulon and Naphtali.

His lack of geographical feeling or orientation is witnessed by the order of his phrases, Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan, which compares quite unfavorably with Mark's not entirely satisfactory arrangement, Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond Jordan, Tyre and Sidon (3 7 f.). Against the background of the crowds which these countries are said to have supplied, the "Sermon on the Mount" is placed.

3. Contradictions and Inconsistencies. Matthew's editorial efforts often result in contradictions or inconsistencies. In 9 1 Jesus returns to "his own city" (*εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν πόλιν*) which is not Nazareth but Capernaum, as one learns if he refers to Mark (2 1), but which a reader of Matthew alone could not know. Four chapters later (13 54) his "own country" (*ἡ πατρις αὐτοῦ*) is Nazareth. After his collection of parables, Matthew jumps at once to Jesus' visit to Nazareth (*ἐν τῇ πατρίδι καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ*, 13 54, 56, 57) and then, since the Twelve had already been sent out (10 1), he passes on to Mark's account of John the Baptizer's death and Herod's reaction to the fame of Jesus. In thus rearranging and interpolating Mark's account, Matthew perpetrates more and worse absurdities than even the fourth Gospel. The disciples, sent out in 10 1 never return, yet from 12 1 on they are with Jesus. In 13 54-58, Jesus is presumably at Nazareth, whether alone or with his disciples it is impossible to know. In 14 13, apparently alone, he sails away from Nazareth in a boat to a lonely place apart. Later it is discovered that his disciples are with him.

⁶ Cf. *JBL*, LIX, 1940, 113-31.

In numerous instances Matthew's modifications touch only phrases or matters of order and are probably without any intention of making specific changes in spite of their sometimes disastrous results. In other cases Matthew had a definite motive for modifying the picture, and his alterations and omissions sometimes work havoc with Mark's meager geographical outline.

4. Intentional Changes. Evidently the implication of Mark's story of the walking on the water, that Jesus and his disciples started for Bethsaida but were driven by the storm to the Plain of Gennesaret, was found objectionable. It implied that Jesus did not succeed in carrying out his intention. Matthew ventures to emend by merely omitting the phrase "towards Bethsaida" *πρὸς Βηθσαϊδάν* after "to the other side" (*εἰς τὸ πέραν*). This allowed it to be supposed that Gennesaret was on "the other side" from the scene of the miraculous meal—a very simple emendation, which has been responsible for one of two geographical miracles, the modern transfer of the scene of the feast of the five thousand to the eastern shore of the lake, for "when they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret" (Matt 14 34 = Mk 6 53).⁷ In a similar way, Luke's alteration of the account (9 10; cf. v. 12) led to another geographical miracle, the invention (in the modern sense of the English word rather than that of the Latin *inventio*) of a second Bethsaida on the western shore.⁸

In another regard Matthew makes a decided alteration in Mark's account. In relating the story of the "northern journey," he sends Jesus at once "into the regions of Tyre and Sidon" (15 21 = Mk 7 37), omitting the later reference to Sidon and the Decapolis. This properly avoids Mark's lengthy, roundabout journey but introduces a new element of indistinctness and unreality. Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee, whether on the east or west shore is left undetermined, and immediately goes up "into the mountain" (15 29), and feeds the four thousand "in loneliness" there, not by the lake shore. Then he takes a boat

⁷ Cf. Dalman, *Sacred Sites and Ways*, New York, 1935, 171 ff.

⁸ Cf. *JPOS*, X, 1930, 32-58.

and sails to Magadan, an unidentified place like Dalmanutha, but in Jewish territory, for there he meets scribes and Pharisees. Crossing "to the other side" once more (16 5), they come, not to Bethsaida, but immediately into the regions of Caesarea Philippi (16 13). Thus Matthew avoids all mention of Bethsaida, just as Luke (9 18) omits Caesarea Philippi.

Matthew, moreover, is very far from improving on Mark in the story of the last journey. In one sense he betters the account: he makes it smoother and less provocative of questions. Where Mark has Jesus and his disciples come "into a house alone" *εἰς οἶκον . . . κατ' ἰδίαν*) for a private conference, Matthew, sensing the probability that the reader will say, 'What house?', merely drops "into the house" (17 19). He does not have them going "thence through Galilee," i. e. from this house (Mk 9 30), but, very awkwardly, "gathering together," (*συστρεφόμενων*), or "returning" (*ἀναστρεφόμενων*) in Galilee (17 22). He makes Jesus go into the non-existent "borders of Judea beyond Jordan" (19 1). He drops out all reference to the fear of the disciples as they approach Jerusalem and to their astonishment at Jesus' courage, items necessary to explain the situation which led Jesus to take the unusual Jordan-valley route to Jerusalem. Thus in numerous details his omissions sacrifice not only geographical vividness but also accuracy as well as historical clarity, in order to introduce a larger body of teaching materials into the Marcan framework.

5. Conclusions. There is, then, not a single matter in which Matthew shows geographical knowledge superior to that of Mark. His penchant for omissions allows him to make apparent improvements upon Mark in one or two instances, but these editorial successes are more than counterbalanced by errors of judgment. He almost always changes by omission. Where he adds it is only some entirely general or indefinite statement, such as a preaching tour through Galilee or a departure "into the mountain;" something borrowed from Mark and duplicated; or perhaps a mistaken phrase, such as that which turns the 'Arābhāh of the Jordan into the Wilderness of Judea. Not a single case of correct, independent, and original addition to Mark's geography can be ascribed to Matthew.

IV. GEOGRAPHY IN THE THIRD GOSPEL

1. Interest in Geography. The Gospel of Luke gives more attention to geography than any of the others. One might almost think that Luke was under the influence of an ancient Friedrich Ratzel or Ellen Semple, if not an Ellsworth Huntington. The first fact to be noted is that the two *logoi* of Luke's history of Christian beginnings are arranged on a definite geographical as well as chronological scheme. This outline in the second of his two volumes has been recognized, but most moderns have obscured it in the first by efforts to harmonize Luke with Mark and Matthew, with the result that an entirely new center of Jesus' activities has been discovered in a Perea ministry which was utterly unknown to all of the Gospels and is emphatically and explicitly foreign to Luke.

The outline in the Gospel is much simpler than in the Book of Acts. It consists of three parts. The preaching of the gospel begins with Jesus' rejection at Nazareth and then goes on to include all of Galilee (3 1—9 50). The second section consists of a Samaritan mission, begun again with a rejection (9 51—19 27). The third part is the Jerusalem ministry. This section begins with a triumphant reception but with sad forebodings of disaster, and ends with the great rejection of Jesus which prepared for the triumphant spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

Not only is Luke marked by this clear and definite geographical scheme, but the author shows great fondness for geographical background, topographical allusions, and local color. The Gospel has the same fondness for geographical terms, although not quite the same abundancy, as Acts.⁹ As in the Book of Acts the gospel is preached chiefly in cities. Nearly all of the villages of Galilee are turned into cities. For example, Luke names Jerusalem 75 per cent oftener than Mark does and three times oftener than Matthew. Nineteen of the verses in Luke's second chapter have geographical terms and indications of movement. When Luke knows no city name, he yet finds some geographical term to use, as when he places the birth of John the Baptist in "a city of

⁹ Cf. Adolf Harnack, *Apostelgeschichte*, Leipzig, 1908, 54-100; translation, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New York—London, 1909, 49-116.

Judah" (1 39) and the cure of the leper "in one of the cities" (5 12). Mary and Martha live "in a certain village" (10 39).

Luke is much more precise in his use of geographical terms than are Mark and Matthew, and his vocabulary is richer. It must be admitted that he uses "city" (πόλις) of many a village (κώμη). But he puts περίχωρος ("environs") where Mark has ὄρια ("borders"). He has παράλιος, "coastal regions" (6 17), for Mark's awkward "from around Tyre and Sidon" (3 7). Like Josephus (BJ III §506 [10,7]) he has always λίμνη, "lake," where Mark and Matthew use θάλασσα, "sea," for the little Galilean lake. There is as much material to prove the author of the third Gospel a geographer as a doctor.

2. A Literary Device. Yet all of this geographical and topographical material is a purely literary device. The "central section" of Luke, so often called a "travel narrative," is merely a means by which to accomplish three ends: (1) to suggest the spread of the gospel into non-Jewish regions, (2) to make a place for a mass of material and give it local habitations, and (3) to maintain interest by imparting to the account a sense of movement. Almost without exception the section shows no definite geographical knowledge and it abounds with inconsistencies and inaccuracies.¹⁰

3. Luke's Geographical Ineptitude. The "central section" is the outstanding example of Luke's combination of geographical material and geographical ignorance. But the first and third sections are almost as bad. Aside from what he, like Matthew, adds from the Second Source, in only one instance does the third Gospel add definite topographical information. As the centurion's servant, according to Q, was cured at Capernaum, so the widow's son was raised at Nain.¹¹ But in other matters Luke adds confusion by alterations and omissions. As he "translates" the Palestinian custom of sitting crosslegged at meals into the Hellenistic fashion of reclining (7 38) and mud house roofs into

¹⁰ Cf. McCown, "The Geography of Luke's Central Section," *JBL*, LVII, 1938, 51-66.

¹¹ The similarity of the two incidents would indicate that both came from the Second Source.

tiles (5 19),¹² so he changes the house built on a rock to one with foundations dug deep (6 48) and the thin soil of rocky ground (*πετρῶδες*) of the parable of the sower to rock (*πέτρα*, 8 6). The southwind (*νότος*) which brings heat (12 55) is not Palestinian. It is the east wind in both Hebrew (*qādhiṣ*) and Arabic (*ṣerqāyeh*) which does so. His location of the great "sermon" which begins with beatitudes and woes on a plain illustrates his ignorance of the character of the mountain slopes by Lake Gennesaret (6 17).

Much more serious are certain confusions which Luke has introduced into the story of Jesus' ministry. His picture of John the Baptist as one reared like a Bedouin in the wilderness, receiving his call there, and then coming "into all the neighborhood of the Jordan" to preach is definitely mistaken. Luke's use of Judea sometimes to mean the little territory of ancient Judah (1 65; 2 4), at times of the Roman province of Judea and Samaria (3 1; 5 17), and at times of all Palestine (1 5; 4 44; 6 17; 7 17; perhaps 23 5) has caused modern students endless trouble. It will be remembered that so keen a critic as Friedrich Spitta used 4 44 in support of the fourth Gospel, to construct a Judean ministry of Jesus.¹³

Other examples of Luke's geographical ineptitude may be cited. The alteration in the "little apocalypse" where he adds to Mark to make it a warning not only with Mark to "those in Judea to flee into the mountains," but also to "those in the lands not to enter into her" is an outstanding blunder (21 21). It more than underlines the absurdity of the Marcan saying.¹⁴ The discovery of "the brow of the mountain" on which Nazareth was built would be possible only to one who had never seen it. Bethsaida is not in a lonely place (9 10, 12). Jerusalem is 120, not 60,

¹² Cf. McCown, "Luke's Translation of Semitic into Hellenistic Custom," *JBL*, LVIII, 1939, 213-20.

¹³ Uncertain are Lk 21 21; 23 5; perhaps also 1 5; 3 1; 5 17.

¹⁴ Perhaps Mark thought it meant that people should flee from their cities and villages into the uninhabited mountain country. Luke may have meant that people from other countries should not go to Judea when war was on—a gratuitous piece of advice. But no ingenuity can then give the first clause sense. Since Judea is all mountains, the first clause must rest upon a confusion of some kind. Probably the original context of this piece of eschatological commonplace would explain it.

stadia from Emmaus ('Amwâs) (24 13) and a very long walk to take twice in one day.

4. Luke's Omissions. Luke's blindness to the truly dramatic in a geographical setting is pathetically illustrated in his account of the "little apocalypse." Whatever the historical value of that document, a better stage for the address could never have been chosen than that of Mark: Jesus with the little group of disciples on the Mount of Olives looking across the Kedron Valley at the magnificent Temple buildings rising on the opposite hill. Luke deliberately omits every line and every touch of color in the vivid picture when he transfers it to the Temple courts (21 5). If Luke had ever visited Jerusalem, he must have been short-sighted.

Other omissions strike much deeper. In Luke there are no "northern journeys," and Jesus leaves the west shore only once to visit the "other side" of the lake, "the country of the Gerasenes opposite Galilee" (8 22, 26).¹⁵ Bethsaida for Luke is not on the east shore and there is no mention of Caesarea Philippi. There is no Perean ministry in Luke for he has no parallel to Mk 10 1. And finally the ascension narratives omit all mention of Galilee. In consequence, tradition has discovered a Bethsaida by eṭ-Ṭabigha and a Viri Galilei on the Mount of Olives. It is a major falsification of history to picture Jesus as making a long preaching tour in Samaria. It is an even more serious falsification of history to blot all Galilean Christianity out of existence after the crucifixion. And for this wholesale massacre Luke is guilty.

5. The Value of Lucan Geography. The foregoing renders the rationale of Luke's use of topographical and geographical allusions evident. He employed such expressions to heighten the effect of his account, and not because they actually meant anything concrete to him. They sustained interest; they gave life and color to the narrative; nothing more. It did not in the least matter whether they were true, for none of his hearers was expected to visit Palestine and trace the itineraries of Jesus, as modern tourists use the latest popular attempt to follow the

¹⁵ The change from Gergesa to Gerasa may be laid to copyists, yet the introduction of Gadara in many manuscripts shows that the difficulty was recognized, even by copyists.

footsteps of the Master. Luke had never done that. He was a study-table geographer who never did any field work. One may doubt whether he had ever visited Palestine. If he had, he had merely traveled from Caesarea to Jerusalem and back again. His search for materials had been purely literary and bookish. The geographical settings which he scattered so liberally through his writings were not actual, but a purely literary device suggested doubtless by his models. He has no contribution whatever to make to the knowledge of Jesus' movements, but rather confuses and distorts what Mark gives.

The geographical notices of Streeter's L and Proto-Luke do not emerge from the test of analysis with high rating.¹⁶ Indeed it is that part of the Gospel which provides the major part of the Gospel's difficulties and errors. Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene, is at least questionable. The misunderstanding as to John's ministry, the anachronistic placement of the rejection at Nazareth, and the mention of the brow of the village's hill, above all the "central section" with its numerous inconsistencies, show that there is no gold to be mined from this source. Only the mention of Nain may be credited on the right side of the ledger—for whatever it is worth. It should be added, however, that Proto-Luke has no monopoly on geographical blunders, and therefore by this analysis no added evidence for Streeter's theory can be discovered.

V. THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The geographical data in the fourth Gospel are so peculiar and so often in contradiction to those of the Synoptics that they are hardly worthy of consideration. What is true of John's historical material is true also of his geography: it cannot be "harmonized" with that of the Synoptics without giving its own color to the whole. The Jordan remains as the scene of John's ministry, but the "wilderness" disappears. The familiar scenes of the Synoptics fall into the background and new places appear: Sychar, Cana, Tiberias, Bethsaida as the home of Andrew and Peter, Bethany,

¹⁶ Cf. the list of passages, *The Four Gospels*, London, 1930, 222.

or Bethabara beyond Jordan, Aenon near Salem. Some items directly contradict the Synoptics; one or two supplement them. The majority may be purely allegorical in intention, or they may be pilgrim sites visited by pious Christians and followers of John the Baptist about the beginning of the second century. Their value hangs upon the estimate made of the historical trustworthiness of the fourth Gospel, and that remains very much in doubt.¹⁷

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions suggested by this survey of the geographical data in the Gospels are, therefore, largely negative. Whatever there is upon which the student can depend comes from Mark and the Second Source. Matthew and Luke add nothing whatever to these two sources. They are very far from offering data upon which any set of itineraries can be constructed and they nowhere correct or supplement Mark and the Second Source. Their geography is fictional. But Mark appears in a very different light.

The conclusions reached touch both the method and the results of Schmidt's study. He believes that he should use Matthew and Luke as the earliest interpreters of Mark. This introduces all the evils of the old harmonistic method of Gospel study. Actually, as has been shown and as comparison much more detailed than this paper can give would abundantly demonstrate, Matthew and Luke are both indifferent to Palestinian geography and ignorant of it. It is almost incredible that Schmidt can admit on his last page that Luke has both reduced and enlarged Mark's fragmentary itinerary for the sake of added liveliness and that Matthew was entirely indifferent to geography, and then conclude that therefore the modern student can only follow Matthew. It seems a violent *non sequitur*. It can only mean that all attempts to discover the geographical background of Jesus' ministry are to be abandoned. Such entirely negative results are uncalled for. One may discard the geographical items in Matthew

¹⁷ Cf. C. C. McCown, *Search for the Real Jesus*, New York, 1940, 163 and note 7.

and Luke and still with a good scientific conscience accept practically everything in Mark, except his journey northward to Tyre and Sidon.

The values which the various Evangelists attach to the geographical notices they use cannot be adequately discussed here. In Mark and Matthew geographical interest seems to be sporadic and casual, depending, perhaps, largely on the chance acquaintance of the writers or their sources with places and persons. In Luke the geographical outline is a major element in the author's plan; the individual notices are largely used for stylistic effect. The problem of Johannine topography, as already indicated, is too complicated for discussions here. There is every reason to suppose that the allegorical tendency of the later church began to work at a very early date, and it may have already seized upon topography even when the Synoptics were taking shape. But that does not prove that the geographical notices are definitely mistaken, but only that they must be carefully scrutinized.¹⁸

Studies such as this and the three others to which reference has been made do not greatly assist in determining the development of Jesus' thought and purposes, nor the course of the earlier part of his ministry. Indeed they suggest that tradition had no clear ideas on these points. However, they emphasize the striking contrast between the apparent aimlessness of Jesus' movements in the earlier period and the plan of the later periods. They make it probable that, while the tradition of the predocumentary days of early Christianity contained no geographical or chronological outline of the earlier part of Jesus' ministry, it had developed an outline of events beginning with the return of the Twelve from their mission. Mark possessed two divergent but closely parallel accounts of the events immediately following their return. The elimination of what appears to be inference and editorial addition on the part of Mark and the combination of what remains leaves a consistent and intelligible outline of movements beginning in Capernaum, following a circular journey

¹⁸ For a general discussion see R. H. Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels*, New York: Harper, 1938.

through the territory of Caesarea Philippi and northern Galilee, and returning again to Capernaum before the final journey to Jerusalem. The movements of the earlier part of this period were determined and are explained by Jesus' desire to be alone with his disciples, a purpose only imperfectly realized. At least from Caesarea Philippi on, Jesus' movements are attended by a premonition of eventual struggle, suffering, and possible death at the hands of the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem, where, it may be assumed, he had determined to go in order to place his challenge before the nation at the coming Passover.

The tradition which fixed this outline of Jesus' movements, like that which gave the series of events of the Passion, may legitimately be regarded as very early. One may be skeptical as to the locale of many of Jesus' sayings. One may legitimately doubt whether some of the incidents belong where they are placed and suppose them to owe their contexts to Mark's editorial activities. There is no internal evidence in many of the accounts to indicate where they belong in the series. But the movements of Jesus are reasonable and consistent in view of the quite external motives which the Evangelist suggests, first a desire to be alone with the disciples, and second a determination to go to Jerusalem. Only an overdone skepticism would deny their probable correctness. Why Jesus wished to be alone with the disciples, whether merely for rest and recuperation, or because he feared Herod Antipas or the Jewish leaders, or because he desired to instruct the inner circle in preparation for a plan of action already decided, or on his own account for reflection and for the elaboration of a new plan of action, Mark does not indicate. Neither is there any clear indication of the reason for his decision to go to Jerusalem except possibly that he went to fulfill the Scripture prediction of the last woes in the sufferings of the Messiah—a reason which may be variously interpreted. In both of these matters modern guesses are as good as those of Mark, Matthew, and Luke.

These studies, then, suggest that the student of the life of Jesus is entirely without an outline for the earlier part of the ministry of Jesus. No attempt should be made to rehabilitate the hypothesis that Mark presents a trustworthy account of the

whole of the ministry of Jesus either as to its geographical movements or its spiritual development. Indeed the conclusion must be that a biography of Jesus is quite impossible, for no considerable connected series of significant events or chronological series of teachings such as would make it possible to trace his development has been discovered. Certainly part of the frame of the ministry of Jesus which appears in Mark cannot have been properly filled with incidents.

The results of this survey, therefore, may appear to be chiefly negative. However, this is only the reverse side of the coin. The obverse is far from wanting in detail. Indeed, to vary the figure, the negations imply several positive assertions.

Jesus apparently carried on no ministry in Perea, Samaria, Tyre and Sidon, or Jerusalem. Only as to Jerusalem can there be reasonable doubt. As already suggested, the "Lament over Jerusalem" of Q (Mt 23 37 ff. = Lk 13 34 f.), if authentic, has usually been taken to imply several visits and an active ministry of Jesus in the Holy City. Entirely aside from the fact that the tone of the passage has led various scholars to doubt its authenticity, even if authentic, it is a small foundation on which to build so large an edifice. Actually the inference rests upon one word in this unique passage. "How often" (*ποσάκις*) followed, not by imperfects, but by aorists is poor evidence for repeated visits or a long period of preaching in Jerusalem. It may represent frequent desires, not frequent visits. There is nothing in the Synoptic record to substantiate the Johannine picture of a Jerusalem ministry of Jesus. Yet he may have visited the city oftener than appears in the Synoptics. At this point various alternatives are possible, not merely the one—Synoptic or Johannine.

The positive implication of our negative conclusion is that Jesus' labors centered in Galilee. Since the topographical notices of the Gospels are so few and itineraries, except for the closing months of Jesus' ministry, are impossible, the chief interest of the student of the Gospels must lie in the human geography of Galilee. To be understood Jesus must be seen in his Galilean environment. A clear picture of Galilee, lakeshore and upland, mountain and plain, country and city, Jewish and Gentile, is a *sine qua non* for the successful interpretation of Jesus and his

message; for Galilee provided the soil out of which he grew; it gave the atmosphere in which the gospel blossomed.

From the standpoint of the student of the Gospels, it is unfortunate that the American School of Oriental Research was placed in Jerusalem. It is doubly unfortunate that excavators have almost passed Galilee by. Notice what has been done there: a little clearance at Tell Hûm concentrated on a third-century synagogue; the clearance of several other synagogues, all of them late; a single season of excavation at the extremely important site of Sepphoris; a little sporadic clearing at Tiberias, incidental to roadmaking; similar incidental clearances at el-Hamme. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Middle Bronze Age in Southern Palestine is in some ways better known than the first century in Galilee, so far as matters strictly archaeological are concerned.

The only piece of excavation which bears directly upon the beginnings of Christianity is that at Khirbet Minyeh. It has had the valuable result of proving that the site could not have been Capernaum. But its positive contribution is absolutely nil, because the buildings discovered are all late, probably Ommayyad in date.

It is remarkable how neatly all of the few excavations in Galilee have missed the first century of our era. Sheikh Abreiq throws extremely interesting light on Jewish life a century later. Beisân has earlier and later material, but almost nothing definitely dated in the first century.

Literary sources, outside of the Gospels, likewise are lacking until Josephus appears. For Sepphoris there is the Talmudic material which Bücheler and Klein have so well exploited. But that is all later than the first century. Christian references begin only with Eusebius and Jerome.

What was Judaism like in Galilee when Christianity began? Were there no figured representations decorating the walls of its synagogues? Or had the liberal tendencies of the later centuries already begun to work? Were the synagogues small and insignificant or was Judaism already strong enough and rich enough to build edifices with some claim to elegance? It would be extremely

illuminating for the history of both Judaism and Christianity if such questions could be answered.

The economic condition of the country is likewise a matter of interest to both Jews and Christians. How well off were the Jewish peasants of Galilee? Were their houses like those of the modern Arab peasant?

How extensive was the Jewish population? What cities and villages were gentile and what Jewish? How large was the total population? How thickly was the land occupied? The calculations of its population which have been based upon two unrelated passages in Josephus afford no basis whatever for an estimate. How extensive was foreign trade? What articles were imported and from where? Schürer's interesting materials on this subject come from the Talmud. How great was Mesopotamian influence? Were the Greek and Roman connections more important?

To answer these questions much needs to be undertaken. First of all excavation and along with it much more careful exploration such as that which Dr. Aapeli Saarisallo has carried on in dealing with Old Testament questions, and such contributions as Professor Alt is making to Galilean history. Unfortunately the criteria for determining whether a site was occupied in the Hellenistic-Roman period, 100 B.C. to 100 A.D., are almost entirely lacking. The ceramics of the Late Bronze period are much better known.

It is unnecessary to present any argument to prove that these matters of human geography are far more important than topography and itineraries. Once it is agreed that the history of first-century Judaism and Christianity has a tremendous stake in Galilee, these problems of human geography become of the greatest interest. As to itineraries and topography, further data fail us. For the story of the human occupation of Galilee the earth hides innumerable items of interest. In that direction research can foresee a promising future.

Fiction, fact, and truth—all three are to be found in the geographical data in the Gospels. Not fiction alone, as Schmidt seems to suggest and as other *Formgeschichtler*, walking in goose-step after him, boldly affirm. There is much of fiction, especially in Luke, but in Mark much of fact. The facts that are discernible

are enough to rescue a good part of the ministry of Jesus from the London fog in which certain recent theological tendencies would envelop it. The facts discredit the supercilious disdain of the historical Jesus affected by devotees of a "new orthodoxy" which prefers the "apostolic faith" to the more intense and more profound religion of Jesus.

For many areas of the life of Jesus and his contemporaries the facts are wanting upon which the truth can be based. Unwarranted use of the imagination is a serious fault in the interpretation of a literature long held sacred. The construction of fictitious itineraries is a waste of the time of children and teachers. But it is worse than that. The construction of factual itineraries may actually distract from the true purpose of religious instruction, unless they are properly used. A study of human geography is, culturally considered, much more valuable, and contributes much more directly to religious instruction. For this, more facts, to be discovered by the methods of archaeology in its widest sense, are greatly to be desired.

Perhaps the facts would be disconcerting, the truth unwelcome. Certainly they would make glib allegorizing and facile modernizing more difficult. But there can be no doubt that further archaeological labors in the land and scientific criticism of the documents can discover more of the truth. And wherever the truth leads, the truly scientific and truly religious man will follow.