THE SYNOPTIC REPORTS ON THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC
MATT. 9:1-8 WITH PARALLELS

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The synoptic gospels contain very similar reports on the healing of a paralytic man in Capernaum (Matt 9:1-8/Mark 2:1-12/Luke 5:17-26). Some elements of the story find counterparts in the fourth gospel's description of the healing at Bethesda (John 5:11, 18), but this episode has only a remote similarity with the synoptic narrative.

I

Within the East-Galilean material represented by the synoptic evangelists, the healing of the paralytic was given exactly the same place. It was used as the introduction of a new complex of traditions preserved in a concentrated form by Mark and Luke, and which included the following pericopes: the Paralytic, Levi, Fasting; Plucking Corn, the Withered Hand, the Multitude, the Twelve (Mark 2:1-3:19/ Luke 5:17-6:19). Although these evangelists gave the last two items a different order, they definitely presented the whole agglomeration in parallelism. Matthew also gave the Call of the Twelve a different place (Matt. 10:1-4), but within the corresponding section of his gospel (9:1-12:21) he included the other pericopes in the same order as in that block found in Mark and Luke. There is a difference only in so far as Matthew has enlarged the complex in question. He did not only enrich the preceding section by adding the Sermon on the Mount and several

1 C. H. Wilke, Der Urevangelist oder exegetisch kritische Untersuchung über das Verwandtschaftsverhältnis der drei ersten Evangelien (Dresden and Leipzig: Fleischer, 1838) 184: "Dies Stück gibt übrigens die merkwürdigste Probe von der Zusammenstimmung unserer Schriftstellen".

miracle stories, but also expanded the present section of the Galilean tradition by inserting the Speech to the Twelve and various elements (9:18-11:30). On the other hand, Luke permitted the same complex to be followed by the Sermon on the Plain and other parts of his shorter insertion (Luke 6:20-8:3). Yet there are evident traces of a common East-Galilean tradition behind those corresponding sections of the first three gospels (Matt 9:1-12:21/Mk 2:1-3:18/Luke 5:17-6:19). The story of the paralytic served as the introduction of the new block, and within a wider context received the more important function of inaugurating the increasing opposition against Jesus in Galilea (Matt 9:3/Mark 2:6/Luke 5:21).

Matthew and Mark localized the healing of the paralytic to Capernaum (Matt 9:1/Mark 2:1), and they let the following episodes take place in the same city and later in the same region. Luke started his narrative without any geographic reference (Luke 5:17), but in the whole section his reports are so much in harmony with the parallel stories told by Matthew and Mark that he must have based his narrative on a corresponding tradition. Probably he left out the geographic references because of his tendency towards universalism (2:32 etc.) and because of his inclination to reduce the importance of Galilee (cf Luke 4:44; 5:12; 24:6 with the parallels in Matt and Mark).

In their description of the healing of the paralytic, the synoptic evangelists recorded essentially the same facts (Matt 9:1-8 with parallels). No doubt Matthew, Mark and Luke used similar material and wanted to present the same story. However, in doing so they did not emphasize the same points. And what is even more remarkable: each gospel represents a rather individual vocabulary as far as the course of events is concerned (Matt 9:1-2a, 3-4a, 7-8 with parallels). It is only in two contexts of non-narrative character that a common language is found and both of them include quotations of sayings of Jesus (Matt 9:2b, 4b-6 with parallels).

This peculiarity will be illustrated and interpreted below on the basis of a linguistic analysis.

II

Considerable differences are found in the first instance between the concentrated report of Matthew and the more detailed stories told by Mark and Luke. To ascribe this to different sources implies begging the question. It must first be asked to what extent the differences