

The Pre-Markian Passion Narrative

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Over the course of the first and second centuries CE, many different accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth circulated among his followers; some were derived from each other, while others forged distinctive traditions and interpretations of Christ's mission and message. Church authorities in the second century focused on four of these, those attributed to Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, as definitive and divinely inspired, and canonized them as the official record of Jesus's time on earth. (The remaining, excluded works, called *apocrypha*, were suppressed, and any who championed them as legitimate risked being accused of heresy. A good number of these are now lost or survive only in fragments.)

The earliest of the four Gospels (from a Greek word meaning "good news") was Mark, written ca. 70 CE: Matthew and John can be shown to depend on Mark, and John was written later still (90-110 CE). However, some modern scholars believe that the story of Jesus's crucifixion in Mark itself depends on an earlier work, referred to as the "Pre-Markian Passion Narrative" and thought to have been composed sometime before 60 CE. If this theory is true, some of the passages from Mark given below are vestiges of the earliest written account of Jesus of Nazareth as the son of the Jewish God (scholars disagree over which verses are more likely to derive from the earlier text).

Such discussion is also a useful reminder of the role that the early accounts of Jesus played not only as testaments but also as artefacts and focal points around which early communities of Christian believers coalesced within the sometimes hostile environment of the Roman east. The investigation also highlights some of the kinds of challenges modern historians face in studying ancient documents.

- From The Gospel of Mark, 14:32-15:47 (1st century CE). Translation: Young's Literal Translation, 1862. Analysis: *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), v. 2, compiled by Marion L. Soards. Note: The verses from Mark judged most likely to derive from the earlier text are marked with an asterisk, but all of the verses reproduced below are considered by at least a minority of Pre-Markian scholars to have descended from the earlier passion narrative.

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14. ^{32*}And they come to a spot, the name of which [is] Gethsemane, and he saith to his disciples, 'Sit ye here till I may pray;' ³³and he taketh Peter, and James, and John with him, and began to be amazed, and to be very heavy, ³⁴and he saith to them, 'Exceeding sorrowful is my soul—to death; remain here, and watch.' ^{35*}And having gone forward a little, he fell upon the earth, and was praying, that, if it be possible the hour may pass from him, ³⁶and he said, 'Abba, Father; all things are possible to Thee; make this cup pass from me; but, not what I will, but what Thou.'

³⁷And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith to Peter, 'Simon, thou dost sleep! thou wast not able to watch one hour!' ³⁸Watch ye and pray, that ye may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is forward, but the flesh weak.' ³⁹And again having gone away, he prayed, the same word saying; ⁴⁰and having returned, he found them again sleeping, for their eyes were heavy, and they had not known what they might answer him.

⁴¹And he cometh the third time, and saith to them, 'Sleep on henceforth, and rest—it is over; the hour did come; lo, the Son of Man is delivered up to the hands of the sinful; ⁴²rise, we may go, lo, he who is delivering me up hath come nigh.'

^{43*}And immediately—while he is yet speaking—cometh near Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude, with swords and sticks, from the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders; ^{44*}and he who is delivering him up had given a token to them, saying, ‘Whomsoever I shall kiss, he it is, lay hold on him, and lead him away safely,’ ^{45*}and having come, immediately, having gone near him, he saith, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi,’ and kissed him.

^{46*}And they laid on him their hands, and kept hold on him; ^{47*}and a certain one of those standing by, having drawn the sword, struck the servant of the chief priest, and took off his ear.

^{48*}And Jesus answering said to them, ‘As against a robber ye came out, with swords and sticks, to take me!

^{49*}daily I was with you in the temple teaching, and ye did not lay hold on me—but that the Writings may be fulfilled.’ ^{50*}And having left him they all fled; ^{51*}and a certain young man was following him, having put a linen cloth about [his] naked body, and the young men lay hold on him, ^{52*}and he, having left the linen cloth, did flee from them naked.

^{53*}And they led away Jesus unto the chief priest, and come together to him do all the chief priests, and the elders, and the scribes; ^{54*}and Peter afar off did follow him, to the inside of the hall of the chief priest, and he was sitting with the officers, and warming himself near the fire.

^{55*}And the chief priests and all the sanhedrim were seeking against Jesus testimony—to put him to death, and they were not finding, ^{56*}for many were bearing false testimony against him, and their testimonies were not alike.

^{57*}And certain having risen up, were bearing false testimony against him, saying— ^{58*}‘We heard him saying—I will throw down this sanctuary made with hands, and by three days, another made without hands I will build;’ ^{59*}and neither so was their testimony alike.

^{60*}And the chief priest, having risen up in the midst, questioned Jesus, saying, ‘Thou dost not answer anything! what do these testify against thee?’ ^{61*}and he was keeping silent, and did not answer anything. Again the chief priest was questioning him, and saith to him, ‘Art thou the Christ—the Son of the Blessed?’ ^{62*}and Jesus said, ‘I am; and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power, and coming with the clouds, of the heaven.’ ^{63*}And the chief priest, having rent his garments, saith, ‘What need have we yet of witnesses? ^{64*}Ye heard the evil speaking, what appeareth to you?’ and they all condemned him to be worthy of death, ^{65*}and certain began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say to him, ‘Prophecy;’ and the officers were striking him with their palms.

^{66*}And Peter being in the hall beneath, there doth come one of the maids of the chief priest, ^{67*}and having seen Peter warming himself, having looked on him, she said, ‘And thou wast with Jesus of Nazareth!’ ^{68*}and he denied, saying, ‘I have not known [him], neither do I understand what thou sayest;’ and he went forth without to the porch, and a cock crew.

^{69*}And the maid having seen him again, began to say to those standing near—‘This is of them;’ ^{70*}and he was again denying. And after a little again, those standing near said to Peter, ‘Truly thou art of them, for thou also art a Galilean, and thy speech is alike;’ ^{71*}and he began to anathematize, and to swear—‘I have not known this man of whom ye speak;’ ^{72*}and a second time a cock crew, and Peter remembered the saying that Jesus said to him—‘Before a cock crow twice, thou mayest deny me thrice;’ and having thought thereon—he was weeping.

15. ^{1*}And immediately, in the morning, the chief priests having made a consultation, with the elders, and scribes, and the whole sanhedrim, having bound Jesus, did lead away, and delivered [him] to Pilate; ^{2*}and Pilate questioned him, ‘Art thou the king of the Jews?’ and he answering said to him, ‘Thou dost say [it].’ ^{3*}And the

chief priests were accusing him of many things, [but he answered nothing.] ^{4*}And Pilate again questioned him, saying, 'Thou dost not answer anything! lo, how many things they do testify against thee!' ^{5*}and Jesus did no more answer anything, so that Pilate wondered.

^{6*}And at every feast he was releasing to them one prisoner, whomsoever they were asking; ^{7*}and there was [one] named Barabbas, bound with those making insurrection with him, who had in the insurrection committed murder.

^{8*}And the multitude having cried out, began to ask for themselves as he was always doing to them, ^{9*}and Pilate answered them, saying, 'Will ye [that] I shall release to you the king of the Jews?' ^{10*}for he knew that because of envy the chief priests had delivered him up; ^{11*}and the chief priests did move the multitude, that he might rather release Barabbas to them.

^{12*}And Pilate answering, again said to them, 'What, then, will ye [that] I shall do to him whom ye call king of the Jews?' ^{13*}and they again cried out, 'Crucify him.' ^{14*}And Pilate said to them, 'Why—what evil did he?' and they cried out the more vehemently, 'Crucify him;' ^{15*}and Pilate, wishing to content the multitude, released to them Barabbas, and delivered up Jesus—having scourged [him]—that he might be crucified.

^{16*}And the soldiers led him away into the hall, which is Praetorium, and call together the whole band, ^{17*}and clothe him with purple, and having plaited a crown of thorns, they put [it] on him, ^{18*}and began to salute him, 'Hail, King of the Jews.' ^{19*}And they were smiting him on the head with a reed, and were spitting on him, and having bent the knee, were bowing to him, ^{20*}and when they [had] mocked him, they took the purple from off him, and clothed him in his own garments, and they led him forth, that they may crucify him.

^{21*}And they impress a certain one passing by—Simon, a Cyrenian, coming from the field, the father of Alexander and Rufus—that he may bear his cross, ^{22*}and they bring him to the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, 'Place of a skull;' ^{23*}and they were giving him to drink wine mingled with myrrh, and he did not receive.

^{24*}And having crucified him, they were dividing his garments, casting a lot upon them, what each may take; ^{25*}and it was the third hour, and they crucified him; ^{26*}and the inscription of his accusation was written above—'The King of the Jews.' ^{27*}And with him they crucify two robbers, one on the right hand, and one on his left, ^{29*}And those passing by were speaking evil of him, shaking their heads, and saying, 'Ah, the thrower down of the sanctuary, and in three days the builder! ^{30*}save thyself, and come down from the cross!' ^{31*}And in like manner also the chief priests, mocking with one another, with the scribes, said, 'Others he saved; himself he is not able to save. ^{32*}The Christ! the king of Israel—let him come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe;' and those crucified with him were reproaching him.

^{33*}And the sixth hour having come, darkness came over the whole land till the ninth hour, ^{34*}and at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a great voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabachthani?' which is, being interpreted, 'My God, my God, why didst Thou forsake me?' ^{35*}And certain of those standing by, having heard, said, 'Lo, Elijah he doth call;' ^{36*}and one having run, and having filled a sponge with vinegar, having put [it] also on a reed, was giving him to drink, saying, 'Let alone, let us see if Elijah doth come to take him down.' ^{37*}And Jesus having uttered a loud cry, yielded the spirit, ^{38*}and the veil of the sanctuary was rent in two, from top to bottom, ^{39*}and the centurion who was standing over-against him, having seen that, having so cried out, he yielded the spirit, said, 'Truly this man was Son of God.' ^{40*}And there were also women afar off beholding, among whom was also Mary the Magdalene, and Mary of James the less, and of Joses, and Salome, ^{41*}(who also, when he was in Galilee, were following him, and were ministering to him,) and many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴²And now evening having come, seeing it was the preparation, that is, the fore-sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, who also himself was waiting for the reign of God, came, boldly entered in unto Pilate, and asked the body of Jesus.

⁴⁴And Pilate wondered if he were already dead, and having called near the centurion, did question him if he were long dead, ⁴⁵and having known [it] from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.

⁴⁶And he, having brought fine linen, and having taken him down, wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre that had been hewn out of a rock, and he rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre, ⁴⁷and Mary the Magdalene, and Mary of Joses, were beholding where he is laid.