

Luke's Use of Mark

Luke preserves only a little more than half of the Gospel of Mark, and he edits what he does preserve in accord with certain principles.

Organization

Some Markan material is moved about.

Examples:

- The story of Jesus preaching in Nazareth is moved forward to provide the occasion for his inaugural sermon (Luke 4:16–30; cf. Mark 6:1–6).
- The disciples' dispute over who is the greatest is moved to take place at the final supper (Luke 22:24–27; cf. Mark 10:41–45).

Abbreviation

Luke omits from Mark's stories what he considers to be insignificant or inappropriate.

Examples:

- a comment on the incompetence of physicians (Luke 8:42–48; cf. Mark 5:26)
- conversation between Jesus and the father of a demoniac child (Luke 9:37–43; cf. Mark 9:21–24)
- the naked young man in the garden (Luke 22:47–53; cf. Mark 14:43–52)

Note: Matthew's Gospel also omits all of these passages (Matt. 9:20–22; 17:14–18; 26:47–56).

Sophistication

Casual or colloquial expressions are rewritten in the more polished Greek of the educated class.

Examples:

- Instances of the "historical present" tense are changed (150 out of 151 [he missed Mark 5:35 at Luke 8:49]).
- Mark's repetitious use of words such as *and* and *immediately* is reduced.
- Clear antecedents are provided to pronouns that lack them.
- Use of syntactical constructions such as genitive absolutes and articular infinitives is increased (these portend a "higher class" of Greek).

Accuracy

Instances of questionable accuracy are corrected.

Examples:

- "King Herod" (Mark 6:14) becomes "Herod the tetrarch" (Luke 9:7).
- The reference to Abiathar as high priest in Mark 2:26 is omitted (Luke 6:4 [cf. 1 Sam 21:1–6]).

Contextual Relevance

Some changes make things more relevant to Luke's intended audience.

Examples:

- Probably because he is writing for a culturally diverse audience throughout the Roman Empire, Luke eliminates all eight of the Aramaic expressions found in Mark: *Boanerges* (3:17), *talitha cum* (5:41), *corban* (7:11), *ephphatha* (7:34), *Bartimaeus* (10:46), *Abba* (14:36), *Golgotha* (15:22), *eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani* (15:34).
- Notations providing broad historical/cultural context are introduced (cf. Luke 3:1–3 with Mark 1:4) because Luke wants the story that he tells to be received as a work of “world history” with implications for all humanity.
- The word **village** (*kōmē*) is often changed to **city** (*polis*) to give the story a more urban feel that transcends its setting in rural Palestine.
- The monetary value of coins is increased to keep the story relevant for those who live more prosperously than did Jesus and his original followers (cf. Luke 9:3, where the Greek word [*argyriōn*] means “silver,” with Mark 6:8, where the Greek [*chalkos*] means “copper”).

Character Portrayal

Luke changes the way major characters are portrayed in the Gospel story, including Jesus, his disciples, and his family.

Jesus

- Statements that imply a lack of ability or authority on Jesus’ part are omitted (comment in Mark 6:5 does not appear in Luke 4:16–30).

- References to Jesus exhibiting human emotions are dropped: “pity” (Mark 1:41), “anger” (Mark 3:5), “sadness” (Mark 3:5), “wonder” (Mark 6:6), “compassion” (Mark 6:34), “indignation” (Mark 10:14), “love” (Mark 10:21).
- Some stories in which Jesus acts in a somewhat violent way are omitted (cursing of the fig tree [Mark 11:12–14, 20–25; but cf. Luke 16:6–9]; overturning tables in the temple [Mark 11:15–17; cf. Luke 19:45–46]).
- Stories that might seem to portray Jesus as a magician are dropped (Mark 7:31–37; 8:22–26).

Disciples

- Stories of Jesus rebuking Peter (Mark 8:33), of James and John’s presumptuous request (Mark 10:35–40), and of the disciples’ flight at Jesus’ arrest are eliminated.
- Peter’s denial (Luke 22:31–34; Mark 14:29–31) and the disciples’ sleep in Gethsemane (Luke 22:45–46; Mark 14:37–41) are muted and explained.
- Lack of understanding is attributed not to the disciples’ unperceptive nature but instead to divine concealment (cf. Luke 9:45 with Mark 9:32; see Luke 18:34).

Jesus’ family

- Reference to Jesus’ family “coming to seize him” is dropped (Mark 3:21).
- Story of Jesus designating his “true family” is reworded to lessen the contrast with his earthly family (cf. Luke 8:19–21 with Mark 3:31–35).