

Synagogue and Church

The synagogue forms the background of the earlier part of the Gospel tradition. The work of Jesus in Galilee began there, and there it ended with his rejection.

Mark begins with the *personae dramatis*: the proclamation of John the Baptist,¹ the manifestation of Jesus at his baptism,² the temptation of Jesus by Satan,³ the proclamation of the kingdom of God in Galilee by Jesus,⁴ and the call of the first disciples.⁵ With this introduction Mark proceeds to illustrate the work of Jesus in Galilee in a series of typical scenes: in the synagogue, in the house, in desolate areas, at the sea, in the fields, in towns. But the underlying theme here is the synagogue. There is at once an archetypal scene in the synagogue at Capernaum, where the two sides of the work of Jesus, teaching and healing or exorcism, are exhibited.⁶ It is a new teaching with authority,⁷ different from that of the scribes;⁸ and it is accompanied by a direct assault on the dominion of Satan.⁹ A generalised statement on these lines follows: 'And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming in their synagogues, and casting out demons'.¹⁰ Jesus entered the synagogue 'again' on the Sabbath, and healed the man with the withered hand.¹¹ The outcome was the first plot to kill him. It involved the improbable alliance of Pharisees and Herodians - improbable because they stood for utterly different interests. The Pharisees stood for the redemption of Israel by the devout observance of the Torah, and for them the synagogue was their chief sphere of influence. The Herodians were 'partisans of Herod the Great and his family',¹² who stood only for their own interests. This section of Mark is brought to a conclusion with the return of Jesus 'to his own country', where on the Sabbath he taught in the synagogue.¹³ It is a paradoxical scene, for initial astonishment on the part of the hearers turns into 'unbelief'. Jesus leaves the synagogue, never to return.

1 Mk 1:-8

2 Mk 1:9-11

3 Mk 1:12-13

4 Mk 1:14-15

5 Mk 1:16-20

6 Mk 1:21-29

7 Mk 1:22,27 (GNT³text; app.crit.)

8 Mk 1:22

9 Mk 1:28

10 Mk 1:39

11 Mk 3:1-6

12 Bauer^d/ Arndt and Gingrich¹, sv.

13 Mk 6:1-6a