

ACCORDING TO “MARK”

REVIEW:

QUESTIONS?

Here's the diagram that would have been the conclusion of Monday's lecture:

MARK

(c. 70 CE)

Q

(c. 50 CE)

(Sayings “Gospel”–
–material also in Thomas)

MATTHEW =

(80-85 CE)

Most of Mark + Special Matthew + Q material
(Birth & Resurrection Stories)

Jewish Audience

(85-90 CE)

LUKE =

Less of Mark + Special Luke + Q
(B & R Stories
Parables)

Gentile Audience

QUESTIONS?

Why am I teaching you this stuff?

Chiefly as a way of encouraging a critical, analytical, even skeptical approach to the material.

Here's another questions for you. On Monday, in the process of trying to explain why Mark is now generally regarded as the earliest written Gospel and as a source for both Matthew and Luke, I said:

In the Preface to his *Harmony of the Gospels* (1922), A.T. Robertson observes that, when one sees how “Matthew and Luke made use of Mark for the framework of their Gospels,” this perspective “simplifies amazingly the unfolding of the narrative” (vii).

What is a Gospel Harmony?

It's an attempt to produce, from the collected material of the four Gospels, a single, coherent, and comprehensive narrative. According to the Oxford English Dictionary of the English Language (OED), a harmony in general is a “combination or adaptation of parts, elements, or related things, so as to form a consistent and orderly whole.”

More specifically, a Harmony is a “collation of passages on the same subject from different writings, arranged so as to exhibit their agreement and **account for their discrepancies**; now chiefly used of a work showing the correspondences between the four Gospels and the chronological succession of the events recorded in them.”

Here's a sample of what one kind of Harmony looks like:

MARK

8:12

And he . . . said,
*Why does this generation
ask for a sign?
Truly I tell you,
no sign will be given
to this generation.*

MATTHEW

12:38-42

But he answered them,
*An evil and adulterous
generation
asks for a sign,
but no sign will be given
to it
except the sign
of the prophet Jonah.
For just as Jonah
was three days and three nights
in the belly of the sea monster,
so for three days and three nights
the Son of Man will be
in the heart of the earth.*

LUKE

11:29-32

he began to say,
This generation is
*an evil generation;
it asks for a sign,
but no sign will be given
to it
except the sign
of Jonah.
For just as Jonah
became a sign
to the people of Nineveh,
so the Son of Man will be
to this generation.*

The words in **boldface** are (probably) from the Q source.

Now go back to an important phrase in the definition of “Harmony” above: **account for their discrepancies**. That’s the problem. The practice designed to reconcile differences actually **highlights** them by juxtaposition.

The differences above are merely verbal, but often the differences are more substantive. A **comparative study** of parallel passages gives us insight into the possible intentions of each author as he re-organizes and edits the material. It helps us to identify what is distinctive about each Gospel.

We turn now to some of the distinctive features of “Mark”

Mark begins abruptly and moves rapidly.

Everything points (sometimes obscurely) to the Crucifixion of the Messiah (Christ) and a central paradox: Jesus is a Messiah/Savior who Suffers.

Moreover: **Those who follow him will suffer:**

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

(8:34)

Why is this Good News?

According to “Mark,” “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (8:35)

In other words, Mark’s Gospel is about Martyrdom.

Mark is pervaded by a sense of **eschatological urgency**: the followers of Jesus **now** are living in the end time (the **eschaton**).

I believe that this sense of urgency accounts for Mark’s

- elliptical, cursive style;
- Jesus’s irritability, his impatience with the disciples
- the mystery of Jesus’s “hidden messiahship.”

Mark generally lacks transitions between episodes. Or transitions are marked by the word *immediately*, as if there were no time to move from place to place.

Jesus is hostile to members of his immediate family—perhaps understandably, since they try to have him “put away.” More puzzling, however, is Jesus’s impatience with the disciples when they don’t “get it.” For example: When the disciples ask to have the Parable of the Sower explained to them, Jesus says: “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?” (4:13) But then he goes on to lay it out for them. Go figure.

Reflection suggests, however, that it is really “Mark” who is impatient, not Jesus. When the disciples apparently fail to understand the miracle of the loaves, it is “Mark,” not Jesus, who says “their hearts were hardened” (6:52).

Perhaps the most puzzling feature of Mark’s Gospel is the “hidden messiahship” of Jesus. Again and again, Jesus performs a miraculous cure and then says, in effect: ‘Don’t tell anyone.’ After healing a leper, for example, Jesus tells him: “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them” (1:44). More generally, when he performs an exorcism, “he [does] not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him” (1:34).

Why does Jesus NOT proclaim the Good News about who he is? Why is he hiding his true nature as the Son of God?

My guess: followers will not really *know* who Jesus is until they have shared his suffering. They will *know* God’s Son by becoming children of God.

Since most of us probably do not want to become martyrs, and do not believe that we are living in the end times—at least I don’t—what does Mark’s eschatological perspective mean to us? **What if we were to live as if any moment might be our last? How would we behave?**

Obviously a very personal, and in some sense a “religious,” certainly not an “academic” question. Nonetheless, here’s my opinion, as a learned scribe, the Gospel according to Jesus according to JCU:

One of the scribes came near and heard [Jesus] disputing with . . . [the Sadducees about the resurrection], and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

(12:28-34)