

**Lecture 6. The Synoptic Problem II: The Priority of Mark**

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**1. Review**

- The Synoptic Problem is the study of the similarities and differences of the Synoptic Gospels in an attempt to explain their literary relationship.
- There are four basic kinds of material: Triple Tradition, Double Tradition, Special Matthew, Special Luke
- In Triple Tradition, Mark is the middle term. Two major explanations for Mark as middle term: Marcan Priority; Marcan Posteriority.
- Marcan Priority theories: **Two-Source Theory** (Matthew and Luke used Mark and “Q”) and **Farrer Theory** (Matthew used Mark and Luke used Mark and Matthew).
- Marcan Posteriority theory: **Griesbach Theory** (or “Two Gospel Theory”): Luke used Matthew; Mark used Matthew and Luke.
- Which is more plausible, that Mark was first or third?

**2. Additions and Omissions**

- Mark has very little special material. Nearly everything in his Gospel is also found in Matthew, or Luke, or both.
- It is therefore worth asking whether it is more likely that Matthew and Luke added material to Mark or whether it is more likely that Mark omitted material from Matthew and Luke.

**(a) Marcan Omission of Congenial Material**

- If Mark used Matthew and Luke, then he often omitted material we might have expected him to include, e.g. the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6.9-13 // Luke 11.1-4), which might have fitted well at Mark 11.20-25.

### *(b) Marcan Addition of Elements Uncongenial to Matthew and Luke*

- The handful of Special Mark verses include the following:

Mark 7.33-36: Healing of a Deaf Mute

Mark 8.22-26: Blind Man of Bethsaida

Mark 14.51-52: Man Running Away Naked

- Is it more likely that these are verses that Matthew and Luke both omitted (e.g. because of the physical nature of the healings, or the hint that Jesus' power was limited)? Or is it more likely that these are verses that Mark was keen to add?

### *(c) The Relationship between Additions and Omissions*

- The difficulty for the Griesbach Theory is that a consistent picture of Mark's editorial activity does not emerge.
- Mark is enigmatic in many ways, yet banal in other ways. This makes better sense on the assumption that Mark is a work of brutish genius, the first to construct a Gospel, than that he has distilled this odd mix from Matthew and Luke.
- Note that Mark's Gospel is oral in nature, with many colloquialisms. Is it likely that so oral a Gospel would have had so little extra oral tradition in comparison with other early Christian Gospels?

### **3. Harder Readings**

- Mark often has readings that would be difficult to explain as secondary to Matthew and Luke, but are more straightforward to explain as Matthew's and Luke's modifications of Mark:

**Mark 10.17-18: As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." (Contrast Matt. 19.16-17)**

**Mark 6.5 And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He wondered at their unbelief. (Contrast Matt. 13.58)**

### **4. Dates of the Gospels**

- A key moment in early Jewish and Christian history is 70CE, the Fall of Jerusalem. Matthew and Luke are apparently more specific in allusions to this event than is

Mark,

**Matt. 22.7, The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city**

**Matt. 23.37-39 // Luke 13.34-35, . . . *Behold your house is forsaken . . .***

**Luke 20.20-24, . . . and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles . . .**

## **5. Editorial Fatigue**

- There are several examples of Matthew and Luke making characteristic changes to Mark in the earlier part of a pericope, but failing to sustain these changes throughout, and gradually lapsing into the wording of their source. The lapse creates a minor contradiction, and the phenomenon is labelled editorial fatigue (see my article, "Fatigue in the Synoptics" in *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998): 45-58, reproduced at <http://markgoodacre.org/Q/fatigue.htm> ).
- Mark 1.40-5 // Matt. 8.1-4: The Leper
- Mark 6.14-29 // Matt. 14.1-12: Death of John the Baptist
- Mark 6.32-44 // Luke 9.10b-17: Feeding of the 5,000

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