

# JESUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT:

## THE SYNOPSIS GOSPELS: FORM CRITICISM - WEEK 4

Professor Phanor

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# DEFINED

- Synoptic Gospels
  - J.J. Griesback
    - German scholar of the eighteenth century
    - Synopsis – seeing together
    - Chosen because of high degree of similarity between Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the presentation of the ministry of Jesus
    - Separate from Gospel of John

# INTRODUCTION

- Same
  - Structure
  - Content
  - Tone

# INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

- Matthew, Mark, and Luke
  - Ministry in Galilee
  - Withdrawal to the north
  - Ministry in Judea and Perea while Jesus is in Jerusalem
  - Final ministry in Jerusalem
  - Brief teachings with intense action
- John
  - Ministry in Judea
  - Very little sequence found
  - Focus was on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem during periodic visits in the city
  - No exorcisms, and no parables
  - No sending out the Twelve

# INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

- Occupations
  - Matthew
    - Publican, or tax collector
    - Well-educated
    - Knew how to write
    - Wrote in several languages
    - Knew arithmetic

# INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

- Occupations
  - Mark
    - Never given
    - Full name (John Mark)
      - *“ When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying” (Acts 12:12).*
    - Wycliffe translators generally begin their translation work with the Gospel of Mark because it's short
    - Easy-to-read

# INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

## ■ Occupations

### ■ Luke

- Physician
- Did not know Jesus personally
- Had opportunity to speak to many about miracles they witnessed
- Seems to have read the gospels

# INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

## ■ Occupations

### ■ John

■ Fisherman

■ Beloved

- *“One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side” (John 13:23).*
- *“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!”” (John 19:26).*
- *“So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him”” (John 20:2).*

# INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

## ■ John

### ■ No Transfiguration

- Transform into something more beautiful and radiant
- Bible References

### ■ No Olivet Discourse

- *“The Olivet Discourse as the ultimate exposition of events related to the future of Israel has been a proving ground where incorrect rapture systems have gone astray. A survey of the Discourse starts with the backdrop of a scathing rebuke and proceeds to note the stunned disciples, the doomed temple, the timing question, the unexpected delay, the great tribulation, the second coming, and the application” (Pettigew, L.D., 2002).*

### ■ No Last Supper discourse

Discourse – spoken communication or debate; speak or write authoritatively about a topic

What is a “rule of thumb?”

# RULE OF THUMB

1. a general or approximate principle, procedure, or rule based on experience or practice, as opposed to a specific, scientific calculation or estimate
2. a rough, practical method of procedure

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rule%20of%20thumb?s=t>

# RULE OF THUMB (HISTORY)

- Physical violence against women is a right that men have exercised against women for centuries. In fact, the concept of abusing wives has its root in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century (Hart, 1992).
- Hart (1992) points to a 15<sup>th</sup> century document entitled, *Rules of Marriage in the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century*, which states: “When you see your wife commit an offense, don’t rush at her with insults and violent blows...Scold her sharply, bully and terrify her. And if this doesn’t work take up a stick and beat her soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and spare the body” (p.3).
- Hart further explains the term “rule of thumb” which comes from British common law, permitting husbands to beat their wives with a rod no thicker than their thumb.

Hart, B.J. State Codes on Domestic Violence: Analysis, Commentary, and Recommendation:  
*Juvenile & Family Court Journal* Vol. 43, No.4 1992

# ORAL TRADITIONS

- Form criticism
  - Focuses on the period of oral transmissions
- Source criticism
  - Focuses on the way different literary units were put together to make up the gospels
- Redaction criticism
  - Focuses on the literary and theological contributions of the authors of the gospels

# FORM CRITICISM

- First applied to Old Testament
  - Hermann Gunkel
    - Other scholars came into play
      - Karl Ludwig Schmidt (German Protestant Theologian, NT Professor)
      - Martin Dibelius (German Theologian, NT Professor, Sermon on Mount impossible to live up to)
      - Rudolf Bultmann (German Lutheran Theologian, NT Professor, Only that Jesus Existed, preach, and dies by crucifixion matters, not his life happenings)
- 1. Forms critics believe that the earliest stage of Christianity was set in the process by which the gospels came into being: the oral stage
- 2. Form critics believe that early Christians remitted the words and actions of Jesus by word of mouth for a considerable length of time
- 3. Two decades or so afterwards, the material began to be put into sources

# FORM CRITICISMS (6 ASSUMPTIONS)

- 1<sup>st</sup> Assumption
  - The stories and sayings of Jesus circulated in small independent units, except the passion narrative
  - This exception is not admitted by many contemporary form critics

## FORM CRITICISMS (6 ASSUMPTIONS) (CONT'D)

### ■ 2<sup>nd</sup> Assumption

- The gospel can be compared to the transmission of other folk and religious traditions
- Laws of transmission can be observed in the writings of the gospels

## FORM CRITICISMS (6 ASSUMPTIONS) (CONT'D)

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Assumption
  - Stories and sayings of Jesus took on standard forms

	Dibelius	Bultmann	Taylor
Brief Sayings of Jesus said in context (Give Caesar what is His) (Mark 12:13-17).	Paradigms Systematic arrangement	Apothegms A short cryptic remark containing some general or generally accepted truth; maxim	Pronouncement Stories
Stories about Jesus' miraculous deeds (Feeding of 5,000) (Mark 14:13-21; Mark 5:31-44; Luke 9:10-17).	Tales	Miracle Stories	Miracle Stories
Stories that magnify Jesus as a hero (Story of Jesus at temple at age 12) (Luke 2:41-52).	Legends	Historical Stories and Legends	Stories about Jesus
Teaching of Jesus that does not climax in a single saying (Lord's Prayer) (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4).	Paranesis Kind of advice, instruction, or counsel; traditional moral teaching	Dominical Sayings Source from the Lord Jesus Christ	Sayings and Parables

## FORM CRITICISMS (6 ASSUMPTIONS) (CONT'D)

- 4<sup>th</sup> Assumption
  - Sitz in Leben
    - Setting in life
  - Every literary category has its life situation

## FORM CRITICISMS (6 ASSUMPTIONS) (CONT'D)

### ■ 5<sup>th</sup> Assumption

- The early Christians put the material in certain forms
- Modified the activity to fit of its own needs and situations
- Forms critics differ widely over the degree to which the early church modified and created gospel material
  - Bultmann
    - The modifications were huge
    - Little of the Scriptures are a reliable source of information of the ministry of Jesus
  - Taylor
    - Mainly the arrangement of material is influenced

## FORM CRITICISMS (6 ASSUMPTIONS) (CONT'D)

- 6<sup>th</sup> Assumption
  - Used certain criteria to determine age and historical trustworthiness of pericopes (an extract from a text, especially a passage from the Bible)
  - Assumed that people in general:
    1. Lengthen their stories
    2. Add details to them
    3. Conform them more and more to their own language
    4. Generally preserve and create only what fits their own needs and beliefs

## FORM CRITICISMS (6 ASSUMPTIONS) (CONT'D)

- 6<sup>th</sup> Assumption (cont'd)
  - Form critics believe that gospel was:
    1. Shorter
    2. Lacked details
    3. Contained Semitisms
      - “ Semitic characteristics, especially the ways, ideas, influence, etc., of the Jewish people

## FORM CRITICISMS (6 ASSUMPTIONS) (CONT'D)

- 6<sup>th</sup> Assumption (cont'd)

- Form critics believe that gospel was:

4. Dissimilar

- Eliminate things that were unlikely to be introduced in the early church
- “Critically assured” there were a certain number of sayings that adhered to Jesus’ sayings

5. Compared to authentic text

6. Multiple attestation – found in more than one text

## FORM CRITICISMS (EVALUATION) (CONT'D)

- Scholarly truths
  - There was a period of oral transmission
  - Much of it was likely in small units
  - There was probably a tendency for the material to take standard forms
  - The church influenced how the information was handed-down

# FORM CRITICISM (EVALUATION) (CONT'D)

- Scholars Bultmann, and Dibelius note that:
  1. The early church did not distinguish Jesus as the Son of God, thus, they felt that it was okay to “put words in His mouth”
    - *“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer”* (II Corinthians 5:16).
      - No longer views Jesus from a flesh point-of-view
  2. The gospels was pulled together over a period of over twenty years
    1. The text was an undefined body of text
    2. Rabbinic literature never pulled together anything resembling the Gospel
  3. Oral transmission does not always lengthen
    1. Sayings do not claim authenticity , but surety
    2. Focus on attention of what Jesus said

## FORM CRITICISM (EVALUATION) (CONT'D)

- Scholars Bultmann, and Dibelius note that:
  4. Form critics write as though there were no eyewitnesses to confirm accounts
  5. Form critics underestimate the degree to which first-century Jews would be able to memorize information and transmit information
    - Memorization in first-century Jewish society was undeniably common

# CONCLUSION

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”*

(II Timothy 3:16).