

# BSTH 3463 B1: Jesus and the Synoptic Tradition

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Assignments & Evaluation	Due Date	Percentage of Final Grade
<p>Quiz</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multiple choice and true/false quiz on the material covered in the first lecture.</li> </ul>	November 30	10 %
<p>Bible Study Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Choose one passage from the synoptic gospels, summarize it in 1-2 paragraphs and provide 5 discussion questions.</li> </ul>	December 7	10 %
<p>Synoptic Comparison</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Choose one passage found in all three synoptic gospels and comment on similarities and differences (2 pages).</li> </ul>	December 14	20 %
<p>Research Paper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Choose one passage from synoptic gospels and interact with scholars (commentaries, journal articles, etc) and defend your interpretation (5-6 pages).</li> </ul>	January 11	25 %
<p>Take Home Exam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read Synoptic Gospels: Four Views, choose the view you hold and explain why (2-3 pages).</li> </ul>	January 4	25 %
<p>Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on attendance and discussion participation.</li> </ul>	January 11	10%
		100 %

# Jewish Background



# Jewish Influence

## Defining Terms:

- \* Jewish = Judean
- \* Technically, a Jew is not any Israelite or Hebrew but someone who belongs to the southern kingdom of Judah (comprised of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin).
- \* Jesus (from Judah) and Paul (from Benjamin) were therefore Jews.

# Jewish Influence



Galilee

Samaria

Judea

# Jewish Influence

## Who Were the Samaritans?

- \* Remnant of the northern Israelites (whom the Old Testament describes as largely faithless)
- \* Intermarried with Gentiles that were settled in the land by the Assyrians at the exile.
- \* Believed that Mount Gerizim was the proper place to worship (at one point had their own temple there).
- \* Mutual hatred between the Jews and Samaritans.

# Jewish Influence

## Religious Groups

- \* **Pharisees** - Likely means 'Set Apart'; had a theology similar to Jesus and the early Christians; survived the destruction of the Temple (70 AD) and evolved into Rabbinic Judaism.

# Jewish Influence

## Religious Groups

- \* **Sadducees** - Likely named after the high priest Zadok; focused on the Torah and rejected the oral law; upper class; worked with the Romans; closely tied to the priesthood and disappeared after the destruction of the Temple.

# Jewish Influence

## Religious Groups

- \* **Essenes** - Not mentioned in the New Testament; smaller group than the Pharisees and Sadducees; ascetic culture; rejected the Jerusalem priesthood and may have produced the Dead Sea Scrolls.

# Jewish Influence

## Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)

- \* **TaN**a**K**:
- \* **T**orah (**L**aw) - Books of Moses (Pentateuch)
- \* **N**evi'im (**P**rophets) - Former (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings); Latter (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Twelve)
- \* **K**etuvim (**W**ritings) - Everything Else

# Jewish Influence

## Writings You Should Know

- \* **Septuagint (LXX)** - Greek translation of Old Testament
- \* **Apocrypha** - Jewish writings that are part of Roman Catholic and Orthodox canons but not Protestant Bibles.
- \* **Pseudepigrapha** - Other Jewish writings, often named after Old Testament figures (e.g. Enoch, Ezra, Baruch)

# Jewish Influence

## Writings You Should Know

- \* **Dead Sea Scrolls** - Included portions of the Old Testament, Pseudepigrapha and original writings.
- \* **Philo** - A Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Egypt who blended Greek philosophy and biblical interpretation. (BC 25-50 AD)
- \* **Josephus** - A Jewish historian who wrote accounts of the Jews after being captured by the Romans. Most important works: *Antiquities* and the *Jewish War*. (37-100 AD)

# Jewish Influence

## Writings You Should Know

- \* **Mishnah** - Rabbinic text representing the oral law, compiled 200 AD.
- \* **Talmud** - Mishnah plus commentary (Gemara), compiled in sixth century AD. Babylonian and Jerusalem/Palestinian Talmud but Babylonian is most authoritative.

**Warning:** These texts must be used with caution in attempting to understand first century rabbinic traditions.

# Greco-Roman Context

- \* Alexander the Great and Hellenization
- \* Greek philosophy and monotheism
- \* Caesar is Lord
- \* Pax Romana and Roman infrastructure

# Two Meanings for 'Gospel'

- \* “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1)
- \* We use the same word for the content of the Christian message and the genre of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- \* Mark’s reference is to the content of the Christian message. However, it nicely describes the nature of what Mark records. The other books attempt the same goal and so we call them Gospels.

# What Does Gospel Mean?

- \* The word gospel means “good news” and it comes from the Greek *euangelion* (eu means “good” and angel means “messenger”)
- \* It is from this word that we get evangelism, which means sharing the good news.
- \* The original meaning of gospel was the content of a message sent from a battlefield to a city to announce the victory of the enemy.

# Gospel in the Old Testament

- \* “David was sitting between the two gates when the watchman went up to the roof of the gate and over to the wall. The watchman looked out and saw a man running alone. He called out and told the king. The king said, “If he’s alone, he bears good news.” As the first runner came closer, the watchman saw another man running. He called out to the gatekeeper, “Look! Another man is running alone!” “This one is also bringing good news,” said the king.” (2 Samuel 18:24-26)

# Gospel in the Old Testament

- \* “The Spirit of the Lord God is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners.” (Isaiah 61:1)

# Gospel in the New Testament

- \* Many would define the gospel as “If you believe Jesus died on the cross for you, you will go to heaven.”
- \* “After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the good news (gospel) of God.” (Mark 1:14)
- \* What was the content of Jesus’ gospel? Was he looking for faith in his crucifixion?

# Gospel in the New Testament

- \* “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news!” (Mark 1:15)
- \* The gospel is that the kingdom of God was arriving. The kingdom of God can be also translated as the reign of God.
- \* “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

# Gospel in the New Testament

- \* “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him. He began by saying to them, “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” (Luke 3:18-21)

# What are the Gospels?

- \* Is it enough to just describe the genre as Gospels?
- \* Do Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have anything in common with other ancient forms of writing?

# What are the Gospels?

- \* There have been a variety of theories but there is now a general consensus that the Gospels belong to the genre of *bioi* (lives), similar to the *bioi* written by authors such as Plutarch.

# What Are Bioi?

- \* “The picture has now emerged of the genre of *bioi* nestling between history, encomium (a writing or speech in praise of someone) and moral philosophy, with overlaps and relationships in all directions.” - Richard Burrige

# Gospels are Theological Literature

- \* “While the Gospels are meant to be historical, they are more than unbiased news reports. They are theological documents written to instruct and encourage believers and to convince unbelievers of the truth of their message. This is evident in that they focus especially on the saving work accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” - Mark Strauss

# Reading the Gospels in Context

- \* The Gospels are inspired by the Holy Spirit, but they are “incarnated” in first century forms.
- \* The Gospels should not be read as twenty-first century western documents but as ancient biographies and held to those standards.
- \* Variations in detail between the different Gospels are well within the standards of precision among ancient writings.

# Implications

- \* “The first implication of all this is that any idea of the gospels as unique, sui generis works is a nonsense: authors cannot create, and readers cannot interpret, a total novelty. The second implication is that we must have the same generic expectations as the author and his original readers: trying to ‘decode’ the gospels through the genre of modern biography, when the author ‘encoded’ his message in the genre of ancient bios, will lead to another nonsense—blaming the text for not containing modern predilections which it was never meant to contain.” - Richard Burridge

# New Testament Canon

- \* We have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament canon.
- \* But why these four and not any of the other Gospels that were written?

# The Da Vinci Code

- \* 'Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned' (p. 317).
- \* 'More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion' (p. 313).

# Myths and facts

- \* There are much fewer than eighty Gospels that were written.
- \* The extra-canonical Gospels are later and not earlier.
- \* Constantine and the Council of Nicaea had nothing to do with choosing books of the New Testament.
- \* The four canonical Gospels were agreed upon very early on.

# Council of Nicaea

## What Happened at Nicaea?

- \* The Council of Nicaea took place in 325 AD.
- \* It had nothing to do with choosing books of the Bible.
- \* It was called to deal with the Arian heresy which taught that Jesus was a created being.

# Definitions

## Canon of Scripture

- \* “Those books viewed by the church as authoritative and so fit to be included in the Bible. Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians agree on the twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon, though differ on whether to include the Apocrypha in the Old Testament canon.” - Mark Strauss

## Gnosticism

- \* “A religious movement which claimed adherents gained salvation through secret knowledge of their true heavenly origin.” - Mark Strauss

# Canon Lists

- \* The Muratorian Fragment (ca. 170–200) - Our four plus no others.
- \* Origen of Alexandria (ca. 215–250) - Our four plus no others.
- \* Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 311) - Our four and mentions Gospel to the Hebrews as non-canonical.
- \* Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 350) - Our four and criticizes Gospel of Thomas.
- \* Mommсен Catalogue (aka Cheltenham List) (ca. 359) - Our four and no others.
- \* Athanasius of Alexandria (367) - Exactly the same as our current Christian canon.

# The New Testament Canon

- \* There never seems to be a debate about which Gospels belonged in the Christian canon.
- \* The main books that were under discussion were 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and sometimes Hebrews.
- \* We never find any of the apocryphal Gospels in collections of Christian Scripture.
- \* Early Christian apologists often quoted the apocryphal Gospels at length which contradicts the idea that the church suppressed them.

# Gospel of Thomas

- \* The non-canonical Gospel that is most often put forward as having authentic sayings of Jesus is the Gospel of Thomas.
- \* The Jesus Seminar included Thomas in their book, *The Five Gospels*.
- \* It was not written by Thomas.
- \* Probably written in the mid-second century AD.
- \* It contains 114 sayings and no narrative.

# Gospel of Thomas

- \* 7. Jesus said, "Lucky is the lion that the human will eat, so that the lion becomes human. And foul is the human that the lion will eat, and the lion still will become human."
- \* 57 Jesus said, "The Father's kingdom is like a person who has [good] seed. His enemy came during the night and sowed weeds among the good seed. The person did not let the workers pull up the weeds, but said to them, 'No, otherwise you might go to pull up the weeds and pull up the wheat along with them.' For on the day of the harvest the weeds will be conspicuous, and will be pulled up and burned."

# Gospel of Thomas

- \* 114. Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven."

# Infancy gospel of Thomas

- \* Infancy Gospels were written in attempt to imagine what Jesus could have been like during the silent years between his birth and ministry.
- \* The Infancy Gospel of Thomas was not written by Thomas.
- \* It was probably written in the mid to late second century.

# Infancy gospel of Thomas

- \* And a certain Jew when he saw what Jesus did, playing upon the Sabbath day, departed straightway and told his father Joseph: Lo, thy child is at the brook, and he hath taken clay and fashioned twelve little birds, and hath polluted the Sabbath day. And Joseph came to the place and saw: and cried out to him, saying: Wherefore doest thou these things on the Sabbath, which it is not lawful to do? But Jesus clapped his hands together and cried out to the sparrows and said to them: Go! and the sparrows took their flight and went away chirping. And when the Jews saw it they were amazed, and departed and told their chief men that which they had seen Jesus do.

# Infancy gospel of Thomas

- \* Compare to the Qur'an 5:110
- \* When Allah will say: O Jesus, son of Mary, remember My favour to thee and to thy mother, when I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit; thou spokest to people in the cradle and in old age, and when I taught thee the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel, and **when thou didst determine out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then thou didst breathe into it and it became a bird by My permission;** and thou didst heal the blind and the leprous by My permission; and when thou didst raise the dead by My permission; and when I withheld the Children of Israel from thee when thou camest to them with clear arguments -- but those of them who disbelieved said: This is nothing but clear enchantment.

# Infancy Gospel of Thomas

- \* After that again he went through the village, and a child ran and dashed against his shoulder. And Jesus was provoked and said unto him: Thou shalt not finish thy course (lit. go all thy way). And immediately he fell down and died. But certain when they saw what was done said: Whence was this young child born, for that every word of his is an accomplished work? And the parents of him that was dead came unto Joseph, and blamed him, saying: Thou that hast such a child canst not dwell with us in the village: or do thou teach him to bless and not to curse: for he slayeth our children.

# Gospel of Peter

- \* This was not written by Peter and was likely written in the mid to late second century.
- \* “The docetic note in this narrative appears in the statement that Jesus, while being crucified, 'remained silent, as though he felt no pain', and in the account of his death. It carefully avoids saying that he died, preferring to say that he 'was taken up', as though he - or at least his soul or spiritual self - was 'assumed' direct from the cross to the presence of God. (We shall see an echo of this idea in the Qur'an.) Then the cry of dereliction is reproduced in a form which suggests that, at that moment, his divine power left the bodily shell in which it had taken up temporary residence.” - F.F. Bruce

# Gospel of Peter

- \* “But in the night in which the Lord's day dawned, when the soldiers were safeguarding it two by two in every watch, there was a loud voice in heaven; and they saw that the heavens were opened and that two males who had much radiance had come down from there and come near the sepulcher. But that stone which had been thrust against the door, having rolled by itself, went a distance off the side; and the sepulcher opened, and both the young men entered. And so those soldiers, having seen, awakened the centurion and the elders (for they too were present, safeguarding). And while they were relating what they had seen, again they see three males who have come out from the sepulcher, with the two supporting the other one, and a cross following them, and the head of the two reaching unto heaven, but that of the one being led out by a hand by them going beyond the heavens. And they were hearing a voice from the heavens saying, 'Have you made proclamation to the fallen-asleep?' And an obeisance was heard from the cross, 'Yes.'”

# Secret Gospel of Mark

- \* This Gospel was “discovered” by Morton Smith in 1958.
- \* Many scholars consider this to be a hoax.
- \* There is no reason that was an original or alternative version of the Gospel of Mark.

# Why are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the canon?

- \* They are the only Gospels from the first century, written during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses to Jesus.
- \* They are the only ones that fit the genre of the ancient *bios* or lives.
- \* The others are very fanciful and are closer in style to myth.
- \* There is a continuity in theology and thought between the canonical Gospels, other New Testament writings and the early Church Fathers.

# The New Testament Canon

- \* “It is specially important to hear in mind that the fixing of the New Testament Canon was not the arbitrary work of a Church Council. When at last, in A.D. 393, a Church Council drew up a list of New Testament books, it simply confirmed the canonical recognition that was already well established as the general consensus of Christians. And in this matter the early Christians were certainly guided by a wisdom higher than their own, as may be seen in what they rejected as much as in what they accepted. We could not improve upon their direction. But, enlightened by the witness of the Spirit who guided them, we, too, recognize in the New Testament the books which were given by inspiration of God to stand alongside the books of the Old Covenant, the Bible of Christ and His apostles, and to make up with them the complete volume of God’s Word written.” - F.F. Bruce

# Definitions

## Synoptic Gospels

- \* “The name given to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, because they present the ministry of Jesus from a similar perspective. Synoptic means ‘viewed together.’” - Mark Strauss

## Source Criticism

- \* “A type of historical criticism which seeks to identify the written sources behind each Gospel and their relationship to one another.” - Mark Strauss

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

MATTHEW 19:13-14

Then children were brought to Him so He might put His hands on them and pray. But the disciples rebuked them. Then Jesus said, "Leave the children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to Me, because the kingdom of heaven is made up of people like this."

MARK 10:13-14

Some people were bringing little children to Him so He might touch them, but His disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me. Don't stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

LUKE 18:15-16

Some people were even bringing infants to Him so He might touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. Jesus, however, invited them: "Let the little children come to Me, and don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

- \* “The question is the relationship between these three Gospels. Why do they so closely resemble each other? Why do they differ at so many points? Did they borrow material from each other? Which was written first and which borrowed from the others? The questions of these relationships has been termed the *synoptic problem*.” - Mark Strauss

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

- \* The first step is to determine the earliest Gospel.
- \* Augustine (354-430 AD) understood it this way: "Now, those four evangelists whose names have gained the most remarkable circulation over the whole world, and whose number has been fixed as four, ...are believed to have written in the order which follows: first Matthew, then Mark, thirdly Luke, lastly John."
- \* Augustine believed that Mark was an abbreviated version of Matthew. As a result, Mark was dismissed as being relatively unimportant until the last couple of centuries.

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

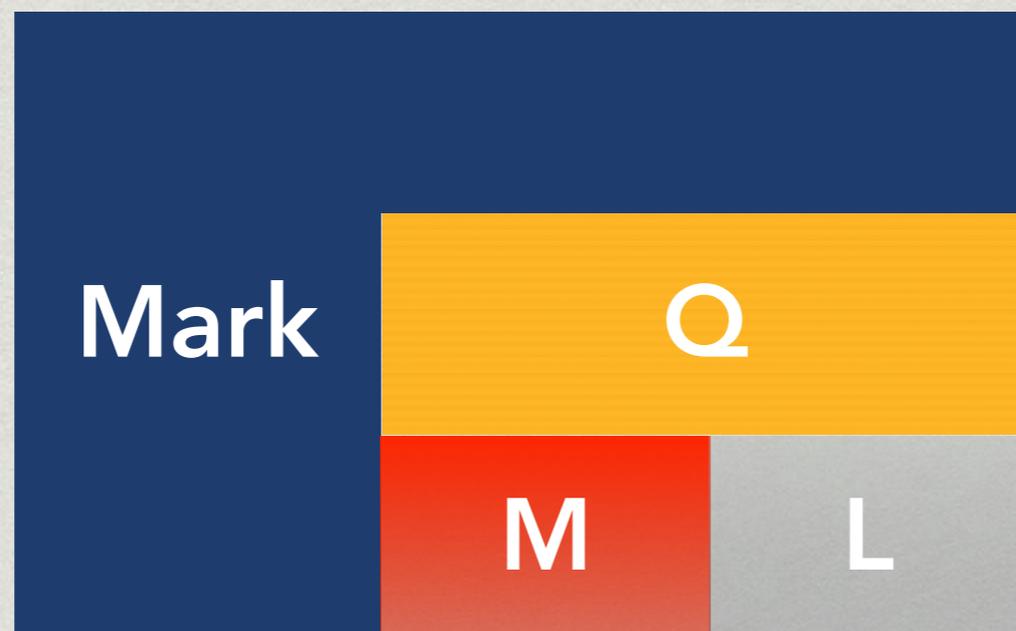
- \* More recently, scholars have come up with a different theory.
- \* Mark does not have as many stories as Matthew and Luke but when they are in common, Mark's version is often longer.
- \* In content and style, Mark reads more like a first draft or source text than an abbreviation of a fuller Gospel.
- \* The majority of New Testament scholars accept Mark as the earliest Gospel. This is called the priority of Mark.

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

- \* A part of the solution to the synoptic problem is that Matthew and Luke seemed to have used Mark as a source.
- \* However, there is still a significant amount of material in Matthew and Luke that is not explained by Mark.
- \* The material that Matthew and Luke have in common is attributed to a sayings Gospel called Q (either oral or written). This is a hypothesis, we do not have any manuscript evidence for Q.
- \* Material unique to Matthew is called M and unique to Luke is called L.

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

The Four Source Hypothesis



Mark

Matthew

Luke

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

- \* Not every scholar accepts this theory and some reject the existence of Q, but this is the most popular theory among New Testament scholars.
- \* What are the theological implications for inspiration?
- \* Inspiration does not require the absence of sources.
- \* Certain Old Testament historical books name the sources they use.

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

- \* “Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4)
- \* Luke seems to be aware of earlier accounts and to have used them in his own Gospel.

# What is the Synoptic Problem?

- \* Why would Matthew, who was one of the Twelve, use the account of Mark, who was not one of the Twelve, as a source?
- \* Would an eyewitness need the help of a non-eyewitness?
- \* Mark does contain eyewitness testimony in that it is based on the preaching of Peter.
- \* Matthew's first language was not Greek and so it makes sense that he would use an existing Greek Gospel instead of translating from scratch.

# Definitions

- \* Textual Criticism - Study of manuscripts to determine the earliest and most accurate version of the text.
- \* Form Criticism - A type of historical criticism which studies the oral or spoken traditions behind the written Gospel sources.
- \* Redaction Criticism - A type of historical criticism which studies how the Gospel writers edited their sources to achieve their distinct theological goals.

# Historical Jesus

- \* First Quest (1774-1901) - “The first quest was an attempt to be ‘historical’ by noting how the scriptural accounts were not coherent and then seeing what remained. The argument, grounded in an excessive rationalism, was that one should separate the document in the account from its historical core, if any remained.” - Darrell Bock

# Historical Jesus

- \* New Quest (1950s) - “Second questers make much use of many of the critical methods, such as form, redaction, and especially tradition criticism. They do so usually requiring the burden of proof to fall on the need to show authenticity. This approach is the one into which the Jesus Seminar falls” - Darrell Bock

# Historical Jesus

- \* Third Quest - “This emphasis on Jesus’ Jewish roots grew into what is becoming known as the third quest, an approach that runs alongside the second quest but works more seriously with Jewish backgrounds than either of the earlier quests. In general, those who participate in the third quest have tended to see far more historicity in the Gospels than either of the previous quests, showing a renewed respect for the general historical character of the Gospels.” - Darrell Bock

# Criteria of Authenticity

## Criterion of Dissimilarity

- \* McKnight (60; citing Perrin): "The earliest form of a saying we can reach may be regarded as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church, and this will particularly be the case where Christian tradition oriented towards Judaism can be shown to have modified the saying away from its original emphasis."
- \* Sanders (316; under 'Uniqueness'): "material can be safely attributed to Jesus if it agrees neither with the early church nor with the Judaism contemporary with Jesus." Cf. Stein, 240.
- \* Example: Matt 8:21-22: "Let the dead bury the dead."
- \* Problems: This criterion identifies what is unique about Jesus, but not what is characteristic about Jesus. It also assumes we know enough about 1st c. Jewish and early Christian world to make informed decisions.

# Criteria of Authenticity

## Criterion of Multiple Attestation

- \* Sanders, 323: "A passage is more likely to go back to Jesus if it has been preserved in two or more sources which are independent of each other." This criterion may confirm authenticity of motifs (not just sayings).
- \* Example: Jesus' forgiveness of sinners: Mark 2:15-17; Q = Mt 11:18-19; L = Lk 15:1-2; M = Mt 21:28-32
- \* Problem: who decides what constitutes independent sources?

# Criteria of Authenticity

## **Criterion of Semitisms**

- \* Evidence of Aramaic/Semitic background points to historical authenticity.
- \* Example: Mark 15:34

# Criteria of Authenticity

## Criterion of Divergent Traditions

- \* Sanders (304): "strongly against the grain; too much with the grain"
- \* Stein (247): "Criterion of Divergent Patterns from the Redaction"
- \* Traditions that do not serve the purpose of the author are more likely to be authentic.
- \* Likewise, with traditions within one Gospel that appear to stand in tension with each other.
- \* Example: Matt 10:5-6; 28:19-20
- \* Taken from <http://www.westmont.edu/~fisk/Articles/CriteriaOfAuthenticity.htm>

# Jesus of History vs Christ of Faith

- \* How historical does our faith need to be?