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New Testament
Bible Survey

The Gospels – Part I: Mark & Matthew

Last Week Review

- The New Testament is the continuation of the story of redemption, building on the Old Testament
- Pay attention to 3 critical questions when reading and interpreting the Bible:
  - What does the text say?
  - What is the context?
  - What does it mean to me now?
- We must be brave enough to question our own loyalties and prejudices when reading the Bible

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Who Am I?

- The king would rule the world and inaugurate peace
- Called the “Son of God”
- Birth feared by the ruling elite; every male child born that year killed
- Dreams and visits by divine figures revealed him as “savior”
- Descended from auspicious members of his lineage
- Divine signs at his birth, including a special star
- Reign described as *euaggelion* – “Good News”



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Who Am I?

- Raises interesting questions of the gospel writers:
    - Simply copying other authors?
    - Even aware of these other stories?
    - Intentionally highlighting certain aspects of Jesus' life to contrast with Caesar Augustus?
    - Is declaring Jesus' birth in the way they do a direct challenge to Rome?
    - What does this mean for how we read the gospels today?

One thing is clear: Gospel writers are engaging with the ideas around them to explain who Jesus is and what his presence means

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Reading the Bible is Hard



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What is a “Gospel?”

- From an old English phrase – “Goodspell” = “good news”
  - Also ancient Greek – *euaggelion* (*eu = “good”; aggelion = “message”*
- First 4 books of the NT
- Present the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection
- Literary genre of ancient biography with many sub-genres within
  - Ancient historiography
  - Narrative
  - Parables
  - “Sayings”
  - Hymns
  - Apocalyptic literature



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What is a Gospel?

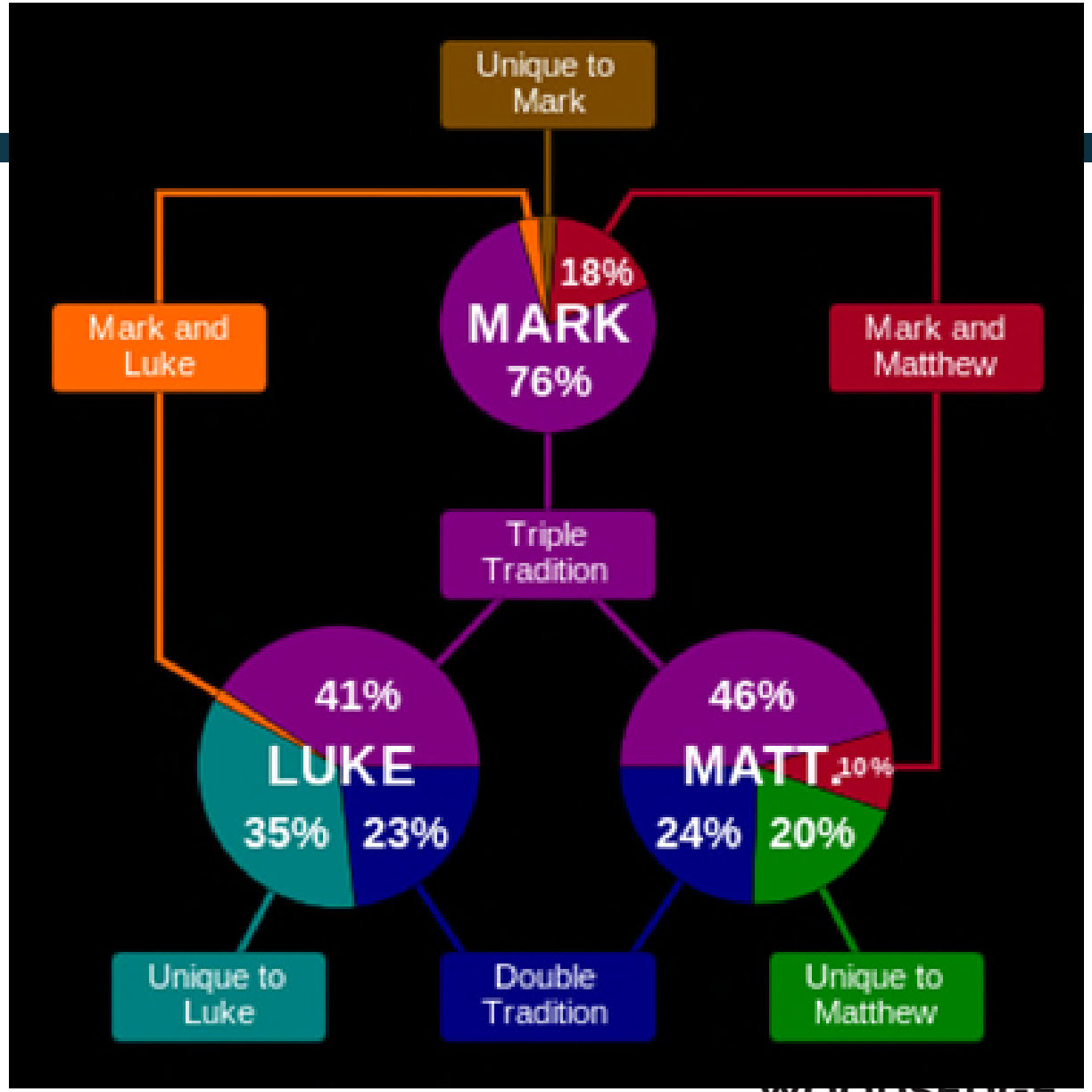
- Process of writing subject to much debate, but in general
  - Started as oral accounts from the witnesses of Jesus
  - Some gathered into a written account (“Q” source)
  - Used by gospel writers along with other materials
- All gospels not the same – the writers show theological/creative freedom in the content, order, & emphases of their works
- Why four? Because they were written to answer different questions for different parts of the church
- We believe the Holy Spirit provided inspiration
- All focus on the death and resurrection of Christ



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The Synoptic Gospels

- Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the "Synoptic Gospels" because of their literary relationship
- "Synoptic" means "seen together" in Greek (think: *synopsis*)
- The question of how to understand this relationship is called the *Synoptic Problem*
- Shared material between the 3 gospels:
  - Unique to Mk: 3%, Unique to Mt: 20%, Unique to Luke: 35%
  - Shared Mk/Luke: 3%, Shared Mk/Mt: 18%
  - Shared Mt/Lk: 24% - this is the "Q" source
  - Shared between Mk/Lk/Mt: 76% - this is called the "Triple Tradition"



The Synoptic Gospels

Group Exercise: The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Compare the three versions of the parable in the gospels:

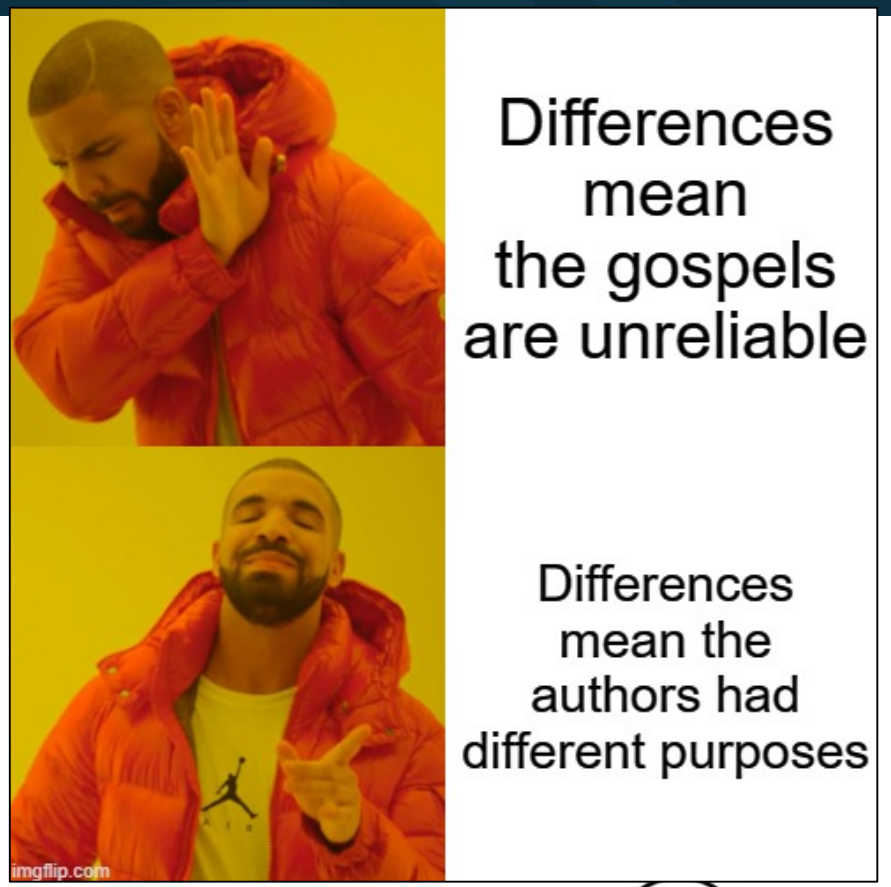
1. What is similar?
2. What is different?
3. What comes before the parable?
4. What comes after the parable?
5. What can you determine about the emphases, themes, or messages of the parable in each of the gospels?





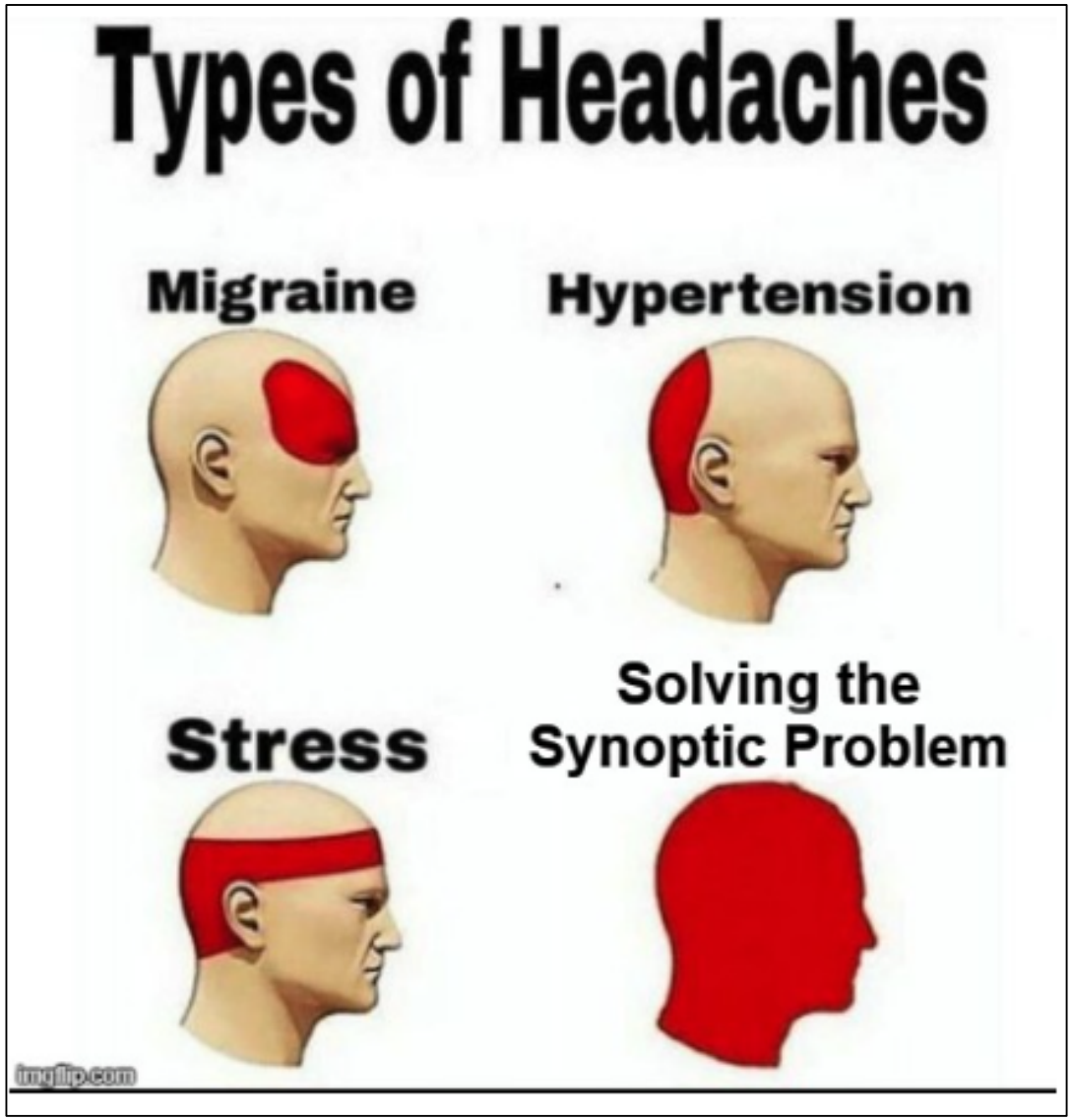
The Synoptic Gospels

- What does all this mean to *today's* reader?
  - We don't need to fear differences between the gospels
  - Doesn't mean they are "non-historical" or unreliable
  - Instead pay close attention and ask some questions:
    - *Why did the writer do something different here?*
    - *How does that change the meaning in the passage?*
    - *Don't just ask "what" ask "why"*
    - *Draw the text closer to us rather than dismissing it*
    - *Feel free to say "I don't know"*



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The Synoptic Gospels



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The Gospel of Mark: The Mystery of the Christ



Image from the *Book of Kells* depicting Mark as a lion, heralding the coming of the Kingdom of God



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Summation of Mark

- Key verse: Mark 8:27-29

  “Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

  On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”…Peter answered,

  “You are the Messiah.”

- Summary:

  Mark, the earliest gospel, tells the story of Jesus’ public ministry and journey to Jerusalem where he is killed and then resurrected in fulfillment of God’s plan of establishing the Kingdom of God. Mark focuses the reader on the question, “Who is Jesus?”



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Central Theme of Mark

- Mark is a very dramatic presentation of Christ
- Mark is oblique about Jesus' identity with the characters:
  - Many fail to recognize who Jesus is even as they are amazed by his actions
  - Crowds - "We have never seen anything like this [healing of the paralytic]." (Mk. 2:12)
  - Disciples - "Who then is this that even the wind and sea obey him?" (Mk. 4:14)
  - Jewish leaders – "By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you authority to do them?" (Mk. 11:28)
- Mark in some ways is an *apocalypse*
  - *Apocalypsis* in Greek means "to reveal"
  - The theme of Jesus' identity is not just for the characters, but for the **reader!**



Central Theme of Mark

- Same theme seen in the parables
  - Usage meant to reveal the Kingdom of God to those who seek it – hide meaning to those outside and to reveal to the faithful
  - “To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God” (Mk. 4:11)
  - Question to the reader (US!) is whether we are one who will:
    - “look, but not perceive, listen, but not understand”
    - Or will we “not turn again and be forgiven” (Mk 4:12, quoting Isaiah 6:9)
- Mark is following Isaiah here – just as the prophet’s preaching created hardness of heart in Israel, so also Jesus’ did

- Yet Mark is undermining this insider/outsider dynamic rhetorically by presenting who Jesus is clearly!



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Central Theme of Mark

- Mark ends the passage with a warning from Jesus:
  - “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given to you. For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” (Mk. 4:24-25)

- So again, the rhetorical question to the reader: Do you understand who Jesus is?



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The Ending of Mark

- The abrupt ending of Mark has drawn interest for centuries
- A seemingly weird ending:
  - Ends on the word “for” (*gar*) in the Greek
  - No triumphant post-resurrection appearances
  - The women leave in “fear”
- Later scribes decided to create their own endings, called textual variants:
  - Shorter version – “And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself send out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.” – manuscript evidence: 800-900 CE
  - Longer version – manuscript evidence: 400-500 CE; does not appear in earlier manuscripts

Why included in some Bibles today? Included in the Majority Text

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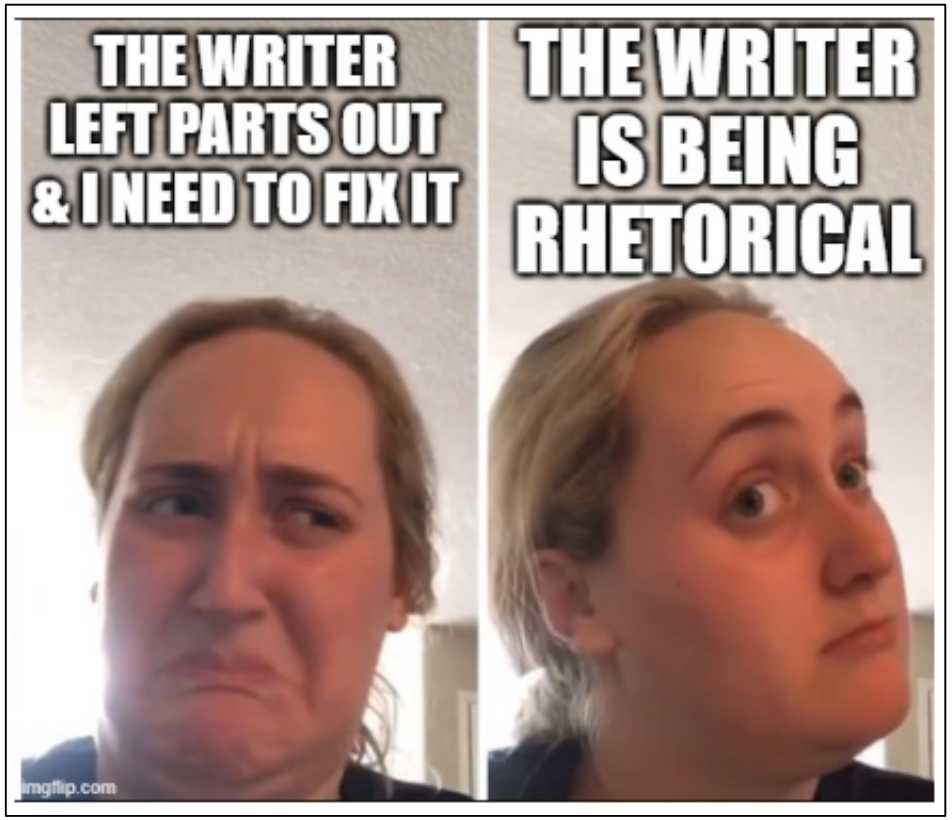
The Ending of Mark

- We use a form of critical analysis called *textual criticism* to grade manuscripts and reconstruct the text of the New Testament

- The ending of Mark features the same rhetorical question as the rest of the book – “What happened to Jesus? What should we do about him?”

- When we read Mark, we have to answer that same question too

- It is the question of the book – what will YOU do about Jesus?



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The Gospel of Matthew: Torah Fulfilled



Image from the *Book of Kells* depicting Matthew as a man, a tribute to Christ's genealogy as presented in the gospel



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Summation of Matthew

- Key verse: Matthew 5:17 - 20

> "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished…For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

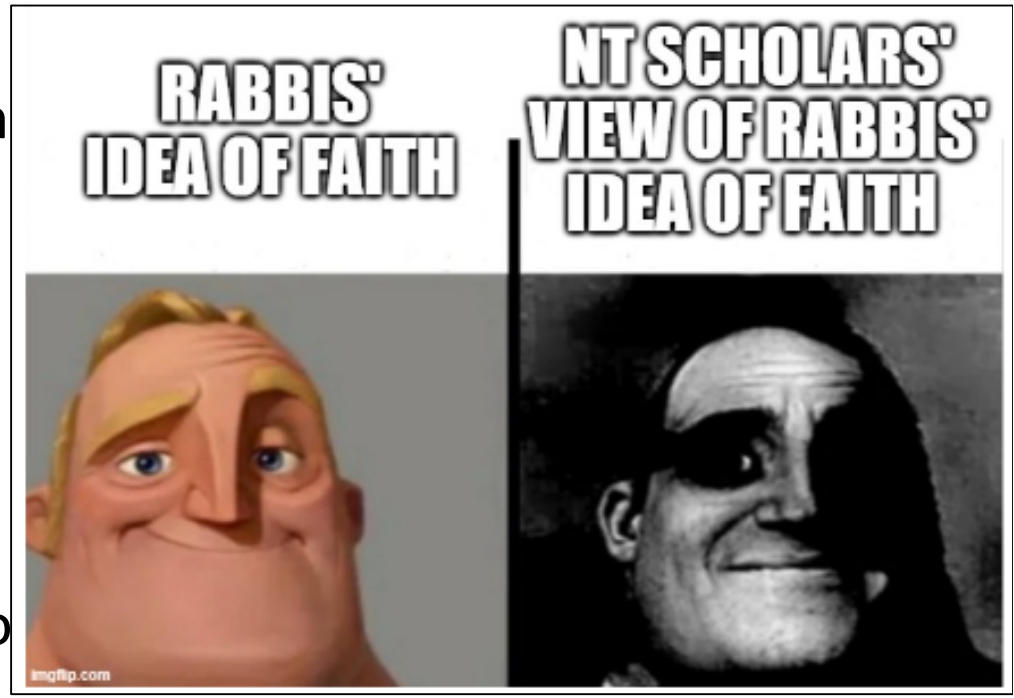
- Summary:

Matthew's gospel highlights how Jesus is the unique fulfillment of the messianic hopes of Judaism. At the same time, the gospel is addressed to the 1st century believers, providing a definitive map of what belief in Jesus as the living Torah changes their lives.

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Corrective: What is Torah?

- ***Torah*** is the name for the Old Testament expectations that were seen as integral to living out the Jewish faith as revealed by God himself at Sinai. (aka the "Law")
- *This was **NOT** "salvation by works"!*
- How is someone considered "righteous"? **By faith in accepting the covenant as revealed by God at Sinai!**



"[T]hose who accept the covenant, which carries with it God's promise of salvation, **accept also the obligation** to obey the commandments given by God in connection with the covenant. One who **accepts the covenant** and **remains within it is 'righteous',** and that title applies to him ***both*** as one who obeys God ***and*** as one who has a 'share in the world to come', but **the former does not earn the latter**." – E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*

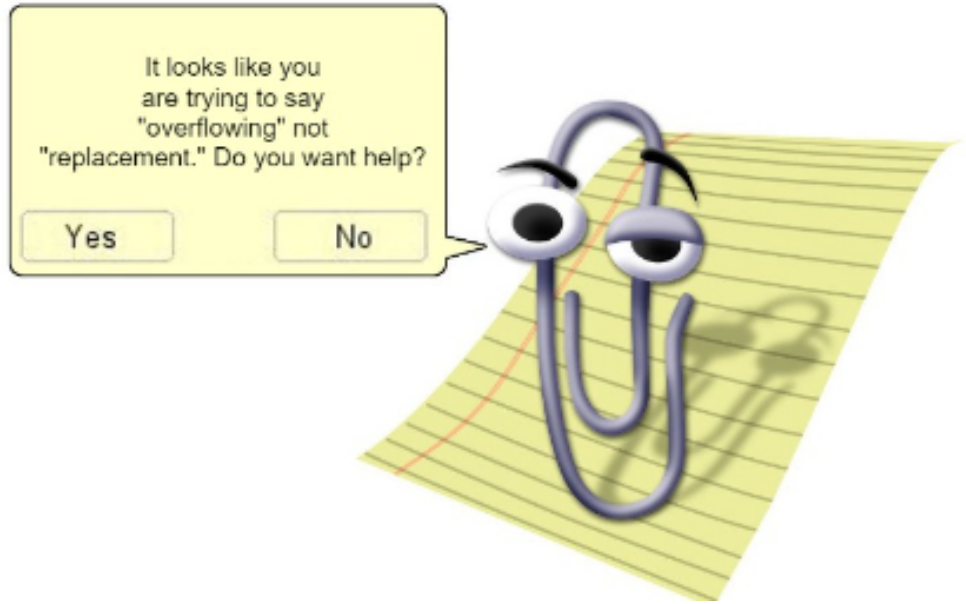
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Theme: Jesus as Torah

- Matthew has long been noted for its affinities with 2nd Temple Judaism
- Some ways this is expressed:
  - OT citations – constructs OT "doublets" where he combines verses
  - Focus on 1st century Jewish issues such as Torah observance
  - Presentation of Jesus as the ultimate Messiah, rabbi, Son of God
- In Matthew, Jesus is the ultimate referent of Torah – he is Torah *in the flesh* – the living Torah
- *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* (Matt. 5:17)

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Theme: Jesus as Torah



- What could this “fulfillment” mean?
- Greek word: *pleroo* – “filling a cup” as if to overflowing
- Used throughout Matthew to point to Jesus as the ultimate signal of Torah
- Jesus is the new life described by Jeremiah 31:33 –
  - “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts”
  - In Jesus, Torah is finding its ultimate purpose – overflowing at the cross

“They remain the authoritative word of God. But role will no longer be the same, now that what they pointed forward to has come, and it will be for Jesus’ followers to discern in the light of his teaching and practice what is now the right way to apply those texts in the new situation which his coming has created…”

RT France, *The Gospel According to Matthew,* NCINT, pg. 183

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Theme: Jesus as Torah

- An example: Jesus picks wheat on the Sabbath - Mt. 12:1-8
  - Jesus appeals to human need as the ultimate criteria for whether Torah allows it
  - Cites David and the Temple priests as justification
  - “One greater than the temple is here.”
  - Ends with “For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”
- Next passage: healing of a man with withered hand – Mt. 12:9-14
  - Same question: can Sabbath law be broken in favor of mercy
  - Jesus literally demonstrates with a miracle his authority to fulfill/over-rule Torah practice about the Sabbath
  - Why do the leaders want to destroy Jesus?

Jesus is not just the Son of God, Messiah, and Son of Man. He is Torah come to life, demonstrating the real message of Torah, now written on the hearts of believers thru the cross and resurrection



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Theme: Discipleship

- So what does it mean to live like Jesus is Torah?
- Definitive teaching sections throughout Matthew following narrative sections

Group Activity:

- Read Matthew Ch. 5:21 – 26
  - How would you describe the behavioral standards here?
  - Is this realistic or idealistic?
- In Matthew, discipleship is:
  - A radical calling
  - Hyper-ethical
  - Leads to persecution

Celsus (178 AD) on Christians:

"Christians, needless to say, utterly detest one another; they slander each other constantly with the vilest forms of abuse and cannot come to any sort of agreement in their teaching. Each sect brands its own, fills the head of its own with deceitful nonsense..."

On The True Doctrine, 91

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Theme: Discipleship

- What should discipleship look like in our church?

- What do we do well and what do we need to improve on?



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Today's Takeaways

- The gospels are focused on the death and resurrection of Christ
- Mark is focused on revealing who Jesus is and pushing the reader to decide what to do about it
- Matthew presents Jesus as the living Torah, bringing about the reality of Jer. 33 through the cross



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Preparation for Next Week

- Reading:
  - Gospel According to John, Luke
  - Burge / Green – Chapter 10, 11

- Writing:
  - Theological ditty topic: “Why do you think the Gospel of John is so different from the other three gospels?”

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