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**Week – 3**

**The Formation of the New Testament**

The resurrection of Jesus. (31 AD)	The event which gave rise to the Christian Faith.
The Conversion of St. Paul (35 AD)	Reported in Acts.
Paul, Letters to the Churches (49 – 62 AD)	Only those called 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, 1Thessalonians, Philemon and Phillipians are without dispute Paul's writings.
Gospel of Mark ( 65 AD )	Most scholars agree that Mark's was the first gospel to be written.
Destruction of the Temple ( 70 AD )	In the year 66 AD the Jews of Judea rebelled against their Roman masters. In response, the Emperor Nero dispatched an army under the generalship of Vespasian to restore order. By the year 68, resistance in the northern part of the province had been eradicated and the Romans turned their full attention to the subjugation of Jerusalem. That same year, the Emperor Nero died by his own hand, creating a power vacuum in Rome. In the resultant chaos, Vespasian was declared Emperor and returned to the Imperial City. It fell to his son, Titus, to lead the remaining army in the assault on Jerusalem.
Gospel of Matthew ( 82 AD )	Composed largely of St. Mark's material with modifications and additions; notably the birth narrative and the teaching of Jesus.
Gospel of Luke & Acts of the Apostles ( 90 AD )	Also, most of St. Mark's gospel plus another different birth narrative and teaching of Jesus.
Gospel of John ( 100 AD )	Quite different in style and content from the earlier Gospels. It is structured around the seven signs of the Kingdom and the 'I AM' sayings which are not the <i>Ipsissima Verba</i> of Jesus.

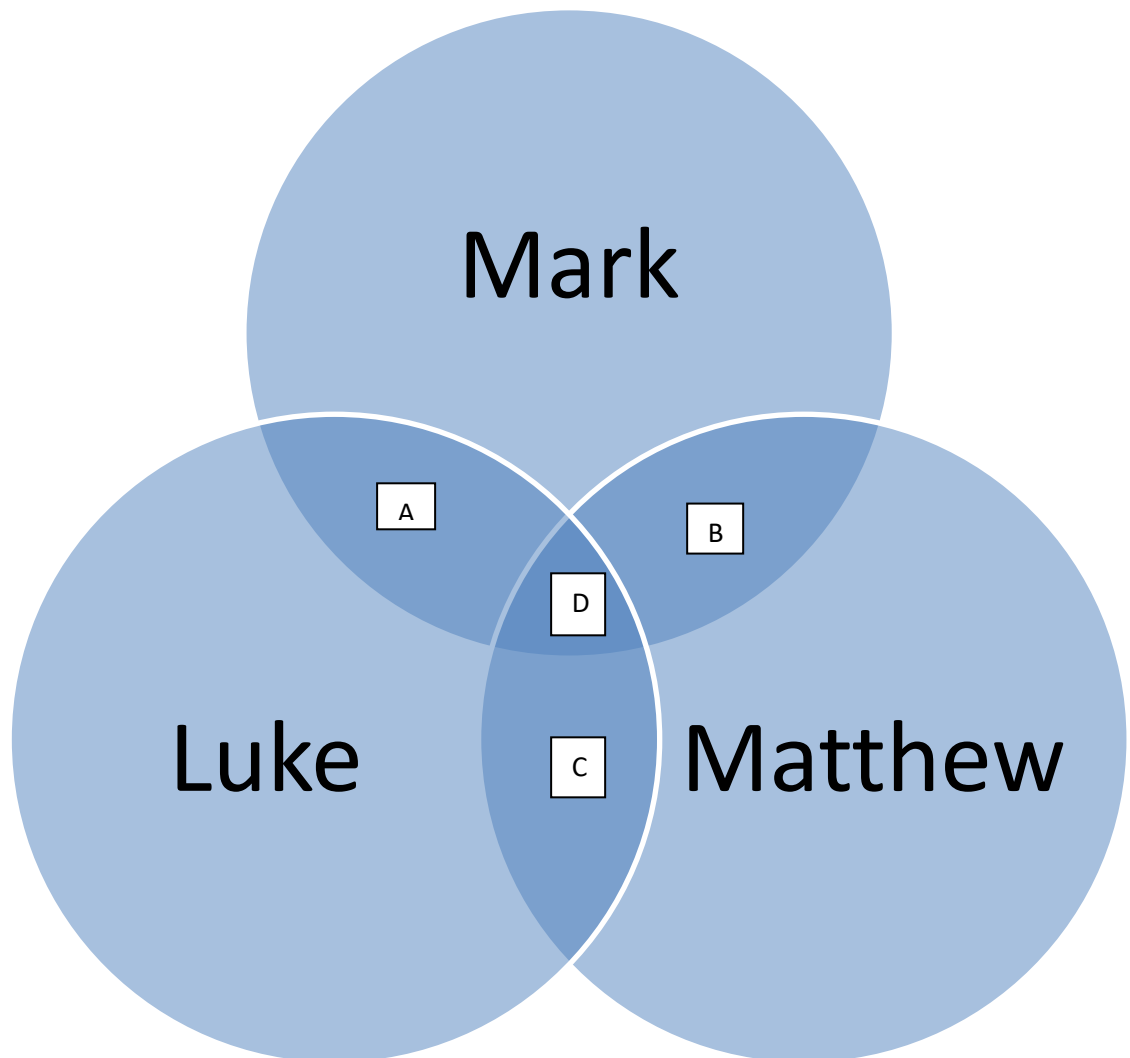
The Bible is a library comprising a wide range of literary genre. The Old Testament includes Myth, Legend, Poetry, History, Songs, Prophecy (insight not foresight) Law and Apocalyptic literature. The New Testament contains Gospels and Letters which draw heavily on the Old Testament material. In particular, the New Testament writers used themes and stories from the Old Testament in order to express their conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. Clearly such a wide spectrum of writing cannot be interpreted in a uniform way which ignores the particular literary genre. If the Bible is to be interpreted in a way which is understandable and credible to 21<sup>st</sup> century people care must be taken to appreciate the 'setting in life' in which each book was written.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the **Synoptic Gospels** because they include many of the same stories, often in the same sequence, and sometimes exactly the same wording. This degree of parallelism in content, narrative arrangement, language, and sentence structures can only be accounted for by literary interdependence. Most scholars believe that these gospels share the same point of view and are clearly linked. The term synoptic comes from the Greek *syn*, meaning "together", and *optic*, meaning "seen". According to the majority of biblical scholars, Mark was the first gospel to be written. Matthew and Luke then used Mark as a source, as well as a hypothetical sayings gospel known as Q. Matthew and Luke also included unique material, and the sources for this

material are designated M and L, respectively. The synoptic gospels are the primary source for historical information about Jesus.

This Venn diagram illustrates the logical relationships between the synoptic gospels. *The areas of the diagram are not meant to be proportional to the volume of text.*

### THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS



A + D: – Text shared by Mark & Luke.  <i>Mark ∩ Luke</i>	‘Whoever is not against us is for us’ Mark 9: 38 – 40, Luke 9:49 – 50.
B + D: – Text shared by Mark & Matthew.  <i>Mark ∩ Matthew</i>	Jesus feeds 4,000 people Matt. 15: 32 – 39, Mark 8: 1 – 10
D + C :- Text shared by Luke & Matthew <i>Luke ∩ Matthew</i>	Jesus calls the first disciples Matt. 4: 18-22: Mark 1: 16-20; Luke 5:1-11
C – Text shared by Luke & Matthew but not Mark. ( Q ).	The Birth of Jesus Luke 2: 1 – 7, Matthew 1: 18 – 24 The teaching of Jesus Matt. 5: 1 – 30; 38 – end and chapters 6&7.
D – Text shared by Mark, Matthew & Luke.  <i>Mark ∩ Luke ∩ Matthew</i>	Preaching of John the Baptist Mark 1: 1 – 8, Luke 3: 1 – 18, Matthew 3:1 – 12 and ‘Little Apocalypse’– Mark 13; Matt. 24; Luke 21 .

### Mark: Beyond Mythology to Reality.

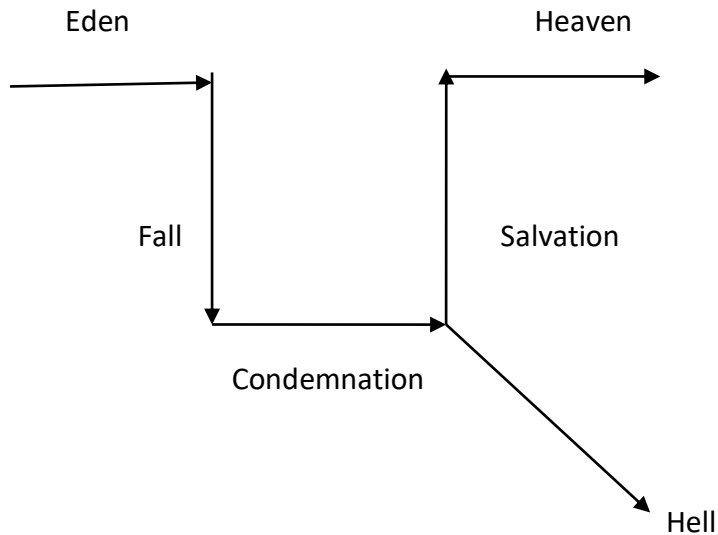
Do demonic spirits exist? Do they speak Are they responsible for wind and storm? Do they grapple with people and throw them to the ground in violent seizures? Is history to be understood in terms of the struggle between God the creator and the demon spirits who have taken over that creation? Does the divine nature of Jesus reside primarily in his ability to cast out these demonic forces, to break their power over human life? Why was the death of Jesus marked with the violent tearing of the curtain in the Temple? Was that magic? Can a citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century respond in a meaningful way to this pre-scientific analysis of reality?

The early Christian view of things, like the late Jewish view on which it was largely based, was eschatological; that is, it held :

- 1 That the universe had been brought into being by a single act of creation by God
- 2 That God had a definite purpose for it
- 3 That throughout history God had exerted pressure on his creation to conform to that purpose
- 4 That under the influence of various powers it had diverged from that purpose
- 5 That at some point God would intervene to overthrow these powers and bring about a state of affairs that he had originally intended.
- 6 That this final state of affairs would involve for certain chosen people a life of unending bliss in God’s presence.

The final intervention by God was believed by some as ‘heaven on earth’, others as a ‘new heaven and a new earth’ for his elect. Others combined both views and thought of a

period of bliss in this world followed by an eternity of glory in the next. According to most schemes, the dead of past generations were to be raised to face judgment and a consequent assignment to eternal bliss or eternal torment. Among the early Christians, God's decisive act and the state of affairs it would bring about, were referred to as 'The Kingdom of God' or 'The Kingdom of Heaven'. This scheme of things is presented in the form of a diagram.



To be a Christian – in the West at least, since the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century - has required us to believe that the bible presents this very specific storyline by which we assess our lives. Most of us know this storyline implicitly even though it has never been made explicit for us. This storyline can be illustrated by six simple lines. We start on the left with a state of absolute perfection in the Garden of Eden. Then comes the 'fall into original sin'; a phrase never used in the Bible. The bottom trough is a state in which we are living, a state referred to as 'the fallen world'. Next comes an ascending line called 'salvation', leading us to heaven. Of course for many people – perhaps the majority of people – the ending is not so happy. Does this story contribute to a higher vision of God, a deeper engagement with Christ, a more profound experience of the Holy Spirit? Does it motivate us to love God, neighbour, and enemy more whole-heartedly? I think not. This storyline is however still believed by many in the Church – some who tweak it slightly by including purgatory and by reducing the number of candidates for hell – others who positively rejoice that they are the 'chosen' few and delight in the prospect of their enemies ending up in Hell. It is also believed by many outside the church who as a consequence reject institutional religion.

Mark accepted the 'street version' of this mythology without question. For him the earth was flat, God was out there beyond the heavens and Satan was down there in hell. Life was a struggle between the forces of Satan and God. Jesus was God's emissary. In the life of this Jesus the conflict between good and evil, God and Satan, was being waged. If this frame of reference is not understood by the reader, the Gospel of Mark makes no sense. But if this frame of reference becomes literalised, it becomes unbelievable in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our task then, is to peel away the outer surface of this writing and search for the person of Jesus who was the source of inspiration for Mark.

The earliest Christians expected Christ's return and the complete establishment of God's kingdom within one or two generations, so from their point of view it was natural to regard the three stages of Christ's work, his earthly life, his present Lordship in heaven, and his future coming, as three acts of a single drama. Since the first Christians were all Jews, they naturally set this drama against the background of the Old Testament and saw it as the final phase of the salvation history of the Jews. St. Mark was therefore not much interested in the earthly life of Jesus – there is no account of his birth and little reference to his family or his genealogy. We know that the mother of Jesus was Mary (Mark 6:3), and that his brothers were called James, Joseph, Judas and Simon (sisters were not named – naturally). The name of Jesus' presumed father was never mentioned. St. Mark's main concern is with the manner of his death and his right to be called the Son of God. This status as the divine Son of God was demonstrated in his power over the works of Satan. There are no resurrection appearances except those referred to in later additions to the gospel. The gospel in its earliest form ends at verse 16:8. *'So they went out and ran from the tomb, distressed and terrified. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.'*

#### Exercises

Read the following sections of Mark's Gospel and compare with the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke.

A Mother's request; Mark 10 : 35 – 45;. Matthew 20: 20 – 28. [B]

A Canaanite Woman; Mark 7: 24 – 30; Matthew 15: 21 - 28. [B]

Healing of a Demon Possessed man; Mark 5: 1 – 20; Matt. 8: 28 – 34; Luke 8: 26 – 29 [D]

'Little Apocalypse'; Mark 13; Matt. 24; Luke 21 [D]

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