

# Course Study Guide

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## NT218

# *Matthew-Mark: Two Presentations of Jesus*

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Updated 2014

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Our Daily Bread  
Christian University

# Lesson 1 Study Guide

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**NT218**

*Matthew-Mark:  
Two Presentations  
of Jesus*

Is The New Testament Really  
The New Testament?

Updated 2014

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# Objectives

How do we know that what is in our New Testament is what the apostles actually wrote? How do we know the books in the New Testament are the ones that belong there? This lesson explores these two questions by introducing you to textual criticism and canonicity; two disciplines that provide essential foundations for confidence in the New Testament record.

When you complete this lesson, “Is the New Testament Really the New Testament?” you should be able to:

- Explain how the discipline of textual criticism is performed and what it contributes to our confidence in the validity of the New Testament books.
- Explain the process used to recognize which books to include in the New Testament.
- List and describe various disciplines used in New Testament studies.
- Increase your confidence and skill as you study the New Testament.

# Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 19-28.

# Transcript

## Course Title: Matthew - Mark: Two Presentations of Jesus

### Lesson One: Is the New Testament Really the New Testament?

#### I. Introduction to Canon, Text, and Gospels

In this lesson we want to cover three different topics. Two form part of the broader historical background to understanding the New Testament that our previous lessons have already begun. The third deals with the writing of the Gospels themselves, as we prepare to move directly to the New Testament documents. The first two topics involve what the scholars call the canon and the textual criticism of the New Testament. The canon, which comes from a Greek word meaning a “measuring rod” or “device,” refers to the collection of books that ultimately were chosen for the label “the New Testament.” How were they chosen? What was left out, what was included, and why?

#### II. The New Testament Canon

Now many people will have heard of the difference between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches with respect to the canon of Scripture. They may have even heard of the term “Apocrypha.” This is a term that refers to a dozen or more books from the intertestamental period, which we have already been studying, written in between the Old and New Testaments, which were never considered canonical or authoritative by Jews, as far as we can tell, but which some in the emerging church, particularly in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries—as Roman Catholicism began to develop in the form that it would later become well-known—valued and therefore at times considered canonical. Strictly speaking, this is a debate for a series of studies on the Old Testament; and therefore we need not go into more detail here.

##### A. Pseudepigrapha

There are other books that were not considered canonical (by either Jews or Christians) from the intertestamental period, but enrich our understanding of its history, of its religion, and of its literary forms. These are known as the pseudepigrapha, and from time to time they will crop up in studies of the background of the New Testament as well. What we are concerned about in the study of the New Testament is whether or not there was ever any disagreement as to the twenty-seven books, and by what process those twenty-seven books emerged to form what Christians believed was an authoritative collection of inspired documents from God.

##### B. Books of the New Testament

The process was a gradual one. The earliest testimony that we have comes from approximately the mid-second century, as lists of New Testament books that were to be considered authoritative began to emerge. By the time of Tertullian, around the end of the second century,

roughly 200 A.D., the concept was expressed that since the old covenant, the covenant with Moses at Sinai, led to a written record of that covenant, emerging over centuries as the Hebrew Scriptures, so also it was natural to expect there to be a written form of the new covenant, the covenant which Jeremiah, in the old covenant, or testament (the words are the same in Hebrew and Greek), had already pointed forward to in Jeremiah 31:31 and following, when God prophesied through Jeremiah that the days would be coming when He would make a new covenant with His people in which His laws would be written on their hearts, internalized apparently in a way that did not always characterize the Old Testament age.

There are also hints in the documents that came to form the New Testament that the revelation of God to Jesus and to the apostles and the first Christians would take on written form. In John's gospel in particular, in John 14:26 and 15:26, Jesus promises to go away but to send the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, the one who will lead His disciples into all truth and bring to mind everything which he had said to them and had taught them. For these reasons, therefore, theologically the concept of a new covenant, issuing in a written collection of books, the New Testament, was a natural outgrowth for early Christian thought.

As one moves into the 300s and 400s and 500s, increasingly ecumenical councils, or gatherings of Christian leaders from around the Roman Empire, convened to discuss more formally a variety of matters of Christian doctrine, often opposing what were believed to be heretical or false teachings that were developing. And among these discussions were discussions about the canon of Scripture. So the process was not one in which overnight God revealed to the fledgling church which twenty-seven books would be canonical. But it is one in which, at least many evangelical scholars believe, from very early on, after the end of the formation of these books the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century, these books were widely recognized as categorically different from other forms of religious writings.

### III. Criteria

More specifically, what were the criteria that led, eventually, to the inclusion of these twenty-seven books, even though discussions did take place as to whether some of them merited inclusion and one or two other documents that were ultimately excluded were at times put forward? The three major criteria are consistency, catholicity, and apostolicity.

#### A. Consistency

What do these terms mean? Consistency in this context refers to documents that cohered with previous Scripture. Clearly the New Testament was about Jesus, about the movement that He initiated, about the beliefs that His followers in the first generation of Christian history and thought taught to various early Christian individuals and congregations. But what was to distinguish the portraits of Jesus and of the sound doctrine and ethics that the apostles taught from other options, options such as those of a Gnosticizing form of Christianity, to which we alluded in the previous lesson? One of the important criteria was that the new revelations were not to be seen as contradicting anything in previous Scripture, that is, the Old Testament, or in earlier agreed upon New Testament documents.

## B. Catholicity

The criterion, secondly, of catholicity refers to universality or somewhat more accurately, the widespread nature of the acceptance of these documents. Documents that emerged just out of one particular sect would not qualify. Rather these books had to have circulated widely throughout the early Roman Empire and been found accurate and helpful and useful by a wide cross section of the first Christians.

## C. Apostolic Authority

Thirdly, the criterion of apostolicity. This means that a plausible claim could be made that each of these books was penned by an apostle or by one who was a close associate of an apostle. Matthew, John, and Peter were among the Twelve. Mark and Luke, tradition alleges, derived their teachings primarily from the apostles Peter and Paul respectively. And although the authorship of Hebrews is disputed—as we noted in our introductory lesson—the candidates that have been put forward have all been close companions of the apostle Paul.

## D. Books Left Out

What types of books were left out? Second-century orthodox writings, collected today in convenient, translated, accessible collections known as the apostolic fathers, were left out, not because there was primarily any false teaching, but because the authors recognized that they were living in an era beyond the era of revelation to the apostles and to their followers. So-called New Testament apocrypha, written no earlier than the third century and spanning several centuries after that, are additional gospels, acts, epistles, or apocalypses trying to fill in the perceived gaps in the New Testament record. But their historical value in most cases is very negligible.

And then we have mentioned the Gnostic writings, other heterodox, or what was believed to be false teachings, emerged from certain sectarian circles. One of the most famous of these, that has engaged much scholarly attention in recent years, is the gospel of Thomas, a document containing 114 sayings largely unconnected together by narrative—purportedly revelations from Jesus to the disciples, about a third of which resemble teachings in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, roughly another third without parallel but not unorthodox in doctrine, and roughly a final third clearly Gnostic in origin. Although a few scholars have speculated that perhaps a few sayings in the gospel of Thomas might reflect true teachings of Jesus preserved outside the canon, for the most part there is little that can supplement in an historically accurate way the teachings of the apostles within the canon.

## IV. Accuracy of the Text

But a second question that proceeds from our discussion of the canon—How do we know that we have what are most likely to be the documents that God genuinely inspired and gave as a new covenant revelation?—is the question of the text of the New Testament. Is it realistic to believe that after two thousand years and thousands upon thousands of copies being made for centuries entirely by hand, that we have an accurate knowledge of what those twenty-seven books originally

contained? We must freely confess at the outset that we have no known autograph, that is to say, no copy that we have reason to believe was the actual parchment or papyrus on which any New Testament author put ink to pen.

### A. Textual Evidence

On the other hand, the textual evidence that we do have for the New Testament is literally outstanding in comparison to the textual evidence of any other ancient document, historical or otherwise, from antiquity from that part of the world. The oldest known copy of any part of the New Testament is a fragment of just a few verses out of John towards the end of his gospel, that dates to approximately 125 to 140 A.D. John, as one of the last New Testament documents written, perhaps only in the 90s, would have written his autograph barely thirty, forty, or fifty years before that. By the end of the New Testament times, we have existing entire gospels or entire epistles, at times perhaps without a handful of verses that had been torn off or there had been holes in the scroll.

### B. Older Translations

By the time we reach the fourth and fifth centuries, we begin to find existing copies of complete or virtually complete New Testaments. Now interestingly, in the history of the translation of the New Testament the six oldest and most reliable copies of an almost complete or complete for the most part were not discovered until recent centuries. During the time of the Protestant Reformation, when the King James version was first created in English, when Luther's Bible was being created slightly earlier than that in Germany, the Reina Valera in Spain, and a variety of other European languages what for those days was a modern European language translation rather than the Latin that the Roman Catholics had preserved for so many years, when all of these translations were coming and many of them were made very meticulously, none of these oldest half dozen or so almost complete New Testaments were known. These discoveries came later, and there are significant textual differences between the older texts and some of the later texts. Today those who follow a modern language translation with footnotes or with marginal notes will regularly have textual variance presented for them, so that the reader today can see where the most interesting and significant of those textual differences occur.

### C. Modern Translations

In the English-speaking world, undoubtedly the three most widely approved and commonly used Protestant translations of the Scriptures have been the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, and the Revised Standard Version, which has been revised again in recent years and is known as the New Revised Standard Version. The vast majority of all of these textual variants that modern language translations incorporate involved very minor errors of spelling, of accidental omission of words or letters or repetition; and these are very easily corrected and are not even noted in the margins of our translations. Occasionally there are theologically significant differences that may have been made intentionally by early Christian scribes to try to smooth out an apparent difficulty in the text or may have been made accidentally.

Only in a handful of cases in the New Testament is an entire verse or verse to a verse and a half in question, and in only two instances is a major chunk of text textually disputed. These two instances are found in the so-called longer ending of Mark's gospel, Mark 16:9-20 in the standard English versification, and the story of the woman caught in adultery in John's gospel—John 7:53-8:11. Textual critics are fairly much agreed that it is doubtful that either of these chunks of text were what Mark or John initially wrote in their autographs. In the longer ending of Mark there are even some signs of some potentially theologically troubling passages: disciples promised that they could pick up snakes or drink their venom without being harmed. In the story in John of the woman caught in adultery, many scholars believe that this is an historically authentic incident—it rings true to everything we know about Jesus' career—but it may well first of all been preserved outside of John's gospel and only added at a later date by an early Christian scribe. What is important to say is, notwithstanding these two dramatic disputed passages and the occasional verse or part of a verse (for example, the longer ending of the Lord's Prayer) no doctrine of Christianity hangs on any disputed text and anywhere from ninety-seven percent to upwards of ninety-nine percent of the New Testament is textually secure beyond any reasonable belief.

Historically, Christian doctrines of inspiration or of inerrancy have almost always referred only to the original autographs, not to any supposed perfect system of preservation of those texts. God providentially, however, seems to have seen fit to preserve the text well enough that no one will ever be led astray particularly if they rely on the most modern and most reliable up-to-date modern language translations. We have the very books that God intended to form the New Testament, and we have very accurate abilities to reconstruct the original Greek in which they were written, and therefore know their contents and know the handful of places where there still are uncertainties about those contents.

## V. Formation of the Gospels

We want to turn now to the first part of the New Testament itself, the Gospels, and raise one final introductory question about the formation of the Gospels: What was involved in writing a biography of Jesus? We have said already that the Gospels resemble the ancient literary genre of biography, but compared to modern biographies they are dramatically different—very little about Jesus' childhood or upbringing, next to nothing prior to his beginning of ministry at age 30, and Mark and John then in turn spending almost half of their gospels on the events that led up to and culminated in the last week of Jesus' life. This is highly disproportionate by modern biographical standards, but perfectly in keeping with the standards of ancient biographical writing where thematic rather than strictly chronological interests often accounted for the arrangement of a work and where the ideologically most significant elements of a famous individual were given the most attention.

### A. External Evidence for the Life of Jesus

There is, however, paradoxically an interesting pair of problems when one assesses the evidence for the life of Jesus. On the one hand, apart from the four canonical Gospels we have extremely little historical information that has been preserved. Josephus, the Jewish historian, preserves the most information and only in a handful of passages, later Jewish literature, the



occasional reference in a Greco-Roman historian, enable us to say with confidence that Jesus was a Jew who lived in the first century, who gathered disciples, who was baptized by John, who preached about the kingdom of God, who had a reputation for being a miracle worker, particularly exorcising people, who broke barriers of fellowship particularly over meals, who got Himself in enough trouble with the authorities to be arrested by the Jews to be convicted by the Romans of sedition. Notwithstanding all of that, there were among His followers people who believed He was the Messiah and who believed they saw Him come to life again.

Beyond that there is very little we can prove outside of the New Testament itself. And yet from one point of view that is a remarkable lot to be corroborated elsewhere, simply because ancient history tended to be about the military and political exploits of emperors and their courts, rather than the obscure stories of an apparently defeated religious movement and a crucified founder who held no official institutional religious office. On the other hand, the second part of the paradoxical problem with the evidence surrounding Jesus is that we seem to have too much.

## B. Synoptic Gospels and Gospel of John

We seem to have an abundance of evidence in the New Testament, or to put it even more pointedly the evidence at times seems to contradict itself. Matthew, Mark and Luke are more like each other than unlike each other, and hence have come to be known as the Synoptic Gospels from the Greek words for a “together look.” One can look at the three together, one can put their material in parallel columns in a synopsis or harmony of the Gospels (this has often been done) and compare and contrast their similarities and differences. On the other hand, the gospel of John is more unlike his three predecessors than like them and this also creates interesting problems for the historian and for the believer as to why the Gospels differ as they do.

Now throughout the greatest part of Christian history and the study of the church, many of these problems were not directly addressed head on. The most common practice from the second century on was precisely to create a harmony of the Gospels—a harmonization in which all of the material of all four Gospels was fitted together into one possible coherent chronology of the life of Christ. The only problem was that God could well have chosen to inspire precisely such a harmony, precisely such a document, and for whatever purposes He did not choose to do so. By creating such a life of Christ, we lose the flavor of the distinctive form of each of the four Gospels in which Christians believe God did inspire them. So it has been largely the product of the last two hundred years when a variety of critical or analytical methods have developed in which the Synoptic Problem—the problem of the relationship of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and the Johannine question, the relationship of John to the synoptics—has been explored in more detail.

## VI. Biblical Criticism

We may think of the four very broad periods of historical investigation in the rise of modern biblical criticism that has addressed these issues.

## A. Source Criticism

The oldest of these is the issue of source criticism: how are these documents related literarily? And the view that has become most popular for a variety of reasons is that Mark was the earliest. Matthew and Luke both knew and used Mark in places, but supplemented him with their own information, some of which may have been from a now lost sayings source. Scholars call it “Q” from the German word *quelle* meaning “source”—some of which may have been from their own distinctive sources, including, in Matthew’s case, if indeed he was the apostle by that name, his own memory.

## B. Form Criticism

A second phase is the phase that we know as form criticism, in which the oral period between the life of Jesus and the writing down of the Gospels, no earlier than twenty to thirty years later and maybe somewhat later than that, took place. The stories of Jesus circulated in different forms, parables, miracle stories, proverbs, and so on, and many scholars believe that different histories of these forms can be traced throughout the period in which the teachings and deeds of Jesus circulated by word of mouth. Sometimes form critics are quite skeptical about the historical trustworthiness of the tradition during this period, but other more evangelical scholars have pointed out that first-century Judaism was a culture that had cultivated high arts of memorization and it would have been quite possible for the disciples to preserve this information very accurately.

## C. Redaction Criticism

The third period dominating the last half-century or so in biblical scholarship is that of redaction criticism, from the German word *redaktion*, which simply means “editing.” This focuses on the purposefulness of the four gospel writers, their theological emphases, and their reasons for putting together the traditions in the way they did. It seeks to identify the distinctive themes that each sought to communicate to distinctive audiences.

## D. Literary Criticism

Then finally we come to a period of literary criticism in which the Gospels are read as one would read any other great works, novels, or histories to understand the plot, the dynamic among the characters, periods of climax, tragedy, comedy, and the like. All of these elements will come together as we turn now to a brief introduction to each of the four Gospels separately, but at least they give a little bit of an overview of the types of issues with which scholars are concerned.

# Discussion Questions

How would you respond to a person who asks, “Why should I believe the New Testament is more authoritative than the holy books of other religions?”

In your own words, give a brief explanation of how the New Testament came to be.

Describe in your own words, the three major criteria the twenty-seven books of the New Testament had to meet to be included in the New Testament.

# Further Study

## **Suggested reading for this lesson:**

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 47: “Between the Testaments” (The Apocrypha)

## **Philip Yancey Devotional**

### **Signs of Life - Matthew 27:62-28:15**

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, Who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said.” (Matt. 28:5-6)

When the greatest miracle of all history occurred, the only eyewitnesses were soldiers standing guard outside Jesus’ tomb. When the earth shook and an angel appeared, bright as lightning, these guards trembled and became like dead men. Then, with an incurably human reflex, they fled to the authorities to report the disturbance.

But here is an astounding fact: Later that afternoon the soldiers, who had seen proof of the Resurrection with their own eyes, changed their story. The resurrection of the Son of God did not seem nearly as significant as, say, stacks of freshly minted silver.

A few women, grieving friends of Jesus, were next to learn of the Miracle of Miracles. Matthew reports that when an angel broke the news of Jesus’ resurrection, the women hurried away “afraid yet filled with joy.” Fear, the reflexive human response to a supernatural encounter—when the women heard from a glowing angel firsthand news of an event beyond comprehension, of course they felt afraid. Yet filled with joy—the news they heard was the best news of all, news too good to be true, news so good it had to be true. Jesus was back! He had returned, as promised. The dreams of the Messiah all came surging back as the women ran fearfully and joyfully to tell the disciples.

Even as the women ran, the soldiers were rehearsing an alibi, their part in an elaborate cover-up scheme. Like everything else in Jesus’ life, His resurrection drew forth two contrasting responses. Those who believed were transformed, finding enough hope and courage to go out and change the world. But those who chose not to believe found ways to ignore evidence they had seen with their own eyes.

Life Question: What makes you believe, or not believe, in Jesus?

# Glossary

**Apocrypha** — (Greek “hidden things”) The books and portions of books present in the Septuagint and Vulgate but not included in the Jewish and Protestant canon

**Form Criticism** — The study of the history and function of the forms in which traditions or messages are communicated

**Literary Criticism** — Literary criticism is the investigation of a text that seeks to explicate the intention and achievements of the author through a detailed analysis of the component elements and structure of the text itself.

**Pseudepigrapha** — (Greek “falsely entitled”) In Protestant tradition since the seventeenth century, the term has been used to designate those intertestamental ancient Jewish and Hellenistic Jewish writings not in the Old Testament canon or in the Apocrypha.

**Redaction Criticism** — (German *Redaktionsgeschichte*) The study of how literary materials are organized, interpreted, and modified by an author or editor. The term “redaction” in gospel criticism describes the editorial work carried out by the evangelists on their sources when they composed the Gospels.

**Source Criticism** — Source criticism attempts to discover the written sources behind various parts of biblical text.

# Quiz

1. In the context used in this lesson, the term “consistency” refers to:
  - A. Scripture that was consistent with the Gnostic writings
  - B. Documents that cohered with previous Scripture
  - C. Verses that match word for word
  - D. Accuracy of transcribing
2. In this period of criticism, the Gospels were read as one would read great works, novels, or histories to understand the plot.
  - A. Redaction criticism
  - B. Form criticism
  - C. Source criticism
  - D. Literary criticism
3. The content of the Gospels:
  - A. Can be summed up in the statement, “If you have read one, you have read them all”
  - B. Will reveal the total life of Christ
  - C. Is always laid out in chronological order
  - D. Is thematic rather than strictly chronological
4. The gospels of Matthew and Luke used two main written sources, which were:
  - A. Q and the gospel of Mark
  - B. Q and the gospel of John
  - C. Q and the gospel of Thomas
  - D. The gospels of Mark and John
5. To Christians Jesus Christ is the central person of human history . . .
  - A. but very little information about Him can be learned from sources outside the Bible.
  - B. but no information about Him can be learned from sources outside the Bible.
  - C. and subsequently a great deal of information about Him can be learned from sources outside the Bible.
  - D. but He is only known from the Bible.
6. What are the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha?
  - A. Sets of books that are accepted by all Christians as probably inspired by God but not as important as the books in the canon
  - B. Sets of books not included in the Protestant canon, although the Apocrypha is included in the Catholic canon
  - C. Sets of books not included in the Protestant canon, although both are included in the Catholic canon
  - D. Sets of books which offer solid Christian doctrine but which nevertheless have been determined non-canonical

7. Which of the following is **true** of the gospel of John?
  - A. It is more unlike the other three gospels than it is like them.
  - B. It has been called the Johannine gospel, which means a “together look.”
  - C. It is similar to the gospel of Mark.
  - D. Its author is unknown.
  
8. Which of the following is true of the books of the Apocrypha, as far as we can tell?
  - A. They have been included in the Bible since the second century.
  - B. They record events from the early first century.
  - C. The Jewish people never considered them authoritative or canonical.
  - D. None of the above
  
9. Which of the following criteria is not used in determining the canonicity of book?
  - A. Spirituality
  - B. Consistency
  - C. Catholicity
  - D. Apostolicity
  
10. What is apostolic authority?
  - A. The authority of an apostle to determine which books would become part of the New Testament canon
  - B. Gives authority to those books that describe the life of an apostle or of a close associate of an apostle
  - C. The authority of an apostle to determine who could be baptized.
  - D. Gives authority to those books written by an apostle or by a close associate of an apostle

Answers: 1.B 2. D 3. D 4. A 5. A 6. B 7. A 8. C 9. A 10. D

# Lesson 2 Study Guide

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NT218

## *Matthew-Mark: Two Presentations of Jesus*

Matthew - Mark: Two Stories of Jesus

Updated 2014

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Christian University



# Objectives

This lesson studies Jesus' life as recorded in Matthew and Mark. Their purpose, background, emphases, and audiences are explored. Similarities and differences between each writer's record and the other three gospels are presented and explained to give you a fuller understanding of the incomprehensible Jesus.

When you complete this lesson, "Matthew – Mark: Two Stories of Jesus," you should be able to:

- Discuss authorship, audience, dating, and purpose for writing Matthew and Mark.
- Name and explain the major themes and the outlines of Matthew and Mark.
- Explain how Matthew and Mark each portray Jesus and why they did so.
- Gain greater appreciation for the amazing person Jesus Christ is.

# Scripture Reading

Read Mark 1-8.

# Transcript

## Course Title: Matthew - Mark: Two Presentations of Jesus

### Lesson Two: Matthew—Mark: Two Stories of Jesus

#### I. Introduction to Matthew and Mark

For this and the next lesson we now turn to an introduction to each of the four Gospels. In this lesson we will look at Mark, which is believed to have been written first, and then Matthew. We want to try to understand the Gospels as they were originally written, as different authors, evangelists, to specific Christian communities with distinct purposes in mind and distinct circumstances that elicited those purposes. We begin with the gospel of Mark.

#### II. Gospel of Mark

##### A. Presentation of Jesus

If we ask the question of distinctive themes or theology, the most natural place to begin is with the way each gospel writer presents Jesus. Obviously they have much in common, but the distinctives are telling as well. Mark is the gospel which some commentators have claimed has the best balance in his presentation between the divinity and the humanity of Christ. In fact, his gospel falls neatly into two halves, roughly the first eight chapters presenting an action-packed, dynamic narrative of Jesus' ministry—focusing particularly on His miracles, on His triumphs, and on His ability to amaze the crowds. Then abruptly after Peter's confession on the road to Caesarea Philippi, in 8:27 and following, Mark's narrative turns toward the cross. Many fewer miracles appear here—much more teaching for the disciples instead, and the teaching often is on the need to suffer. The glory of the first half of the gospel, as it were, is increasingly replaced by a focus on the cross. One famous turn-of-the-century commentator, Martin Kahler, spoke of the gospel of Mark as a passion narrative with an extended introduction, and this famous remark is not too far from the truth.

##### B. Son of God

In the first half of Mark's gospel, appear those indications most clearly of His divinity. The opening verse of Mark 1:1 speaks of Jesus, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus, who is the Christ, and who is the Son of God. While the term "Son of God" does not appear frequently in the gospel, it appears again at the close of the gospel in Mark 15:39 on the lips of the centurion seeing the way in which Jesus dies. The term "Son" by itself also appears at the strategically located incidence of Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration. For Mark, "Son of God" is a title of majesty, pointing to Jesus' divinity. The emphasis on the healings and miracles, that we have just mentioned characterize the opening half of Mark's gospel, furthers this sense of one who comes with supernatural powers. But that divinity is also balanced by Jesus' humanity.

### C. Messiah

The second title that Mark 1:1 introduces us to, the “Christ,” is a significant title throughout Mark’s gospel, and Christ is the Greek equivalent of Messiah. And one of the striking features, particularly so in Mark more than in any other gospel, is the number of times when someone recognizes Jesus as the Christ only to have Jesus tell him, as it were, to keep it silent. This motif has come to be known as the “Messianic secret.” We see it following Peter’s confession on the road to Caesarea Philippi in perhaps the most dramatic fashion of all. Wherein in Matthew’s parallel in Matthew 16, Jesus praises Peter for several verses and gives him the keys to the kingdom; in Mark, all He does is silence him. Mark 9:9 gives us a clue as to the reason for this Messianic secret; it is only after Jesus’ resurrection that people will fully be able to understand Who He is. Prior to His resurrection, it will be too easy for people to misconstrue His ministry as one merely of a popular military or political leader or liberator.

### D. Suffering Servant

The theme of “Suffering Servant” is a second one that fits into the focus on Jesus’ humanity in the gospel of Mark. Again, it is not the sheer frequency of the title but its strategic location. Mark 10:45 sums up, from Jesus’ mouth, His understanding of His coming death. “For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life, a ransom for many”—a probable allusion to Isaiah 53 and the ministry of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah’s prophecy, the “ransom” alluding to the ministry of a substitutionary atonement as Jesus pays the penalty in His death that sinners deserve to pay for theirs.

### E. Negative View of Disciples

In addition to distinctive views of Jesus, Mark is also well-known for having perhaps the most negative portrait of the disciples of any of the four Gospels. They too regularly misunderstand. Apparently Peter’s confession was inadequate (because of Jesus’ abrupt silencing of him) and that is made clear in the succeeding verses when Peter is not prepared for Jesus’ prediction that He must go to the cross. Jesus has to turn and rebuke Peter as one who is reflecting the viewpoint of Satan and not that of God. In Mark, Jesus’ disciples understand His parables less than they do anywhere else. And if we are right in our comments from our earlier lesson that the original copy of the gospel of Mark ended with 16:8, then Mark has deliberately ended his gospel without ever narrating an explicit resurrection appearance of Jesus. Rather the angel has told the women who were at the tomb that He was raised, that they should go tell His disciples, that they should meet Him in Galilee. But the original text of Mark most probably concluded with the words, “They did not say anything to anyone, for they were afraid.” Clearly, Mark’s community, Christians that they were, knew more of the story, but Mark chose to highlight the aspect of fear and misunderstanding on the part of the disciples.

Why so? This leads us to a consideration of the distinctive circumstances of the people to whom Mark was writing his gospel. The negative portrait of the disciples and the emphasis on the way to the cross has suggested to many that Mark was writing to a group of Christians who themselves felt very inadequate, perhaps in light of the growing persecution of early Christianity. And a frequent suggestion has placed the composition and sending of Mark’s

gospel to the decade of the 60s A.D., thirty-some years after the death of Jesus, as the persecution instigated by Nero was increasing in intensity. Mark 13, in which Jesus describes the coming destruction of the temple in very cryptic language as the abomination of desolation or the desolating sacrilege has led many to think that this is being written before the fulfillment of that prophecy in A.D. 70, after which point the description could have been much more explicit.

## F. Date and Setting of Mark

What little external evidence we have from the ancient church fits these suppositions in the writings of Irenaeus and Clement. We read the following from Irenaeus: “Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not indeed in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter who used to give teaching as necessity demanded, but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord’s oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.” From this we learn the belief that Mark was Peter’s associate, writing down the gospel events as he had learned them primarily from Peter, and apparently was concerned at times to write more thematically than strictly chronologically in sequence.

From Clement we read: “When Peter had preached the Word publicly to Rome and announced the gospel by the Spirit, those present, of whom there were many, besought Mark, since for a long time he had followed him and remembered what had been said, to record his words. Mark did this and communicated the gospel to those who made request of him. When Peter knew it he neither actively prevented nor encouraged the undertaking.” Clearly some interesting differences, but still linking Mark with Peter and this time placing the readership of Mark’s gospel in Rome, which fits the location of the first community to receive significant persecution by a Roman emperor.

There is, however, a different factor, significant for the dating and location of Mark’s composition and sending of his gospel, and that is the nearly unanimous conviction of scholars that the gospel of Luke used Mark and therefore Mark must be earlier than Luke. We will see, when we come in our next lesson to introducing the gospel of Luke, that there are at least plausible reasons for dating Luke and his second volume, Acts, to the very beginning of the decade of the 60s and no later than 62, the year with which the events that Acts ends were recorded.

If this is true then Mark must be placed just a little bit earlier than the persecution of Nero, which did not break out until 64. Perhaps Mark was written in 60 or 61 or even the early 50s, in which case we cannot be as sure about the context of persecution in Rome. It may have been the more localized, sporadic hostility that believers face throughout the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. In any event, it seems likely that Mark is writing a very transparent, a very truthful, and a very sober account of the failures, as well as the successes, of the original disciples, not least Peter himself, in order to encourage people who perhaps felt that they were not doing too well in their Christian faith—that just as God was able to use these very fallible

first followers of Christ, so he could use them too.

### G. Authorship of Mark

If we take these early traditions of the church seriously, we also then come to the conclusion that the author, Mark, was none other than the John Mark that we learn about in the book of Acts as a sometime companion of the apostle Paul and Barnabas, and one who was in Rome in the early 60s—at least if that is where we date the epistle of 1 Peter which has a closing reference to Mark in it. Nevertheless, the gospel strictly speaking is anonymous, and the titles “the gospel according to so and so,” would probably not have been added until at the very earliest the late first and early second century. There are many modern scholars who are somewhat more skeptical of the ancient attributions of authorship, but we see no reason to rule out the strong possibility that this Mark is indeed the author of the gospel—not least because he is a rather obscure character to have been chosen, if in fact he was not the author.

## III. Gospel of Matthew

### A. Jesus the Teacher

If we turn from the gospel of Mark to the gospel of Matthew, we see a distinctive portrait yet again of the life and ministry of Jesus. We again begin with his theology and then with distinctive views of Jesus. One of the things that strike us about Matthew, unlike Mark, is the extent of Jesus’ teachings that we read about. Jesus, in Matthew, preaches five lengthy sermons that comprise almost a chapter, or at times more than a chapter, in length: the famous Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7; His missionary discourse to the disciples in chapter 10; a chapter of parables in 13; a sermon on humility and forgiveness in chapter 18; and, after the extended woes to the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23, to more full chapters of what has been known as His eschatological or Olivet discourse, His teaching about the end times on the Mount of Olives. Interestingly, the Hebrew Scriptures also began with five major blocks of teachings, the five books of Moses. Was Matthew trying to portray Jesus as a teacher like, but also greater than, Moses? The fact that He twice goes up into the mountains to teach is reminiscent of Moses’ receiving the Law on Mount Sinai as well. But Jesus is not just a teacher, or perhaps even a lawgiver for Matthew. He is the “Son of David,” a very Jewish royal title, very distinctive to the gospel of Matthew.

### B. Jesus the King

Matthew highlights elements of Jesus’ kingship and royalty, particularly in his opening chapters, in ways that the other gospels do not. The term “Son of God” that we ran across in Mark actually occurs more frequently in Matthew, and the element of the wonder associated with Jesus’ ministry, and particularly His miracles, seems to be heightened as well. Then, lastly, one may speak of the title “Lord.” Although it is not particularly distinctive to Matthew, being found in all of the four Gospels frequently, it is Matthew’s most characteristic title, as one who is worthy of worship, this Jesus of Nazareth.

In addition to distinctive views about Jesus, there is an extremely detailed and distinctive focus on the Jewish people in the gospel of Matthew.

### C. The Jewish Jesus

Here there is at first glance a certain tension, seemingly contradictory information. On the one hand, there are statements and events in the gospel of Matthew that portray Jesus as more uniquely Jewish than in any of the other gospels. Only in Matthew do we read in two chapters about Jesus' birth that repeatedly He fulfills words of the prophets about what the Messiah would be like. Only in Matthew do we read in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:17-20, about Jesus' relationship to the Law when He says, "Think not that I came to abolish the Law; I did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, I came to fulfill them." There are seemingly scandalous passages: in Matthew 10:5-6, when Jesus tells His disciples to go nowhere among the Samaritans or the Gentiles but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and Jesus Himself, in speaking to the Canaanite woman in 15:24, says He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

### D. The Universal Jesus

What is more, only Matthew's gospel uses the expression "kingdom of heaven" rather than the more common and well-known "kingdom of God," probably because Jews were reticent to pronounce the very holy name of God and substituted this euphemistic expression. Yet despite those and many other Jewish features of the gospel of Matthew, there are also very universalist features, features that stand out more prominently in Matthew than elsewhere, about Jesus as "the one for all nations." It is only Matthew who, in the parable of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21:43, speaks through Jesus of the kingdom being taken away from the people of Israel and given to a nation who would produce the fruits pertaining to the kingdom. It is only Matthew who has the famous story of the judgment of the sheep and the goats, the judgment of all nations, in chapter 25, or who ends his gospel with the Great Commission, to go into all the world, making disciples of all nations—Matthew 28:18-20.

Probably the best resolution of this tension between the two stages of Matthew's gospel is to recognize what Paul would later put very succinctly in the epistle to the Romans: that he was sent first of all to the people of Israel, that the gospel is good news first to the Jew but then also to the Gentile. Jesus, during His lifetime, while foreshadowing and occasionally anticipating a bit of Gentile mission, for the most part reserves His ministry for the people of Israel, knowing that as God's chosen people they should have first chance to respond to this new stage in His revelation. But He also knows that His religion, that His understanding of the way His ministry fulfills Judaism, will no longer leave room for distinctively chosen people but rather bring the message, through His apostles to every corner of the globe.

### E. Other Distinct Features

Still other distinctive features of Matthew's theology include a focus on discipleship. Matthew is the only gospel ever to use the word "church," as he anticipates some of Jesus' organizational mandates for the fledgling community of His followers. He has greater levels of conflict with the Jewish authorities in Matthew's gospel than in Mark, some would say than in any of the other gospels, although John too portrays Jesus as having some very harsh words with the authorities. In fact, Matthew and John have been, at times, accused of being anti-Semitic, in



an age understandably and appropriately sensitive to such issues. These claims must be taken seriously, but there is probably nothing stronger, even in the woes to the scribes and Pharisees of Matthew 23, than is found in much of the Jewish prophetic literature of the Old Testament. Jesus was a Jew thoroughly immersed in the rituals and beliefs of Judaism, but also believing that God had called Him prophetically to critique several ways in which particularly the leadership of His generation of Judaism had strayed from God's will.

#### F. Date, Setting, and Authorship of Matthew

The question then comes again: What setting would lead to this distinctive collection of themes and views about Jesus? And the obvious answer is that Matthew is writing to a very Jewish Christian community. Beyond that, there is little agreement. It has been debated whether this is before or after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. It has been debated whether this was in the Syrian city of Antioch, one place where Jewish Christianity, we know, was preserved in strong numbers even into the second century. It has been debated as well whether or not this took place before or after a so-called ban on Christians from the synagogue in the mid to late 80s—at the time a prayer was introduced into the Jewish liturgy of calling down a curse from God on all heretics, including apparently the Nazarenes, probably a name for the sect of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps what can be agreed upon is that some of the vitriolic, some of the passion, that emerges in the gospel of Matthew is because of this tension with the non-Christian Jewish community.

Wherever or whenever Matthew was written, his gospel was written to a Christian community still embroiled in serious tension with non-Christian Jews in their community. In fact, one scholar has coined the phrase “the synagogue across the street” based upon archaeological data from various Middle Eastern cities in which synagogue and church were quite literally located very close to each other in the center of a particular community. If, indeed, Matthew is writing primarily to Jewish Christians who are freshly converted, who have freshly broken from the synagogue and all of their family and friends and attachments that implied, one can understand, on the one hand, Matthew's passion for wanting to win as many Jews to Christ as possible, to encourage and build up in the faith those who have already come to believe in him, and also the remnants of strong emotions, if not at times some hostility.

If we again turn to the testimony of the early church, we find the unanimous conviction that the author of this gospel was none other than the converted tax collector, one of the twelve apostles, the man whom the Gospels alternately call Matthew or Levi. Interestingly, however, Matthew is written in very good Greek, a better Greek style even than Mark's gospel; and it does not seem to most scholars to be the type of writing that someone who is writing with Greek as a second language would have penned.

If one turns to the oldest known testimony about the origins of the gospel of Matthew, we come to the testimony of the Christian writer Papias from the early second century, quoted by later church historian Eusebius. Papias wrote, “Matthew composed his gospel in the Hebrew language, and everyone translated as they were able.” Unfortunately, even the translation of Papias' words is disputed. Let me read that saying again with some different translations: “Matthew compiled his sayings in the Aramaic language, or dialect, or style, and everyone

interpreted as they were able.” We are not even entirely sure what the oldest testimony claims for Matthew, but there is an unbroken early testimony that he wrote something down, whether the sayings of Jesus or a full-fledged gospel, in either a Hebrew or Aramaic style or dialect.

That leaves open the possibility that our Matthew, our Greek Matthew, is the translation, even perhaps by someone other than Matthew himself or perhaps by the apostles, a translation and/or an expansion, a second edition if you like, of what Matthew originally wrote in Hebrew or Aramaic. It is not even impossible that what scholars call “Q” that we alluded to in our last lesson might have been this sayings document in Hebrew that Papias speaks of, which Matthew then later supplemented and added to, partly in dependence on Mark, in creating the form of the gospel that we now know. At any rate, Matthew clearly imbibes a Jewish milieu. As one understands his structure, one must pay careful attention to the teachings of Jesus that dominate his narrative. Notice how he intersperses blocks of teaching and narrative, often on a similar topic, in ways that have an apologetic thrust to convince the outsider, a catechetical thrust to teach the insider, and a pastoral thrust to encourage all those who read that Jesus is worthy of their worship.



# Discussion Questions

Dr. Blomerg demonstrates that the four gospel writers present Jesus with certain distinctives due, in part, to the different audiences they were addressing. If you were composing an account of Christ's life for the modern reader in your culture, what themes about Jesus life and teaching would you emphasize? Why?

In this lesson, the lecturer describes how the date and authorship of the Gospels are often debated. How important do you think it is that we can prove exactly when each gospel was written and who wrote it? Why?

In your own words, describe the key distinctives of the gospels of Mark and Matthew. Why are these distinctives important?

# Further Study

## **Suggested reading for this lesson:**

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 49: “Behold Your King!” (Matthew)

## **Philip Yancey Devotional**

### **Turning Point - Mark 8**

“But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:29)

As this chapter opens, Jesus is exasperated with His disciples. They had seen Him feed 5000 people, and then 4000, and yet still they worried about their next meal. “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?” He asked reproachfully. Still, for all their denseness, the disciples had grasped something about Jesus that eluded most others. The crowds saw Him as a reincarnation of a prophet: Elijah, maybe, or John the Baptist. But in this scene, Peter boldly pronounces Jesus the “Christ,” the very Messiah long predicted by the prophets.

It is difficult for us to comprehend the importance of that single word to first-century Jews. Ground down by centuries of foreign domination, they staked all their hopes in a Messiah who would lead their nation back to glory. Matthew records that Jesus, pleased by Peter’s impulsive declaration, lavished praise on him (16:17-19). But, Peter’s brightest moment was immediately followed by one of his dimmest—a few paragraphs later Jesus identifies Peter with Satan. What transpired between those two scenes marks an important turning point in the story of Jesus’ life.

To Peter and the other disciples, “Messiah” stood for wealth and fame and political power. Jesus knew, though, that the true Messiah would first have to endure scorn, humiliation, suffering, and even death. He was the Suffering Servant prophesied by Isaiah. He would take up an executioner’s cross, not a worldly position of honor.

Jesus accepted Peter’s designation; He was indeed the true Messiah. But from that moment on, Jesus made a strategic shift. He left Galilee and headed toward the capital of Jerusalem. Instead of addressing the crowds, He narrowed His scope to the twelve disciples and worked to prepare them for the suffering and death to come. Peter may have grasped Jesus’ identity, but he had much to learn about his mission. He wanted Jesus to avoid pain, not understanding that the pain of the cross would bring salvation to the whole world.

Life Question: If someone asked you who Jesus is, what would you say?

# Glossary

**Barnabas** — A Jewish Levite of Cyprus who became one of the earliest Christian disciples at Jerusalem. His original name was Joseph (Ac 4:36). Its literal meaning is “Son of Encouragement.”

**Caesarea Philippi** — Ancient Paneion, now Banias, at the southwest base of Mount Hermon on a rocky terrace 1150 feet above sea level. It is on the main source of the Jordan River.

**Eusebius** — (c. A.D. 260 - c. A.D. 340) - Bishop of Caesarea, the “Father of church history.” Of Eusebius’ many writings, the most celebrated is his “Ecclesiastical History,” the principal source for the history of Christianity from the apostolic age until his own day.

**Irenaeus** — (c. A.D. 130 - c. A.D. 200) - Born in Asia Minor and studied under Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. Irenaeus became bishop of Lyons in A.D. 177. Two major writings survive: “Against Heresies” and “Proof of the Apostolic Preaching.”

**Kingdom of God/Heaven** — Scholars have differed about the basic meaning of the term, whether it conveys an “abstract” idea of God’s rule or reign, or a “concrete” idea of the realm over which He will reign—in this case, the age to come. Today there is a widespread consensus that it is primarily the latter.

**Nero** — (A.D. 37 - 68) - The fifth Roman emperor, who was born at Antium in A.D. 37, began to reign in October, A.D. 54, and died June 9, A.D. 68. He accepted extravagant honors, setting the stage for the deification of Roman emperors during their lifetimes. When Nero sought scapegoats for the fire of 64, he chose the Christians.

**Papias** — (c. A.D. 60 - A.D. 130) - Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor. Nothing is known of his life, apart from the statement of Irenaeus that he was a “man of long ago,” the disciple of “John,” and a companion of Polycarp. His work “Expositions of the Oracles of the Lord” survives only in quotations in Irenaeus and Eusebius.

**Samaria** — In the heart of the mountains of Israel, about six miles northwest of Shechem, stands the hill of Shomeron. Omri, the king of Israel, purchased this hill from Shemer, its owner, and built on its broad summit the city to which he gave the name of “Shomeron,” i.e. Samaria, as the new capital of his kingdom instead of Tirzah (1Ki 16:24).

**Son of God** — A title applied to Jesus designating alternately either His messianic status or consciousness of filial intimacy with His Father (Mk 14:36; Ro 8:15). It speaks also of Jesus’ unity of will with His Father’s will.

# Quiz

1. Jesus is portrayed as more uniquely Jewish in this gospel than in any of the others:
  - A. Luke
  - B. Matthew
  - C. Mark
  - D. John
2. Mark's gospel was probably written in the:
  - A. Unknown
  - B. Late 60s
  - C. 70s
  - D. 60s or even early 50s
3. The word "church" is only found in this gospel:
  - A. Matthew
  - B. Mark
  - C. Luke
  - D. John
4. This gospel gives the most negative portrait of the disciples.
  - A. Matthew
  - B. Mark
  - C. Luke
  - D. John
5. This is the only gospel in which the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is found:
  - A. John
  - B. Luke
  - C. Mark
  - D. Matthew
6. What are the circumstances of the audience to whom Matthew wrote?
  - A. They were full of pride and overly comfortable during a period of widespread wealth.
  - B. They needed encouragement and strengthening in light of the tensions present in the Jewish community.
  - C. They had isolated themselves as a Jewish community and were loving each other but neglecting the others around them.
  - D. They were doubting whether Jesus came for them, because they were Gentiles.
7. What are the most prominent views of Jesus found in the book of Matthew?
  - A. Miracle worker and suffering servant
  - B. Earthly king and Savior
  - C. Teacher and Son of David
  - D. Prophet and storyteller

8. What balance does Mark achieve in his gospel?
  - A. Between Christ's divinity and his humanity
  - B. Between Christ's love and his judgment
  - C. Between Christ's teaching and his miracles
  - D. Between Christ's love for Jews and for Gentiles
9. Who was the audience to which Mark primarily wrote?
  - A. Romans
  - B. Gentiles
  - C. Jews
  - D. The world
10. Who wrote the gospel of Mark?
  - A. Probably Mark, one of the twelve disciples
  - B. Probably Mark, a half-brother of Jesus
  - C. Probably John Mark, companion of Paul and Barnabas and a young boy when Christ was alive
  - D. All of the above

Answers: 1. B 2. D 3. A 4. B 5. D 6. B 7. C 8. A 9. A 10. C

# Lesson 3 Study Guide

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NT218

*Matthew-Mark:  
Two Presentations  
of Jesus*

The New Testament as God's Revelation

Updated 2014

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Our Daily Bread  
Christian University

# Objectives

This lesson examines the rather fantastic claim that the New Testament is authoritative because it is a revelation from God Himself. You will study why you can trust the New Testament as God's Word and how you can apply seven disciplines of study to your reading of the New Testament to increase accuracy of interpretation.

When you complete this lesson, "The New Testament as God's Revelation," you should be able to:

- Explain how the doctrines of grace and inspiration inform our understanding of New Testament authority.
- Define and use the disciplines of hermeneutics and exegesis to guide your study of New Testament books.
- Name, explain the meaning of, and apply five critical methodologies to your New Testament study.
- Develop greater confidence in the New Testament's authority and in your ability to interpret Scripture.

# Scripture Reading

Read Mark 9-16.

# Transcript

## Course Title: Matthew - Mark: Two Presentations of Jesus

### Lesson Three: The New Testament as God's Revelation

#### I. Introduction

In this graduate-level New Testament course, we will cover four major topics in six lessons. The major topics will include: New Testament as Scripture, development of the New Testament text, New Testament settings, and archaeological evidence. In this first lesson, we will introduce the New Testament as Scripture.

#### II. New Testament as Scripture

Thinking about scriptural authority, one must start with the fact that Scripture views itself as a message from God. One appeals to Scripture in this matter not for proof, but for information. God calls Himself as “the Lord, the compassionate ... abounding in love (mercy) and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6); the prologue of the fourth gospel says the Word of God is “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Grace is synonymous with merciful love, as truth is with fidelity. The definition is the same.

##### A. Grace Explained

The essence of the doctrine of grace is that God is for us. What is more, He is for us who in ourselves are against Him. More still, He is not for us merely in an abstract manner, but has effectively acted toward us. Grace is summed up in the name Jesus Christ. As He is God in Himself, so He will be God toward us, for our benefit. He will assume the responsibility for our past, present, and future. He is the grace of God toward us. He, no longer an enemy, stands with us against our real enemies, and that effectively: “If God is for us, who can be against us” (Ro 8:31)? Grace must be acknowledged for what it is, a free gift, and be accepted with humble and joyful gratitude. This human decision, involving acknowledgment and acceptance, is the faith that corresponds to God's grace. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Eph 2:8).

##### B. God-inspired

The theological idea of inspiration presupposes a personal mind and will—in Hebrew terminology, the “living God”—acting to communicate with other living beings. The Christian belief in inspiration rests both on explicit biblical assertions and on the pervading mood of the scriptural record. Christians believe both testaments are the inspired Word of God. This doctrine of inspiration has not been superimposed upon Scripture, but is what it claims for itself. Critics may reject that claim, but they cannot deny the claim has been made. Paul confidently states, “All Scripture is God-breathed” in his letter to Timothy (2Ti 3:16), and Peter adds, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they



were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2Pe 1:21). The biblical text is, therefore, more than just a great literary work; it is the very Word of God.

### III. Understanding the New Testament

The primary goal of this lesson, therefore, is to help you become a better exegete, that is, a better listener and student of the Word of God. In order not to miss the benefit of your own study, use other study materials after you have done your own work, not before. These are helpful especially in giving information you cannot get from the Bible alone—for example, additional facts about people, places, and events. And they can provide useful comments on passages that may be difficult to understand.

#### A. Hermeneutics

Correctly interpreting and understanding the Bible can be an arduous, often puzzling, but ultimately rewarding experience. Deciding to begin to do in-depth Bible study may seem intimidating at first, but a knowledge of the art and science of hermeneutics can prove helpful. *Hermeneuein*, a Greek verb, means “to explain, interpret or translate,” while the noun *hermeneia* means “interpretation” or “translation.” Using the verb form, Luke informs his readers that Jesus “explained” to the two disciples on the Emmaus road what the Hebrew Bible said about Him (Lk 24:27). Hermeneutics attempts to help us comprehend what a message—written, oral, or visual—is endeavoring to communicate.

If the goal of hermeneutics is the correct understanding of communication, then we need to learn what precepts and methods will be appropriate to the task. Hermeneutics provides various rules and techniques for acquiring a more complete understanding of the biblical text. To avoid interpretation that is arbitrary, erroneous, or that simply suits personal whim, readers need to be aware of the rules or principles for guidance appropriate to biblical interpretation. When one consciously sets out to discover and employ such principles, one investigates hermeneutics. However, hermeneutics is both a science and an art. There are rules, principles, methods, and tactics associated with biblical interpretation, but no mechanical system of rules will ever help a person fully understand all the implications or nuances of any given text; that is where the art of interpretation enters in.

Questions related to biblical hermeneutics can often be difficult to answer and there may be various ways to go about answering them. But there should be agreement on one aspect of biblical hermeneutics according to Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart: “A text cannot mean what it never meant. Or to put that in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken” (*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982, p. 27). In other words, the interpreter must always keep in mind that the text under consideration is more than a piece of literature—it is the Word of God.

#### B. Exegesis

Exegesis is a normal activity in which all of us engage on a daily basis, even if we have never

called it by that name. Whenever we hear an oral statement or read a written one and seek to understand what has been expressed, we are engaging in exegesis. The term “exegesis” itself comes from the Greek word *exegeomai*, which basically means, “to lead out of.” When applied to texts, it denotes the “reading out of the meaning.” The noun, therefore, can refer to interpretation or explanation. Thus whenever we read a text or hear a statement that we seek to understand and interpret, we are involved in exegesis.

The goal of biblical exegesis is to reach an informed understanding of the text under consideration. The fact is there are various nuances of any text’s meaning, and different types of exegesis can address these different aspects. For this reason, the exegete can never hope to present the exegesis of a passage as if it were his or her final understanding. Rather, one does an exegesis of a passage in which a coherent, informed interpretation is presented, based on one’s encounter with an investigation of that text at a given point in time. Exegesis does not allow one to master the text so much as it enables one to enter into it.

### C. Relationship of Hermeneutics to Exegesis

According to Walter C. Kaiser in *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, the relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis is as follows: “Hermeneutics seeks to describe the general and special principles and rules that are useful in approaching the biblical text; exegesis seeks to identify the single truth-intention of individual phrases, clauses, and sentences as they make up the thoughts of paragraphs, sections, and ultimately, entire books. Accordingly, hermeneutics may be regarded as the theory that guides exegesis; exegesis may be understood to be the practice of and the set of procedures for uncovering the author’s (or editor’s) intended meaning (p. 47).”

In other words, hermeneutics stands in the same relationship to exegesis as the rulebook stands to the game. The rulebook is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. Rules are not the game, but the game is meaningless without rules. Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics.

## IV. Biblical Interpretation

Interpretation is an activity in which the reader or hearer seeks to gain the shareable verbal meanings that an author or speaker has sought to transmit by linguistic signs. Not every meaning in an author’s mind can be conveyed by language. As E. D. Hirsch has put it, “An author’s verbal meaning is limited by linguistic possibilities but is determined by his actualizing and specifying some of those possibilities. Correspondingly, the verbal meaning that an interpreter construes is determined by his act of will, limited by those same possibilities” (*Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, p 47).

The chance that an interpreter will succeed in grasping an author’s verbal meaning is greatly enhanced by the limitations of possible meanings that cultural norms and conventions impose upon words. A linguistic symbol can represent an identical meaning for two persons, because the range of what it can mean has been limited by convention. Of course, words often have several

meanings, but the association a word has with other words in its context does much to indicate the unambiguous meaning that the author intended it to have at a certain place in his or her writing. Nevertheless, the interpreter always has to keep in mind there is some degree of speculation associated with the meaning of the communication he or she wants to grasp. In constructing a text whose author cannot be consulted, a claim to validity in interpretation can never have more than a high degree of probability.

Yet the more willing an interpreter is to submit the proposed construction of a text to the scrutiny of others who have also worked hard to understand it, the higher will be the probability of achieving a consensus regarding the meaning its author wanted to transmit. The greatest difficulty to overcome in the interpretation of texts is the famous “hermeneutical circle,” which refers to the path a thought takes as it attempts to find meaning.

Methodologically, it refers to the procedure that an interpreter follows as he or she turns from the parts of a sentence to the sentence as a whole and then, quite literally, from the whole back to the parts. Descriptively, the circle refers to that profound interrelationship that the words of a sentence have with the paragraph as a whole, and so on outward to the work as a unity, and then finally expanding to include all the elements contingent upon an adequate understanding of the text at hand—in short, the interrelationship of text and context, context and text.

To be sure, if all facets of a text were equally capable of being made into evidence to support several different ways of construing a text, then the hermeneutical circle could never be broken, and interpreters would waste their time discussing which view was correct. But as Hirsch points out, “. . . not all traits are genre-dependent . . . and not everything in verbal understanding is variable. Understanding is difficult, but not impossible” (*Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, p 77). So discussion with a fellow interpreter about how a text should be construed is indispensable, precisely because another mind is able to bring one to see some of those relatively few invariable traits in a text that will fit only one interpretation of it. Therefore, validity in interpretation is possible as a matter of high probability, albeit not absolute certainty, and this makes the interpretation of biblical texts as worthy a pursuit of knowledge as that of any other field where only high probability rather than absolute certainty is attainable.

## V. Critical Methodologies

In the balance of this lesson, we will examine the various ways of addressing the questions and problems modern students and interpreters encounter when exegeting the biblical text. The variety of methods to be discussed merely attests to the richness and diversity of the biblical documents, and these methods should be seen as complementary. No single way of approaching a text should be seen as exhausting the meaning of a passage, but rather as a way of dealing with one particular facet of a passage.

Each of these approaches is treated as a type of criticism. Criticism is a comprehensive term, embodying a number of techniques employed in the study of (among other things) written documents in order to establish, as far as possible, their original text, the literary categories to which they pertain, style, authorship, date, purpose, and so forth. Biblical criticism embraces various critical disciplines, notably textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction

criticism, historical criticism, and canonical criticism.

### A. Textual Criticism

Because the biblical autographs (original copies) have all been lost, it is important to carefully evaluate the manuscripts that we do have. Although this is usually the job of specialists, all believers should have some familiarity with textual criticism. The function and purpose of textual criticism is of a dual nature to (1) reconstruct the original wording of the biblical text, and (2) to establish the history of the transmission of the text through the centuries. Over the course of time, two kinds of errors have crept into the text: unintentional and intentional.

Unintentional errors include (1) errors of the eye. The copyist sometimes confused similar appearing uncial letters. Homoioteleuton is an error in which the scribe's eye skips from the first to the second nearby occurrence of an identical word or group of letters, thereby omitting all the intervening text. Errors of the eye also include the transposition of letters, producing a different word. (2) Errors of speech arise from similarities of pronunciation. (3) Errors of the mind result from misunderstanding or forgetfulness, which include changes in word order and the substitution of synonyms.

Intentional changes include (1) linguistic or rhetorical corrections, which were undoubtedly made in good faith. (2) Historical corrections include changes introduced to correct an apparent error of fact. (3) Harmonistic corrections include the apparent intentional assimilation of parallel passages (for example, the assimilation of the Lord's Prayer in many manuscripts of Luke 11:2-4 to the fuller form of Matthew 6:9-13). (4) Doctrinal corrections are among the less frequent deliberate changes. (5) Liturgical corrections might have been introduced into the text because of the use of the passage in the liturgy.

Textual criticism has gradually evolved certain principles, which are based upon patient classification and weighing of all the documentary evidence available, both external (that is, the value of the manuscript) and internal (that is, intrinsic probability). External evidence seeks to determine which reading is supported by the most-reliable witnesses—Greek manuscripts, versions, and patristic citations. Many of the witnesses can be put into one of four groups or text-types: Alexandrian, Caesarean, Byzantine, and Western. By examining a large number of textual variants, scholars can determine the relative reliability of these text-types.

1. The Alexandrian Text is one of the geographical place names given to manuscripts of the New Testament bearing the same textual characteristics and thought to have come from a common ancestor originating in Alexandria, Egypt. Also called the Egyptian Text or, more commonly and preferably perhaps, the Neutral Text so called by F. J. A. Hort (1882) on the theory that it was an essentially pure representative of the New Testament autographs. The principal witness to the Neutral Text is the fourth-century manuscript Codex Vaticanus.

2. The theory of the Caesarean Text as a distinct text-type was proposed by B. H. Streeter (1924). It is based on the knowledge that in the two halves of his commentary on John, Origen quoted from different manuscripts of the New Testament, the former available

while he was in Alexandria, the latter while in Caesarea. Streeter deduced from this that a distinct Caesarean text-type existed, which he identified with Codex Koridethi and two families of minuscules (Families 1 and 13). Recent text-critical studies seem to indicate, however, that the witnesses purportedly with the Caesarean text-type do not represent a text-type sufficiently distinct from the two major strains, the Alexandrian and the Western, to warrant a separate designation.

3. The Byzantine, or Antiochian, text-type is found in many of the later uncial manuscripts, almost all of the minuscule manuscripts, and most of the later church fathers and versions. It formed the basis of the Textus Receptus and therefore of the King James Version. It is characterized by clarifying the harmonizing interpolations, and a general smoothing of dictation.

4. The Western Text is another one of the geographical place names given to manuscripts of the New Testament bearing similar textual characteristics. They are mainly in the bilingual Graeco-Latin manuscripts, Old Latin manuscripts, and quotations from the Latin Fathers, all associated with Italy, Gaul, and Africa. The term Western Text is only partly accurate (since some Old Syriac and Coptic manuscripts show the same textual characteristics) and is replaced by some scholars with the letter D, after its central witness, Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis.

The basic principle of internal evidence is that the reading from which the other readings could most easily have risen is probably the original reading. The following are the traditional formulations, according to Richard Soulen in his *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*: (1) the more difficult reading is often preferred, (2) the reading would be more likely to have given rise to the other, (3) the shorter reading is generally preferred, (4) the reading characteristic of the author is generally preferable (p. 195).

## B. Source Criticism

Source criticism can be pursued most easily when a documentary source has survived alongside the latter work that has drawn upon it. In the Old Testament the most obvious example of this is seen in 1 and 2 Chronicles. The books of Samuel and Kings were the Chronicler's principal sources, and as they have survived we can make rather definitive statements about his use of them. In the New Testament, the gospel of Mark is generally recognized to have been a major source of the other two Synoptic Gospels; and since the source survives alongside the works that drew upon it, we can, without difficulty, study the use Matthew and Luke made of Mark.

When there are parallel traditions, the procedures for analysis are (1) note the evidence internal to the documents themselves (that is, the areas of overlap and the points of difference in the different traditions), (2) note any relevant external evidence (that is, the statements of early church fathers about the writing of the Gospels), and (3) propose and test different possible explanations of the evidence for comprehensiveness and simplicity. Of course, when the sources have not survived, source criticism becomes a much more speculative business.

### C. Form Criticism

Form criticism of the New Testament has two aims: (1) To classify the various New Testament books according to their literary genre (German *Gattungsgeschichte*), and (2) to analyze the smaller units of traditional material according to the “form” or “shape” they have assumed during the oral, preliterate period. Form criticism has been intensively applied to the Gospels from the early twentieth century on.

The four more or less traditional steps of the form-critical method have been conveniently outlined by Gene M. Tucker as follows. (1) Structure: An analysis of the outline, pattern, or schema of a given genre; its opening and closing (inclusio), conventional patterns (for example, parallelism, chiasm), etc. (2) Genre: A definition and description of the unit according to its type. (3) Setting: A determination of the social situation or language that gave rise to the genre, to other typicalities of the text, or to the individual text at hand. (4) Intention: A statement of the purpose and function, the mood and content, of the genre in general and specifically of the example under study (*Form Criticism of the Old Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

### D. Redaction Criticism

What is redaction criticism? The term “redaction” in gospel criticism describes the editorial work carried out by the evangelists on their sources when they composed the Gospels. Redaction criticism is the study of the observable changes introduced by the gospel writers into the traditional material they received and used. As used in biblical exegesis, redaction criticism refers to that stage of interpretation whose primary focus is the final written form or composition of a passage. More specifically, it pertains to the final stage of the tradition, as it were, that has become crystallized in written form, and asks what the author or final editor intended to say through the passage in its final form. Redaction criticism presupposes the insights and perspectives of textual criticism and form criticism.

The redaction critic asks, for example: Why does Luke alter the Markan tradition concerning John the Baptist as Elijah (Compare Mk 6:14-16 with Lk 9:7-9; Mk 6:17-29 and 9:9-13 are absent from Luke)? Why does Luke have Satan present at the beginning and end of Jesus’ ministry and not during it (Lk 4:1-13; 22:3, but compare Mk 8:31-33 with Lk 9:21-22)? In answering these questions and countless others like them, redaction critics have effectively restored the Synoptic writers to their rightful place as theologians of the early church. They were, in one scholar’s words, the “earliest exegetes” of the Christian tradition, not merely its first editors.

### E. Historical Criticism

Historical criticism means the study of any narrative that purports to convey historical information in order to determine what actually happened. The phrase “what actually happened” is by no means free from difficulties of interpretation, but a common-sense view of it will suffice for us in the present discussion.



The goal of historical criticism is the writing of a chronological narrative of pertinent events to reveal where the possible nature and interconnection of the events themselves are. The historical criticism of documents proceeds on the basis of two related assumptions or perspectives. These may be designated in the internal and external historical aspects of a document. The internal historical aspects of a document are related to the historical and cultural dimensions described or depicted in the texts. The external historical aspects of a document are related to the historical, cultural, and biographical context in which the document was produced.

## F. Canonical Criticism

Canonical criticism regards biblical books as canonical; that is, as the authoritative writings of the Jewish and Christian communities. It also presumes that theological convictions guided those who compiled these books. Hence, it seeks to find their theological meaning by analyzing their canonical shape: the editorial design of their present form.

Initially, due to the extensive writings of Yale professor Brevard Childs, canon criticism seeks to move beyond standard source, form, and redaction criticism and to interpret the biblical texts in their “canonical shape”—that is, their present form (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). According to Childs, this final shape is of special significance because (1) it alone displays the full history of revelation witnessed to by Scripture; (2) in it the community has exercised its critical judgment on the received traditions and modified them accordingly; and (3) by showing how the texts were actualized by generations removed from the original event and composition of the writings, the canonical shape may provide a hermeneutical key as to how we may actualize the text in our day.

## VI. Conclusion: Analysis and Synthesis

The exegetical task may be said to fall into two fairly well-defined stages: analysis and synthesis. As the interpreter begins the task of exegesis, examining different aspects of the passage, whether they are textual, historical, or whatever, will serve as a way of breaking down the passage into its component parts and problems and examining them as discrete units and issues. These separate analytic tasks will normally overlap, for each will inform the other.

As analysis takes place, the interpreter’s understanding of the passage will gradually increase and the groundwork will be laid for synthesis. Synthesis, here, means the process by which the interpreter again “puts together” the text. The task is now to relate the preliminary analytical investigations to each other, weighing the significance of each, and deciding how each one will contribute to the overall interpretation of the text at hand.

# Discussion Questions

Now that you have learned more about the discipline of textual criticism, read and compare Matthew 12:1-8 and its parallel passages, Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 6:1-5, in at least three different Bible versions. In doing so, what have you discovered about the text? How is this method valuable to your interpretation and application of the passage?

What does it mean to believe that Scripture is inspired by God? Do you believe that, in the words of Paul, “All Scripture is God-breathed”? Why or why not?

Prior to studying this lesson, had you had any previous experience studying hermeneutics or exegesis? If so, describe that experience. If not, what is your first impression of hermeneutics and exegesis? Do you see these as valuable pursuits? Why or why not?



# Further Study

Search the Internet or Bible reference tools to learn more about the history of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

## **Suggested reading for this lesson:**

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 48: "Jesus and His Church" (Matthew-Acts)

## **Philip Yancey Devotional Miracles and Magic - Mark 3**

He had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever the evil spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." But He gave them strict orders not to tell Who He was. (Mark 3:10-12)

Large crowds flocked from far away as word of Jesus' powers spread. Some people came for healing; others, just to witness the extraordinary phenomena. Who but a messenger from God could perform such works? Yet Jesus himself had an odd ambivalence toward miracles. He never did "tricks" on demand, like a magician. "A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign," He said to those who sought a display of magic (Matthew 12:39).

Jesus seemed not to trust miracles to produce the kind of faith He was interested in. Mark reports that on seven separate occasions He warned a person just healed, "Tell no one!" He was suspicious of the popular acclaim that His miracles stirred up, for He had a hard message of obedience and sacrifice, and miracles tended to attract gawkers and sensation-seekers.

Mainly, Jesus used His powers in compassionate response to human needs. Every time someone asked directly, He healed. When His disciples grew frightened on a stormy lake, He walked to them across the water or calmed the wind. When His audience got hungry, He fed them, and when wedding guests grew thirsty, He made wine.

Much like people today, Jesus' contemporaries looked for ways to explain away his powers, even when faced with irrefutable evidence. Here, for instance, the Pharisees seek to credit the miracles to Satan's power. On another occasion they arranged a formal tribunal, complete with judges and witnesses, to examine a man Jesus had healed. The man's parents confirmed his story ("One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"), but still the doubters hurled insults and threw him out of the court (John 9).

In short, the crowd's mixed responses bore out Jesus' suspicions about the limited value of miracles. They rarely created faith, but rather affirmed it in true seekers.

**Life Question:** Would people be more likely to believe God if miracles were more common today?

# Glossary

**Coptic** — The language of ancient Egypt, into which a large number of Greek words had been incorporated and written in an alphabet closely akin to Greek. After the tenth century, the language was gradually supplanted by Arabic, but it appears to have survived in a few places down to the end of the seventeenth century, and is still used in the liturgy of the Coptic church.

**Critical** — Operating with careful, reasoned judgment based on close scrutiny of the subject at hand

**Form Criticism** — The study of the history and function of the forms in which traditions or messages are communicated

**Literary** — Having to do with the process of creating and writing a document or part thereof

**Minuscule** — Denotes a manuscript written in small cursive or “running” letters, first used for codices of the Bible c. A.D. 800

**Oral** — Having to do with the handing down of information, beliefs, and forms by word of mouth

**Pericope** — An extract or selection from a book or a document. It has been “cut around” and identified as a self-contained literary unit. The Bible contains many literary units or pericopes. To study a verse of Scripture without considering the larger literary unit from which it is taken removes the verse from its essential context.

**Redaction Criticism** — (German *Redaktionsgeschichte*) - The study of how literary materials are organized, interpreted, and modified by an author or editor. The term “redaction” in gospel criticism describes the editorial work carried out by the evangelists on their sources when they composed the Gospels.

**Sitz Im Leben** — German expression meaning “setting in life,” referring to the efforts of form critics to determine the life settings of particular literary types.

**Style** — Identifiable features in a particular author or tradition, such as vocabulary or distinctive syntax.

**Uncial** — A technical term for third-to-tenth-century codices of the Bible written in majuscule or capital letters on parchment or vellum.

# Quiz

1. Current scholarship says this text-type does not warrant a separate designation:
  - A. Alexandrian Text
  - B. Byzantine Text
  - C. Caesarean Text
  - D. Western Text
2. Grace does **not** mean:
  - A. God is for us.
  - B. Even when we are against God, He is for us.
  - C. God will assume responsibility for our past, present, and future.
  - D. It is very expensive, but worth every penny.
3. Intentional changes to a biblical text do **not** include which of the following?
  - A. Linguistic corrections
  - B. Historical corrections
  - C. Harmonistic changes
  - D. Errors of the eye
4. Minuscule denotes a manuscript written:
  - A. In small cursive letters
  - B. In capital letters
  - C. In a distinct style from the fifth century on
  - D. All of the above
5. The goal of biblical exegesis is:
  - A. To help us better support our point of view
  - B. To describe the general and special principles and rules that help us approach a text
  - C. To learn the “absolute” truth
  - D. To reach an informed understanding of the text under consideration
6. The greatest difficulty to overcome in the interpretation of a text is the famous “hermeneutical circle,” which refers to:
  - A. The path the interpreter takes to find meaning in a passage
  - B. The path a thought takes as it attempts to find meaning
  - C. The idea that a circle never ends and, therefore, there is no end to what one can learn from a text
  - D. The circle of difficulties in understanding the true meaning of a text
7. The theological idea of inspiration does **not** presuppose:
  - A. The Bible is a great literary work.
  - B. A personal mind and will acting to communicate with other living beings
  - C. All Scripture is God-breathed.
  - D. Prophecy never had its origin in the will of mankind.

8. The Western Text is a geographical place name referring to this area:
  - A. Italy
  - B. Gaul
  - C. Africa
  - D. All of the above
9. This term refers to a short section or passage of writing:
  - A. Minuscule
  - B. Uncial
  - C. Pericope
  - D. *Sitz im leben*
10. Which statement is **not** true about the Alexandrian Text?
  - A. It includes New Testament manuscripts bearing the same textual characteristics.
  - B. The Codex Vaticanus is not a witness to this text.
  - C. It is also called the Egyptian Text.
  - D. It is commonly and perhaps preferably referred to as the “Neutral Text.”

Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. D 4. A 5. D 6. B 7. A 8. D 9. C 10. B