

Chapter Four: Part One

The Archbishop's Theory

In 1952 the Archbishop of Quebec put forth a bold theory. After reading the gospel and studying its form and structure, he concluded: the Gospel of Mark was composed of pericopes so to correspond to the Jewish calendar. Each week there are specific readings of the Torah in a synagogue. Mark was written so to provide one for each Sabbath. His theory, like ours, was based upon the idea that there is a purposeful arrangement to the gospel and the arrangement was a matter of individual readings, pericopes.

The Archbishop believed that Mark had 49/50 readings that comprised the Galilean ministry; and, he believed there were a series of readings for Passover and for the Festival of the Tabernacles. The Gospel of Mark was a kind alternative reading, or additional set of lessons.

Needless to say, his theory was met with a fair amount of skeptical disdain. There was little in the way of proof. There were no early church fathers who spoke of this; no correspondence or guide to worship that made reference to a pericope structure. Yes, there are if centuries of tradition that point to a gospel lesson to be read in worship, but this does not necessarily mean this was the intent of Mark.

Yet, the real issue of disdain was that the Archbishop's theory was looking at the gospels in a way that was the direct opposite of scholarship. At the time of his research scholars were trying to find the historical kernels of the gospels. They wanted to find what lied beneath the layers of editorial changes made to the actual words of Jesus. It was as if the text as we have it now was like an oil painting with many, many layers. The "real" words of Jesus could only be found if we removed the added layers.

This direction in scholarship is known as historical-critical form theory. It was the standard of scholarly excellence until the 1990s. The archbishop's theory did not, and truly could not, speak to this scholarly path. For the Archbishop, the meaning of the text and the intent of the author was the actual text. He was trying to show that the pericopes of Mark were intended as we have them as used as we have them. As the Christians were expelled from the synagogues, they developed their own readings. They mirrored the style and form of pericopes that were read in the synagogue in the time of Jesus.

Again, there is one big problem with this. We do not know what or if this system of readings on the Sabbath really were. We have a tradition of synagogue readings that is centuries old, but we do not have a list of what was supposed to be read in a first century Sabbath service.

In this way, his critics had a point. It was a theory that had little in the way of direct evidence. What is more, for more than four centuries the Protestant church had been pouring over the New Testament and forming theory after theory as to composition, authorship, audience, and socio-historical context. Think reduction. The Bible had been carefully and painstakingly

researched since Erasmus. The fruit of this effort was careful attention to the gap between what Jesus said and how it was transcribed and transmitted. The careful attention was focused on the belief that what Jesus said had to be consistent, historically plausible, and a likely claim of a Galilean peasant. That is a very focused effort.

Enter the archbishop of Quebec in the 1950s. He really didn't consider any of these things. He looked at the Gospel of Mark and noticed there were natural breaks in the order. He started to count them and cluster them and much to his amazement he started to see patterns that begged to be understood. The best way to compare this is to think of a microscope as compared to a telescope. The scholars since Erasmus have been building a more and more powerful microscope. The historical-critical form of scholarship is looking at the atomic level of the gospel. Jesus is a kind of quark. The archbishop came along with a telescope and said, in essence, "look at the stars and the lovely patterns."

Reading his second effort to account for the structure of Mark, you can hear his defensiveness. He was roundly rejected. For this reason I wish he was alive in the 1980s. If he had been, then he could have seen the birth of "narrative" or "literary" criticism of the bible. If he had he been alive and agile in the '80s he may have been able to see direction of scholarship move in the very direction he proposed. His theory might still be challenged, but it would have been considered with far more care and respect.

I wish he had lived to see this. I also wish he would have started or focused his research on the Gospel of Luke instead of Mark. If he had he would have looked to Luke he would have found the very same wonderful patterns and tantalizing numbers he did in Mark. He would have found them here too, but he would have also found such a profound and esoteric order that he would not have wasted his time with dates and festivals and weeks of the month. In Luke he would have likely realized: the order of the gospel dynamic not determined. Luke has such profound patterns in the pericopes, the idea of fixing them with a date would not have been likely.

The Order of Luke

From the beginning of our study I have tried to suggest that Luke's opening sentences are the key to having "ears to hear and eyes to see." They are key because Luke is putting together something to see and hear. Moreover he says, "many" have tried to do this. Other than the gospel of John's closing claim of many more sayings and actions of Jesus, this claim of Luke seeking to provide one order amidst many is the only direct, viable clue we have to the formation of all the gospels. It is the most important.

Luke's declaration should have been the basis of the archbishop's theory. This declaration is the blueprint of the telescope. With his declaration of one order amongst many we have the ground to speak of constellations.

To read Luke you to see the four parts within the order.

The four parts are as follows:

1. The Infancy Narrative. This is composed of two chapters or thirteen pericopes. Here we have only one teaching of Jesus and it is questionable if it can be counted as such. Luke begins his gospel with a series of stories about the mothers who gave birth to Jesus and John the Baptist. In a way it is a separate order or hidden gospel. The infancy narrative can be seen as the gospel of Mary because it is her story and her faith this is the focus.
2. The Galilean Ministry of Jesus: This is six and half chapters or forty pericopes. They all take place in Galilee. This is a much shortened version of Mark's Galilee section, but it follows his basic plot line. It is as if he is rushing through the life and ministry of Jesus. Galilee is something he must account for, but it is not his focus. An example of this can be seen in this: only Luke does not have the disciples return to Galilee after the resurrection. Galilee was necessary but not point.
3. The third part is the Samaritan pilgrimage of Luke. This is the unique part of his gospel. This section is nearly ten chapters or fifty-five pericopes. The pilgrimage begins the moment Jesus "turned his face to Jerusalem" and ends with his entering Jerusalem "riding on a donkey." During this time Jesus walked the spiritual/cultural no-man's land of Samaria. The largest part of his "order" and, again, it is unique. No other gospel describes this pilgrimage.
4. The final part is the passion and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem. This part has five and a half chapters or forty pericopes that all take place in Jerusalem. This part is similar in number to Matthew and Mark. But the forty pericopes themselves are different. He gets Jesus from the donkey to the garden, but, along the way, everything is different. The passion of Jesus is a very egalitarian gracious speech to the world. "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they do." This is the prayer of Jesus on the cross. In Mark and Matthew, the prayer from the cross is: "my God, my God, why have you left me to die." Luke depicts Jesus as begging forgiveness for the Jews. Mark has Jesus shouting like the psalms: where are you, God?

Think back to the sermon on the mount. This is Matthew's gift to the church and the world. The elegance, the intention, the subtle ebb and flow of heaven and earth. Luke has offered such a gift as well. It is the pilgrimage through Samaria. 55 teachings in an exquisite order. This is his "order." Galilee and Jerusalem: that is the order of Mark. Matthew like Luke has an infancy narrative. Although they are different they are not unique. Luke shortens Galilee and changes the passion in Jerusalem, but he still has much more in common than is unique. The largest part of Luke is the pilgrimage. Only he does this. By seeing the four parts and what makes them common or unique, we can begin to see the order of Luke and with the order the way of reading his gospel.

The Lesser Parts

In this section of the chapter we will look at the “lesser” parts of Luke’s gospel. When we get to the next section of the chapter, we will examine the unique part, the pilgrimage. I call the infancy narrative, the Galilean ministry, and the passion of Jerusalem lesser not only because they are not as long, or less than, the Samaritan pilgrimage, but I also call them lesser because I believe Luke intentionally ordered them to be less. They are meant to decrease so the pilgrimage could increase.

While the infancy, the Galilean, and the passion are lesser, but they are yet each a masterful order. Each has a unique and beautiful gift for the church. Let’s start at the beginning: the infancy

Zechariah and Elizabeth.

The infancy narrative of Luke begins with a temple priest of Jerusalem and his wife who is barren. They are Abraham and Sara resurrected. People of promise who are without the primary blessing of Jewish culture: children. Zechariah and Elizabeth may have been very successful people yet they carried a profound mark of shame. Who else could be the parents of John the Baptist to make clear the path of the messiah?

From this ancient echo of Abraham and Sara, we introduced to a young temple virgin and a radically new path of blessing and promise. Mary, cousin of Elizabeth, is visited by an an angel who says she will bear a child as a virgin. On the outskirts of the city of Jerusalem two pregnant cousins meet. One an ancient, barren women who is pregnant and the other a mystical, chaste virgin who has conceived a child without a man.

But the story is only getting going. This is not just about ancient promises and mystical piety, this is also a story of poor people and outcasts. The messiah is born in Bethlehem, announced by angels to shepherds (only higher than destitute widows). And the birth happens in the shadow of Rome. The Goliath does not know that David is born.

After the birth of Jesus Luke provides a series of stories about the naming of Jesus and his presentation in the temple. While the “holy family” leaves Jerusalem and returns to Galilee, they return in the next story to relate the “twelve year old” Jesus coming to city for Passover. The infancy narrative is then series of stories about poverty and piety. There are ancient promises remembered (John the Baptist) and a whole new path of mercy, the virgin birth. Yet, what is most important is that the infancy narrative is really a series of stories about Mary. She is the focus of the stories.

There is a legend that Mary went to Ephesus after the resurrection. John the beloved went with her and tended to her until she died. (Paul too went to Ephesus, but he did not found a church, nor did he lead the church there.) It could be that Paul and Luke traveled to Ephesus and he heard Mary’s stories. He heard her stories of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Luke

contemplated the account of the shepherds and Mary's treasure and ease with angels. It could be he heard her recount the prophetic zeal in Jerusalem over Jesus and the disastrous return to the city. It could be these were Mary's stories Luke heard in Ephesus where Paul had no need to found a church. Hence, one way to read the infancy narrative is to see it as the gospel of Mary that is added on to the order of Luke.

The Galilean Obligation

The next part of Luke's order is the collection of pericopes that encompass the ministry of Jesus. Pericopes that are flush left are from Mark's order. Lessons that are one tab from the left are shared with Matthew. Three pericopes tabbed beyond this order are unique to Luke.

Here is the list of the pericopes:

1. Preaching of John the baptist
2. Baptism
3. Genealogy
4. Temptation
5. Beginning of ministry
6. Rejection in Nazareth
7. Man with the unclean spirit
8. Healings at Simon's House
9. Jesus preaching in synagogues
10. Calling disciples
11. Cleansing a leper
12. Healing a paralytic
13. Calling of Levi
14. Questions of Fasting
15. Questions of the Sabbath
16. Man with the withered hand
17. Appointing the twelve
18. Jesus teaches and heals
19. Blessings and Woes
20. Love for enemies
21. Judging others
22. Tree and its Fruit
23. Two foundations
24. Jesus heals a centurian's servant
25. Raising of the widow's son
26. Sinful woman forgiven
27. Women accompany Jesus
28. Parable of the sower
29. Purpose of the parables
30. Parable of the sower explained

31. Light under a vessel
32. Mother and brother of Jesus
33. Calming of the storm
34. Healing of the Demoniac
35. Woman who touches Jesus' garment
36. Mission of the twelve
37. Herod's anxiety
38. Feeding of the five thousand
39. Peter's declaration
40. First Passion prediction
41. Transfiguration
42. Healing the boy with the unclean spirit
43. Second passion prediction
44. Who is the greatest
45. He who is not against you is for you

From this list we can see that Luke's account of Galilee is essentially Mark's. He adds a genealogy like Matthew as well as six pieces from the sermon on the Mount which is called, "the sermon the plain" as Luke describes Jesus as speaking from a "level" place. Of the 45 pieces only 3 are unique to Luke. They are offered as a cluster and they each focus on women.

A comparison with Mark is helpful here. Mark takes us from the Baptist to the gates of Jerusalem in 55 pericopes. If we omit the Samaritan pilgrimage, Luke does the same 34 pericopes. Luke, in essence, gives the essentials; he pares down Mark and adds a bit of Matthew's Galilee. The story Mark told of Jesus in Galilee is there; it is just not as elaborate.

If we go back to the theory put forth by the Archbishop about Mark and we consider his pericopes as an intentional set of choices, then we can see that Luke abides by Mark's ordering for Galilee.

In the Next Section

In the next section we will dive deeply into the unique order of Luke, the Samaritan pilgrimage. Yet, before we leap over Samaria and enter Luke's passion in Jerusalem, a few remarks about geography. Palestine in the time of Jesus was divided up into three parts. The northern region of Galilee; the middle region of Samaria; and the southern region of Judea. Nazareth and Capernaum, where Jesus lived, were in Galilee. Jericho and the site of the baptism and temptation as well as Jerusalem are in Judea. Mark and Matthew stick to Galilee and Judea. They do not describe Jesus as entering Samaria.

The simple reason for this is that the Samaritans were cultural and religious outcasts. The Samaritans were the people left behind after the Babylonians destroyed Judea in the 6th century BCE. They lived for nearly a century on their own and developed a unique form of Judaism. They were considered ritually unclean.

This is important when we considered that Luke not only describes Jesus in Samaria, but he also devotes the largest portion of his gospel to this region. For practical reason it is right to treat this part separately, but it is also important to read the second and fourth parts of Luke's gospel without so to see how he compares to Matthew and Mark.

The Fourth Part: the passion of Jerusalem

If we pick up the order just before Jerusalem, when Jesus is in Jericho, it will be helpful to see how much he sticks to Mark. The spacing will be the same as above.

1. Healing of the blind beggar in Jericho
2. Jesus and Zacchaeus
3. Parable of the ten pounds
4. Entry on the donkey
5. Cleansing of the temple
6. Authority questioned
7. Parable of the vineyard
8. Paying taxes to Caesar
9. Question about the resurrection
10. Question of David's son
11. Denouncing of scribes
12. Widow's offering
13. Destruction of the temple
14. Signs and persecutions
15. Destruction of the temple part ii
16. Coming of the son of man
17. Lesson of the fig tree
18. Exhortation to watch
19. Plot to kill Jesus
20. Preparation for Passover
21. Institution of the supper
22. Dispute about greatness
23. Peter's denial foretold
24. Purse bag and sword
25. Prayer on the mount of Olives
26. Betrayal and arrest
27. Peter's denial
28. Mocking and beating
29. Jesus before the council
30. Jesus before pilate
31. Jesus before Herod
32. Sentence to die
33. Crucifixion

34. Death of Jesus
35. Burial of Jesus
36. Resurrection of Jesus
37. Walk to Emmaus
38. Appearance to the disciples (longer ending of Mark)
39. Ascension of Jesus (longer ending of Mark)