

The Meaning of Jesus Week One: How Do We Know About Jesus?  
Ankeny UCC Lenten Study, 2/25/15

- I. Marcus Borg: Seeing Jesus: Sources, Lenses, and Methods
  - a. Gospels are a developing tradition
    - i. Written 70-120 AD
    - ii. Writers interpret earlier events through own experiences
  - b. Gospels are mix of history and metaphor
    - i. Metaphors can be true without being historical-reveal post-Easter Jesus
    - ii. Historical elements reveal pre-Easter Jesus (historical Jesus)
  - c. Implications of the difference
    - i. Easy to lose track of the human, relatable Jesus
    - ii. Easy to forget that the risen Christ is here today
  - d. Lenses for identifying Jesus
    - i. Modern Biblical scholarship, historical and metaphorical Jesus
    - ii. Ancient Judaism—Jesus lived in a time and a place
    - iii. Social history of Biblical Israel
    - iv. Cross-cultural study of religion and religious experience
  - e. Macro Lens of our worldview
    - i. Modernity has a secular worldview-grounded in the seen
    - ii. Religious worldview grounded in the sacred
    - iii. Easy to accept secular worldview uncritically, but it is just one
    - iv. Must widen scope beyond cultural assumptions
  - f. Interpretive lens of early layers+context
    - i. Paul is earliest, dating from 50, but no historical Jesus
    - ii. Q is next (50s), but can only be inferred and has no narrative
    - iii. Mark is earliest Gospel (70s), provides narrative for Mt and Lk
    - iv. John is a different tradition, likely not hugely useful for history
    - v. Gospel of Thomas (100s) a collection of sayings, little narrative
    - vi. What is historical?
      1. Multiple attestation of independent sources
      2. Single attestation if it is coherent with MA core
      3. Complications with developing tendencies (goes against instincts of the gospel writers) could be historical.
    - vii. What is Context?
      1. Archaeological investigation and external sources about time
      2. Roman occupation and rebellions around the time of Jesus
- II. NT Wright: Knowing Jesus: Faith and History
  - a. We look at history and faith as separate, but they aren't
    - i. Historical faith documents inform history
    - ii. Symbol and myth can be historical commentary
    - iii. One world, interlocking dimensions
  - b. History is looking through your lenses at the past
    - i. Must be aware lenses are there
    - ii. Can be give and take as we wrestle with faith and history
    - iii. Must leave room for suspicion, but not be overwhelmed by it

- iv. Historical Jesus can be too subtle, decide too much on little evidence
- v. Must look at our endeavor as messy, dealing with real people
- vi. Real people dealing with ultimate reality is momentous, heavier than a pure history
- c. What does history look like as we reconcile faith and history?
  - i. Evidence from all contemporaneous sources
    - 1. Problem-lots of orthodox evidence, little other
  - ii. Ask questions about Jesus's life and the Jesus movement
    - 1. Does the evidence give us coherent answers?
    - 2. Not really. Rabbinical material, library fragments, gospels, all radically different in scope and coverage
  - iii. Earlier is better
    - 1. Sometimes problematic, but a good starting point
  - iv. Understand how gospels are related (synoptics, John)
  - v. Gospel-writing process
    - 1. Oral tradition
    - 2. Collection of oral traditions into writing
    - 3. Editing of written traditions into narrative
  - vi. All of this is problematic
    - 1. Not real agreement on what came first (mark or matthew)
      - a. Vocal minority says Mt, meaning no need for Q
    - 2. Lots of ways to break down the gospels into different traditions
    - 3. Lots of theories about how Gospels were written
    - 4. Disagreements on a major level mean disagreements on minor level
  - vii. Theories may have been developed to solve church-level problems
- d. How do we deal with these?
  - i. Hypothesis and verification
    - 1. Don't exclude evidence, but try to harmonize it
    - 2. Analyze harmony—simple, complicated, elegant, awkward?
    - 3. Can't assume some material older than others, or which
    - 4. Can't assume pre- and post-Easter distinctions
- e. Faith
  - i. Jesus knows us, we know Jesus, and are aware of his presence
  - ii. Presence ebbs and flows, can bring new knowledge with it
  - iii. This knowledge that Jesus is there and we know him is faith
  - iv. We also know about Jesus
  - v. History keeps faith from being fantasy
  - vi. Faith can put hard questions to history (not veto it)