

Matthew 21.12-17

The Temple Judgement Scene

Read:

1. Matthew 21.12-17
 2. Mark 11.11-15
 3. Luke 19.41-48
 4. John 2.13-16
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Imagine that someone you're disciplining or someone you've been praying for to read the Bible, begins to read the Bible. They come to you with worry and confusion and tell you that they notice the temple story in the gospels are all slightly different. Not one temple account reads the exact same way. They conclude if the gospel writers contradict themselves here how can they be trusted about anything else they say about Jesus? How do you respond?

The temple story is just one example of how there is unity and diversity amongst the gospel stories. Other examples abound in how the gospels differ from each other. How should we respond to people who say the gospels contradict each other therefore they cannot be trusted as accurate sources about Jesus.

The way to answer this question is to ask another question, "what is a gospel?" This is a question of genre or literary type. What kind of book is Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?

"If one does restrict attention to the canonical Gospels, then the question arises, What *kind* of documents are they? To what literary category or "genre" do they belong? The problem of classifying the genre of the Gospels has been much debated in critical scholarship over the years. In one way it is easier to say what the Gospels are not: They are not letters; they are not plays; they are not apocalypses. In fact, the Gospels are in many ways unlike almost anything in ancient literature...in recent years there has been a number of attempts to place the Gospels within the context of other literary products of the ancient world, above all within the category of a "biography". **It is recognized that the Gospels are not biographies in any modern sense of the word.** Above all, there is nothing in them about Jesus' childhood and origins..., nor about Jesus' psychological development. Nevertheless, it is now becoming clear that such features do not always characterize ancient biography...so that it is possible that the NT Gospels could be placed within the wide parameters that accommodate **ancient biographies.**" (Tuckett, NIBC, 18).

"The Gospels most resemble another kind of writing of the time--Greco-Roman biography. A key feature of such biographies was their anecdotal nature--they were arranged more topically than chronologically to emphasize the teachings of the biography's subject.

For example, Suetonius, the Roman biographer of emperors and poets describes his biographical writing in this way: 'Having given as it were a summary of his life I shall now take up its various phases one by one, not in chronological order, but by categories, to make the account clearer and more intelligible. Duane Stuart describes the biographies of Suetonius as broadly chronological but topical in the body of his work.'...

Similarly, each Gospel follows chronology for its basic structure, beginning the early years of Jesus and then narrating his baptism, public ministry, and passion, and resurrection. In the body of a Gospel, the arrangement of individual episodes and sayings often tell us more about the evangelist's thematic interests than about chronology." (Brown, 32, *The Gospels as Stories*).