

The miracles of Jesus

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This document examines the miracles attributed to Jesus throughout his ministry as recorded in the four canonical gospels. Because many of these accounts appear in more than one gospel, the discussion is organized to compare parallel narratives and to highlight both their similarities and their differences.

The miracles are presented according to the generally accepted view of Markan priority, namely that the gospel of Mark was written first and served as a principal source for the authors of Matthew and Luke. Accordingly, we begin with each miracle recorded in Mark and compare it with the corresponding narratives in the other gospels. We then examine the miracles unique to Matthew, comparing them with any parallel accounts in Luke where appropriate. Next, we consider the miracles unique to Luke, again noting any relevant parallels in John. Finally, we examine the miracles unique to John that have no counterparts in the synoptic gospels. This organization makes it possible to follow the development of the miracle traditions across the four gospels while observing the distinctive theological and literary emphases of each author.

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Forward

The purpose of this document is to examine all of the narratives that contain miracles of Jesus in the gospels. In part, this is to argue against any attempt to suggest that an analysis of the most troublesome passages is an attempt at cherry picking. By examining all

1 Miracles of Jesus in Mark

The Gospel of Mark contains twenty-one distinct miracle narratives or summaries of miraculous activity. Some describe individual healings or exorcisms, while others summarize periods during which Jesus travelled throughout Galilee healing the sick and casting out demons without recounting each miracle individually.

One striking feature of Mark's narrative is its geographical distribution. Nearly all of Jesus's miracles occur in Galilee or the surrounding regions during the earlier part of his ministry. After Jesus enters Jerusalem for the final week of his life, miraculous activity virtually disappears. The only miracle performed during this period is the cursing of the fig tree, after which Mark records no further healings, exorcisms, or nature miracles before Jesus's crucifixion. This marked change in emphasis reflects the Gospel's shift from a ministry characterized by miraculous works to one dominated by teaching, controversy, and the events leading to Jesus's arrest and execution.

The following sections examine each miracle recorded in Mark in sequence, comparing it with the corresponding accounts in Matthew, Luke, and John where parallel narratives exist. Differences in chronology, wording, setting, and theological emphasis will be noted as they arise.

1.1 Casting out an unclean spirit on the Sabbath

The very first miracle of Jesus in Mark is [Mark 1:21–28](#):

They¹ went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet and come out of him!”

And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Jesus cast out the unclean spirit with a word of command.

According to the author of Mark, this is the very first miracle of Jesus’s public ministry, as only a few verses earlier, after John the Baptist had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee and began proclaiming, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” As he travelled along the Sea of Galilee toward Capernaum, he called “Simon and his brother Andrew” to follow him, and after going “a little farther”, he called “James son of Zebedee and his brother John”, who immediately “left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men.”

What is peculiar is that Capernaum is only a small fishing town on the north coast of the Sea of Galilee, and yet, simply teaching in the synagogue and casting out one unclean spirit causes his “fame to spread throughout the...region of Galilee.”

From a historical perspective, this passage raises several questions. Mark never tells the reader what this “new teaching” actually was. Jesus enters the synagogue and teaches, the audience is astonished, yet the content of the sermon is omitted entirely. This is a pattern that is repeated throughout the gospels and the writings of Paul. Instead, the subsequent exorcism serves as the demonstration of his authority, leaving the doctrine itself unstated and requiring the reader to infer the significance of the teaching from the miracle rather than from any recorded words. This is not an isolated feature of Mark, but a recurring pattern throughout the gospels: Jesus is repeatedly described as speaking with extraordinary wisdom, insight, or authority, while the substance of what he said is often omitted and only the audience’s reaction is recorded. Likewise, the description of the event’s aftermath raises historical questions. A single exorcism witnessed by those present in one synagogue would ordinarily have had a limited audience. Although news could certainly have spread through family, trade, and pilgrimage networks, the statement that Jesus’s fame immediately spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee appears to function more as a literary device, emphasizing the extraordinary impact of Jesus’s authority, than as a detailed historical account of how news of the event actually disseminated across the region.

In Mark 1, the author makes use of the Greek adverb *euthys* (usually translated “immediately”, at “once”, or “straightway”). In the first chapter alone, Mark uses the term repeatedly to propel the narrative from one episode to the next: the Spirit immediately drives Jesus into the wilderness (1:12); Simon and Andrew immediately leave their nets (1:18); James and John immediately leave their father (1:20); Jesus’s fame immediately spreads throughout Galilee following the exorcism (1:28); immediately after leaving the synagogue he enters Simon’s house (1:29); Simon’s mother-in-law is spoken of immediately (1:30); and the disciples immediately tell Jesus that everyone is looking for him (1:37). The repetition creates a sense of urgency

¹ Jesus, Simon, Andrew, James, and John.

and momentum, giving the impression that Jesus's ministry unfolds with remarkable speed. Whether or not these events occurred in such rapid succession historically, the literary effect is to portray Jesus's ministry as advancing swiftly and decisively from one demonstration of authority to the next.

1.1.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew leaves this healing out of his narrative, and yet, interestedly enough, [Mark 1:16–20](#), where Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, James and John is paralleled in [Matthew 4:18–22](#). The author of Matthew retains much of Mark's wording, but also makes numerous editorial changes. Most significantly, in Mark the calling of Simon and Andrew differs noticeably from the calling of James and John. The author of Matthew reshapes the two episodes into closely parallel accounts. In both, the author of Matthew has Jesus seeing a pair of brothers ("he saw two brothers" and "he saw two other brothers"), they are engaged in their fishing work with nets, he calls them, and they respond immediately by leaving everything behind and following him. The parallelism is especially evident in the concluding formula, where both episodes end with the nearly identical statement, "Immediately they left ... and followed him."

The the very next passage in [Matthew 4:23–25](#),

Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, people possessed by demons or having epilepsy or afflicted with paralysis, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

is hauntingly close to [Mark 1:32–24](#) and [38–39](#):

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him...

He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

This next passage in Matthew likewise appears to be a carefully constructed summary based on material already found in Mark. Mark describes Jesus healing many who were sick with various diseases, casting out demons, and then traveling throughout Galilee proclaiming his message in the synagogues. Matthew retains all of these fundamental elements but expands and rearranges them into a broader and more dramatic portrait of Jesus's early ministry. Instead of Mark's "many", Jesus now cures "every disease and every sickness"; instead of his reputation spreading throughout Galilee, "his fame spread throughout all Syria"; and instead of crowds gathering from a single city, they now come from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Even the mention of the Decapolis, which in Mark does not become significant until after the healing of the Gerasene demoniac ([Mark 5:20](#)), is moved forward to emphasize the extraordinary breadth of Jesus's reputation. Thus, while the seeds of Matthew's account are all present in Mark, the author of Matthew systematically enlarges the scope of Jesus's ministry, transforming a series of local episodes into a sweeping summary in which Jesus's fame has already spread across much of the region.

Consequently, the author of Matthew recounts the calling of the first four disciples and then immediately summarizes the rapid spread of Jesus's fame throughout the region, but he omits the first miracles that immediately follow the call of the disciples in Mark. In Mark, the repeated use of "immediately" (εὐθύς) tightly links the calling of the disciples with the casting out of the unclean spirit and the healing of Simon's mother-in-law, presenting these as the opening miracles of Jesus's public ministry. As we will see, Matthew not only omits the first of these miracles but also moves the second (the healing of Simon's mother-in-law) significantly later in Jesus's ministry.

1.1.2 In Luke

The author of Luke also rearranges Mark's narrative, but in a different way from Matthew. Whereas Mark presents Jesus as beginning his public ministry only after John the Baptist has been arrested, Luke removes this chronological connection. In Mark, the arrest of John serves as the transition from John's ministry to that of Jesus, suggesting that Jesus's public ministry begins only after John's has effectively come to an end. Read naturally, the sequence even leaves the impression that, had John not been arrested, Jesus's public ministry might not yet have begun. This literary arrangement makes Jesus's ministry appear dependent upon John's, with Jesus stepping forward only after his predecessor has been removed from the scene. Luke instead places John's imprisonment earlier in the narrative ([Luke 3:19–20](#)), before mentioning Jesus's baptism, thereby separating the two ministries. Indeed, the statement of John's arrest appears immediately before [Luke 3:21–22](#) where the author of Luke leaves John the Baptist entirely out of the narrative, further distancing Jesus from John the Baptist:

Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Furthermore, unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke does not connect the beginning of Jesus's ministry with John's arrest. Rather, Jesus's ministry is presented as the direct consequence of his baptism, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and his forty days in the wilderness. After overcoming temptation, he immediately returns to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" to begin his public ministry in [Luke 4:14–15](#):

Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region.

He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

This introductory summary has no parallel in Mark. Before Jesus has called any disciples or performed any recorded miracles, Luke states that his reputation had already spread throughout the surrounding region and that he was teaching in synagogues and receiving universal praise. Luke thus presents Jesus as already being a well-known teacher before narrating his first miracle.

Luke then inserts Jesus's visit to Nazareth ([Luke 4:16–30](#)), moving forward an episode that appears much later in Mark ([Mark 6:1–6](#)), with Matthew agreeing with Mark. Rather than presenting it as a rejection after an established ministry, Luke transforms it into one of the defining inaugural events of Jesus's public ministry. There, Jesus publicly identifies himself with Isaiah's prophecy concerning the anointed servant, is rejected by his hometown, and escapes unharmed when an angry crowd attempts to throw him from a cliff.

Curiously, as is often the case throughout the gospels, the author does not record the substance of the teaching that initially astonished the audience. Luke merely states that those present "were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth", without preserving the discourse itself. Instead, the narrative quickly turns to Jesus's brief references to Elijah's aid to the widow of Zarephath and Elisha's cleansing of Naaman the Syrian. Both examples emphasize occasions when God's prophets bypassed Israelites in order to assist Gentiles, implicitly comparing Jesus's audience to the unfaithful Israelites of those earlier generations. Such a comparison would undoubtedly have been deeply insulting to a Jewish audience. Never-the-less, the reader is never told what Jesus originally said that elicited such admiration, but only the comparatively brief insult that allegedly transformed that admiration into an attempt on his life. The narrative therefore preserves the obvious provocation but omits the substantive teaching that had first captivated the audience.

Only after this extended introduction does Luke return to Mark's narrative by describing Jesus's arrival in Capernaum and the exorcism in the synagogue in [Luke 4:31–37](#):

He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbath.

They were astounded at his teaching because he spoke with authority.

In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out

with a loud voice, “Leave us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet and come out of him!”

Then the demon, throwing the man down before them, came out of him without doing him any harm.

They were all astounded and kept saying to one another, “What kind of word is this, that with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out?”

And news about him began to reach every place in the region.

Like in Mark, Jesus cast out the unclean spirit with a word of command.

Luke follows Mark closely, but with several notable editorial changes. The unclean spirit is explicitly identified as a demon, emphasizing the demonic nature of Jesus’s opponent. The demon’s opening words are also expanded with the plea, Leave us alone!” Finally, whereas Mark’s crowd “marvels at a new teaching”, Luke replaces this somewhat enigmatic expression with, “What kind of word is this?” Since Mark never records the content of Jesus’s teaching, Luke’s wording avoids referring to an otherwise undefined “new teaching” while preserving the emphasis on Jesus’s authority. Overall, Luke retains the miracle but places it within a substantially revised introduction to Jesus’s ministry, one in which Jesus’s authority and reputation have already been firmly established before his arrival in Capernaum.

1.1.3 Comment on John the Baptist

From the perspective of literary development, one of the most striking trends among the synoptic gospels is the increasing effort to distinguish Jesus from John the Baptist. In Mark, Jesus appears as one among the crowds coming to John for baptism, and it is only after the baptism that the heavens open, the Spirit descends upon him, and the divine voice identifies him as God’s Son. Furthermore, Jesus does not begin his own public ministry until after John’s arrest, leaving the impression that his ministry follows that of John and, at least narratively, succeeds it. Matthew modifies this picture by inserting a dialogue before the baptism in which John objects, declaring that he himself ought to be baptized by Jesus. Luke goes further still. He places John’s imprisonment before Jesus’s baptism, thereby severing the chronological link between the two ministries, and when Jesus is baptized, John is no longer even present in the narrative. Jesus is simply baptized, the heavens open, and the Holy Spirit descends. Each successive gospel therefore reduces the appearance that Jesus had been a disciple of John the Baptist or that his ministry was in any way dependent upon John’s.

The gospel of John carries this development even further. There, John the Baptist repeatedly testifies to Jesus’s superiority. He identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God, declares that he himself is unworthy even to untie Jesus’s sandal, and twice directs his own disciples toward Jesus. The relationship has been completely reversed. Rather than Jesus appearing as one who first received John’s baptism and later began his own ministry, John exists almost entirely to bear witness to Jesus. Read together, the four gospels exhibit a clear literary trajectory in which John the Baptist is progressively subordinated to Jesus, and every potential ambiguity concerning their relative status is systematically removed.

One historical circumstance that may help explain this literary development is the continued existence of independent followers of John the Baptist. The New Testament itself acknowledges that such groups persisted long after John’s death. In [Acts 18:24–28](#), [19:1–7](#), and elsewhere, individuals are encountered who know only John’s baptism and have not accepted Jesus. The author of Acts invariably resolves these encounters by having such disciples accept Christian baptism and become followers of Jesus. Curiously, however, although Acts frequently records lengthy speeches by Simon, Stephen, and Paul, it provides virtually none of the arguments by which these disciples of John were persuaded. Their conversion is simply narrated as an accomplished fact.

The persistence of independent Johannine communities nevertheless raises an important historical question.

If John the Baptist had publicly identified Jesus as the Messiah and had instructed his own disciples to follow him, one might reasonably expect John's movement to have merged rapidly into the early Christian movement. Yet the evidence suggests otherwise. The author of Luke–Acts consistently portrays disciples of John as eventually accepting Jesus, while the gospel traditions progressively strengthen John's testimony in Jesus's favour. Outside the New Testament, however, communities devoted to John the Baptist continued to exist, and indeed still survive today in the form of the *Mandaeans*. Whether these communities preserve an independent tradition concerning John or represent a later religious development remains debated, but their very existence illustrates that the relationship between the movements of John the Baptist and Jesus was considerably more complex than the New Testament narratives alone might suggest.

1.2 Healing Simon's mother-in-law

The next miracle immediately follows in Mark in [Mark 1:29–31](#):

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

The woman was healed after Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up.

This brief account provides little information about the miracle itself. Unlike many later healing stories, there is no dialogue, no expression of faith by the recipient, no command by Jesus, and no reaction from onlookers. Mark simply states that Jesus took her by the hand, helped her to her feet, and “the fever left her”. The immediate resumption of her household duties is presented as evidence that the healing was complete.

The passage is nevertheless historically noteworthy because it implies that Simon had been married, or at least had been married at some point, since he had a mother-in-law. Beyond this incidental detail, however, the gospels say nothing about his wife. She is never named, never appears in the narrative, and plays no discernible role in Jesus's ministry. The existence of Simon's wife is therefore inferred solely from this passing reference to his mother-in-law.

The audience also differs markedly from that of the preceding miracle. Whereas the exorcism occurred before a synagogue congregation, this healing takes place in a private residence and is witnessed only by Jesus and his newly called disciples, together with those already in the household. The miracle therefore serves not only as an act of compassion but also as the disciples' first private observation of Jesus's healing ministry.

1.2.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew, despite having copied directly from Mark, places this story well into Jesus's ministry:

1. Jesus went throughout all Galilee.. [s]o his fame spread throughout all Syria...[a]nd great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.
2. Jesus then gives the sermon on the mountain in [Matthew 5, 6, and 7](#).
3. Jesus heals a man with skin disease.
4. Jesus heals the Centurion's slave.

Only then does Jesus heal Simon's mother-in-law in [Matthew 8:14–15](#):

When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him.

The woman was healed after Jesus touched her hand.

This is despite the fact that the author of Mark clearly has this healing occurring the same day as the first miracle in the synagogue, for “[a]s soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew...”

Additionally, the narrative is also significantly streamlined. The author of Matthew no longer identifies who is present in the house. Whereas Mark names Simon, Andrew, James, and John, Matthew simply states that Jesus entered Simon's house. Jesus is not told that Simon's mother-in-law is ill; instead, he sees her lying with a fever. Nor does he take her by the hand and lift her up, as in Mark. Rather, he merely touches

her hand, whereupon the fever immediately leaves her, and only then does she rise and begin to serve him. Throughout his gospel, Matthew frequently abbreviates Mark's narratives, removing incidental details and focusing instead on their theological significance. Here, the emphasis falls not on the process of the healing but on the power of Jesus himself. His touch alone is sufficient to cure the fever immediately, anticipating later episodes in Matthew in which physical contact with Jesus (even touching the fringe of his cloak) is enough to bring healing.

1.2.2 In Luke

The author of Luke maintains the chronology found in Mark. Immediately after casting out the unclean spirit (now described simply as a demon) in the synagogue, Jesus proceeds to Simon's home in [Luke 4:38–39](#):

After leaving the synagogue he entered Simon's house.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him about her.

Then he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.

The woman was healed after Jesus rebukes the fever.

As in Mark (and unlike Matthew's transposition), Jesus goes directly from the synagogue to Simon's home, preserving the impression that these events occur on the same day. However, whereas Mark refers to the "house of Simon and Andrew", Luke simplifies this to merely "Simon's house". Luke also returns to Mark's narrative that Jesus is informed about Simon's mother-in-law, but instead of identifying the speakers, he merely states that "they" asked him concerning her. Since Jesus has not yet called any disciples in Luke's narrative, the identity of "they" is left unspecified. The reader may naturally infer that Simon and Andrew are among them, but the text itself offers no explanation for why Jesus is visiting Simon's house or how he had already become acquainted with Simon and his household before their formal call as disciples.

Luke also modifies the manner of the healing. Whereas Mark describes Jesus taking the woman by the hand and lifting her up, and Matthew has Jesus touch her hand, Luke omits any physical contact altogether. Instead, Jesus stood over her and "rebuked the fever". The verb translated "rebuked" is the Greek *ἐπιτιμάω* (*epitimaō*), a strong verb of command that Luke frequently uses when Jesus rebukes demons, the wind, and the waves. Indeed, this is the very same verb that Luke uses only a few verses earlier when Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit in the synagogue. By describing both the demon and the fever as responding to the same authoritative command, Luke portrays the illness itself as yielding to Jesus's authority just as the demon departed from the possessed man. This parallel is unique to Luke and is absent from both Mark and Matthew.

The most significant difficulty with Luke's narrative, however, is that none of the disciples have yet been called. It is not until [Luke 5:1–11](#) that Jesus calls Simon, James, John, and, by implication, Andrew. The setting is entirely different from that in Mark and Matthew. Rather than calling the two pairs of brothers separately as they are engaged in fishing, Luke presents a single episode in which all four become followers of Jesus together after the miraculous catch of fish:

Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets.

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

The differences are numerous. In Mark and Matthew the brothers are in their boats on the Sea of Galilee actively engaged in their work, whereas in Luke they are standing on the shore beside the Lake of Gennesaret washing their nets. The Lake of Gennesaret is simply another name for the Sea of Galilee, derived from the fertile Plain of Gennesaret along its northwestern shore. Furthermore, although James and John are again identified as the sons of Zebedee, their father is no longer present. Instead of working with their father, they are described as Simon's "partners", shifting the emphasis from a family fishing business to a partnership among the four future disciples. Finally, despite Jesus having already healed Simon's mother-in-law and visited Simon's house, the narrative proceeds as though no prior relationship exists between the two. Jesus approaches the boats without any greeting or acknowledgement, and Simon is introduced only as the owner of the boat that Jesus chooses to use.

We will examine the miraculous catch of fish in a later section. For the present discussion, it is sufficient to note that Luke unmistakably presents this episode as the call of the first disciples. Jesus concludes the encounter by telling Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people", echoing the commission in Mark and Matthew that the disciples would become "fishers of people." The narrative then concludes, as in the other two gospels, with the statement that they left everything behind and followed him. These deliberate parallels leave little doubt that Luke intends this account to serve the same literary function as the calling of the first disciples in Mark and Matthew. Consequently, within Luke's narrative Jesus has already cast out a demon, healed Simon's mother-in-law, healed many others, and preached throughout Galilee before Simon, James, John, and Andrew become his disciples.

1.3 Curing the sick and casting out demons

The author of Mark continues the narrative on the very same day as the casting out of the unclean spirit and the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. That evening, after the Sabbath had ended, he narrates in [Mark 1:32–34](#):

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons.

And the whole city was gathered around the door.

And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons,

and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

No mechanism of healing or exorcism is described.

As in Luke, the spirits are now described as demons rather than unclean spirits. Unlike the earlier exorcism in the synagogue and the healing of Simon's mother-in-law, however, Mark does not describe how Jesus healed the sick or cast out the demons; the miracles are simply reported as having occurred. Once again, Jesus silences the demons because they know who he is. Within Mark's narrative, the repeated command for the demons to remain silent contributes to what is commonly called the "Messianic Secret", in which Jesus's identity is repeatedly concealed despite being recognized by supernatural beings. Yet this raises an interesting question: why would the demons have wanted to reveal Jesus's identity in the first place? From their own perspective, publicly identifying Jesus as the Holy One of God or the Son of God would seem contrary to their interests, for it would only draw greater attention to the one who possessed authority over them and encourage even more people to seek him out for healing and exorcism. The demons' apparent desire to proclaim Jesus's identity therefore serves the narrative more than it reflects an obvious demonic motive.

A second difficulty arises from the setting of these events. The narrative is still located in Capernaum, a modest fishing village generally estimated to have had a population of no more than about one thousand inhabitants. Mark states that "the whole city was gathered around the door", suggesting that a substantial proportion of the local population witnessed these events or at least knew those who did. Even if only a few dozen people were healed or freed from demonic possession, the impact upon such a small community would have been extraordinary. Many of the village's inhabitants would have had a family member, friend, neighbour, or acquaintance directly affected by Jesus's miracles.

Yet later in the tradition, Jesus pronounces woes upon Capernaum and the neighbouring towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida ([Matthew 11:20–24](#); [Luke 10:13–15](#)) because they failed to repent despite witnessing his mighty works. Concerning Capernaum, Matthew records Jesus as saying,

"And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you."

Luke preserves an abbreviated form of the same saying. Thus, the gospel tradition itself presents a striking tension. On the one hand, Mark depicts Jesus's first day of public ministry culminating in spectacular healings before virtually the entire town. On the other hand, the later tradition assumes that these very communities nevertheless remained largely unpersuaded. The subsequent woes therefore function not merely as pronouncements of judgment but also as an explanation for why communities that supposedly witnessed so many extraordinary events ultimately failed to become centres of the Christian movement.

1.3.1 In Matthew

Like Mark, Matthew continues with the account of the evening healings following the healing of Simon's mother-in-law in [Matthew 8:16–17](#):

That evening they brought to him many who were possessed by demons, and he cast out the

spirits with a word and cured all who were sick.

This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.”

No mechanism of healing is described, but the exorcisms are performed by a word of command.

Matthew faithfully preserves Mark’s account, but abbreviates it considerably. Mark states that the whole city gathered around the door after Jesus’s public exorcism in the synagogue earlier that day, thereby providing a natural explanation for why so many people sought him out that evening. Matthew, however, has relocated this episode far later in his narrative. Between the calling of the first disciples and these evening healings, he has inserted the summary of Jesus’s Galilean ministry ([Matthew 4:23–25](#)), the Sermon on the Mount, the cleansing of the leper, and the healing of the centurion’s servant. Consequently, the narrative connection that motivates the arrival of the crowds in Mark has disappeared. Matthew simply states, “That evening they brought to him many who were possessed by demons”, without explaining why so many people had gathered or how news of Jesus had spread. Although the setting is still presumably Capernaum, since the preceding episode takes place in Simon’s house, the account has been detached from its original narrative context and inserted into Matthew’s thematic collection of miracle stories.

Matthew also adds a theological explanation absent from Mark. Whereas Mark simply reports that Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons, Matthew explains that these miracles fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.” This quotation is drawn from [Isaiah 53:4](#). Historically, however, Isaiah 53 is not generally understood as a predictive prophecy of a future Messiah. The poem appears in a section of Isaiah addressed to the Jewish exiles in Babylon during the sixth century BCE, and elsewhere in these chapters the “servant” is repeatedly identified as Israel itself. Moreover, the passage is written predominantly in the past tense, describing suffering that has already occurred rather than explicitly predicting future events. Matthew therefore interprets the passage typologically, seeing Jesus’s healing ministry as the fullest realization or fulfillment of the servant’s role. By citing Isaiah, Matthew presents Jesus’s healing ministry not merely as an expression of compassion or divine authority but as the fulfillment of Scripture, a characteristic editorial feature of his gospel.

1.3.2 In Luke

The author of Luke closely follows Mark in [Luke 4:40–41](#):

As the sun was setting, all those caring for any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them.

Moreover, demons also came out of many, shouting, “You are the Son of God!”

But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah.

This is largely a straightforward rewriting of Mark’s summary of Jesus’s many healings and exorcisms, with only a few noteworthy changes. The most significant is that Luke explicitly describes the mechanisms by which the miracles occur. Rather than merely stating that Jesus healed many who were sick, Luke writes that Jesus laid his hands on each of them and cured them individually. Likewise, instead of simply stating that Jesus cast out many demons, Luke explicitly describes Jesus rebuking them, after which they came out of those they possessed.

Luke also slightly modifies the demons’ confession. In Mark, they identify Jesus as “the Holy One of God,” whereas in Luke they proclaim him to be the “Son of God”. Luke further explains why Jesus silences them: they knew that he was the Messiah. As elsewhere in his gospel, Luke preserves the theme that Jesus forbids supernatural beings from publicly revealing his identity while making the narrative slightly more explicit and orderly than Mark’s account.

1.4 Casting out demons throughout all of Galilee

The next event in Mark occurs the very next morning. In [Mark 1:35–39](#), the author writes:

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.”

He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do.”

And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

No mechanism for these exorcisms is described.

Mark now summarizes what appears to be Jesus’s first preaching tour throughout Galilee. Such a journey would naturally have involved numerous towns and villages and would have represented an extended period of ministry rather than a brief excursion. Moreover, if Jesus was indeed traveling throughout Galilee proclaiming his message and casting out demons, his reputation would presumably have spread rapidly throughout the region. By this point in Mark’s narrative, Jesus has already performed a public exorcism in the synagogue at Capernaum, healed Simon’s mother-in-law, healed many sick people, cast out many demons before the gathered crowds, and is now said to be repeating these activities throughout Galilee. The cumulative effect is to portray Jesus as already widely known before many of the later miracle stories occur.

This also provides an important contrast with Luke. In Mark, this is clearly Jesus’s first preaching tour, occurring immediately after his initial miracles in Capernaum. Luke, however, has already expanded and rearranged the narrative by inserting Jesus’s visit to Nazareth before the events at Capernaum, thereby presenting Jesus as having already begun establishing his public ministry before this Galilean tour.

1.4.1 In Matthew

Matthew does not preserve this episode as a separate narrative. Instead, he incorporates its essential elements into his earlier summary of Jesus’s ministry ([Matthew 4:23–25](#)), where Jesus is likewise described as traveling throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing the sick. Rather than following Mark’s chronology, Matthew relocates this first preaching tour to the very beginning of Jesus’s public ministry, even though Mark explicitly places it immediately after the casting out of the unclean spirit in the synagogue, the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law, and the evening healings in Capernaum.

1.4.2 In Luke

Luke also has Jesus leaving the crowds at daybreak and going to a “deserted place”, but he significantly alters the scope of Jesus’s subsequent ministry. Rather than describing Jesus as traveling throughout Galilee, Luke states that he continued proclaiming the good news in the synagogues of Judea, as recorded in [Luke 4:42–44](#):

At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place.

And the crowds began looking for him, and when they reached him they tried to keep him from leaving them.

But he said to them, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.”

So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea.

Unlike Mark, no healings or exorcisms accompany Jesus’s preaching tour.

This is clearly the same narrative found in Mark, but Luke has made a striking geographical alteration. In Mark, Jesus's first preaching tour is confined to Galilee, where he travels among the towns and villages surrounding the Sea of Galilee. Luke, however, concludes the episode by stating that Jesus preached in the synagogues of Judea. If the term is understood literally, this represents a substantial expansion of Jesus's ministry, for Judea lay well to the south of Galilee and included numerous cities and settlements far removed from the region around Capernaum. Yet Luke provides no account of this journey and names none of the places that Jesus supposedly visited. This alteration is consistent with Luke's broader editorial treatment of Jesus's early ministry. Earlier in the gospel, Luke had already expanded Mark's brief Galilean preaching tour into a much more extensive ministry by inserting the visit to Nazareth and the summary that Jesus's fame had spread throughout Galilee. Having already portrayed Jesus as widely active throughout Galilee, Luke no longer has reason to repeat a ministry confined to that region. Instead, he broadens its geographical scope to Judea, thereby continuing to enlarge the reach of Jesus's public ministry.

It should be noted, however, that a number of ancient Greek manuscripts read "Galilee" rather than "Judea" in this verse. The reading "Judea" is generally preferred by modern critical editions because it is supported by the earliest and strongest manuscript witnesses, even though many scholars regard it as the more difficult reading. Indeed, the author of Luke's already having had Jesus tour Galilee together with that author's tendency elsewhere to expand the geographical scope of Jesus's ministry provides a plausible literary explanation for why he would have written "Judea". Conversely, the alternative reading "Galilee" is readily explained as a scribal attempt to harmonize Luke with Mark. Whether Luke intended Judea in the strict geographical sense or employed the term more broadly to denote the land of the Jews remains a matter of debate. Regardless, Luke has clearly departed from Mark's explicit statement that Jesus's first preaching tour was confined to Galilee.

1.5 Healing a man with a skin disease

Finally in Mark 1², the author of Mark recounts the healing of a man afflicted with a skin disease in [Mark 1:40-45](#):

A man with a skin disease came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I am willing. Be made clean!”

Immediately the skin disease left him, and he was made clean.

After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded as a testimony to them.”

But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly but stayed out in the country, and people came to him from every quarter.

The man was healed after Jesus touched him.

First, this appears to have been an event that occurred during Jesus’s tour of Galilee rather than after it. The preceding summary states that Jesus went “throughout all Galilee” ([Mark 1:39](#)), and no return to Capernaum is mentioned before this encounter. Indeed, the opening of the next chapter begins, “When he returned to Capernaum after some days...” ([Mark 2:1](#)), implying that Jesus had spent an extended period away from Capernaum before returning. Consequently, the healing of the man with the skin disease appears to be the only specific event that Mark chooses to narrate from what was presumably a lengthy preaching tour throughout Galilee.

Once again, Mark introduces the theme of secrecy. Jesus explicitly commands the man not to tell anyone about the miracle, yet the man immediately ignores the instruction and publicly proclaims what has happened. Unlike the earlier commands directed to the demons, this command proves entirely ineffective.

More significantly, the narrative presents an apparent tension. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus had already publicly cast out an unclean spirit in the synagogue, healed Simon’s mother-in-law, cured many sick people, cast out many demons before the gathered crowds of Capernaum, and then traveled throughout Galilee preaching and performing exorcisms. His fame had therefore already spread widely. Never-the-less, Mark now attributes a dramatic change in Jesus’s circumstances to this single healing: because the man publicized the miracle, Jesus “could no longer go into a town openly” and instead remained in the countryside while people came to him from every direction. Within the narrative, it is difficult to reconcile this sudden restriction upon Jesus’s movements with the widespread public ministry that had already been described. The episode therefore continues Mark’s theme of secrecy while simultaneously creating a tension with the preceding narrative.

This episode also introduces another recurring theme in Mark: people frequently fail to respond to Jesus as he instructs them. The man who has just been healed is the first person in the gospel to receive a direct command from Jesus only to disregard it completely. Jesus explicitly orders him to tell no one about the miracle, yet he immediately begins proclaiming it publicly. Ironically, the command that is ignored is not a difficult moral teaching or a demanding sacrifice, but a simple request for silence. This disobedience has immediate narrative consequences, for Mark explains that it was because of the man’s actions that Jesus could no longer enter towns openly. Thus, from the very beginning of the gospel, Mark portrays Jesus’s authority as paradoxical: although his commands are instantly obeyed by unclean spirits, diseases, and even the forces of nature, human beings repeatedly misunderstand or disregard his instructions. This tension

²To be clear, the chapter divisions are a medieval addition, introduced approximately twelve centuries after the gospels were written. They nevertheless provide a convenient point at which to divide the present discussion.

between Jesus's unquestioned authority over the natural and supernatural worlds and his limited success in directing human behaviour becomes an important theme throughout the gospel.

1.5.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew, like the healing of Simon's mother-in-law, relocates this episode to immediately follow the Sermon on the Mount. In [Matthew 8:1–4](#), he presents a considerably abbreviated version of Mark's account:

When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him,

and there was a man with a skin disease who came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

[Jesus] stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be made clean!"

Immediately his skin disease was cleansed.

Then Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

The man was healed after Jesus touched him.

Matthew retains the essential elements of Mark's narrative but omits much of its detail, including Jesus's compassion, the stern warning, the man's subsequent disobedience, and the explanation that Jesus could no longer enter towns openly. More significantly, Matthew has altered the setting. In Mark, Jesus appears to encounter the man in relative isolation, making the command, "See that you say nothing to anyone", entirely intelligible. In Matthew, however, Jesus has just descended from the mountain, and "great crowds followed him". The narrative gives no indication that these crowds dispersed before the healing took place; rather, the encounter follows immediately. If the crowds remained present, then Jesus's command to keep the miracle secret becomes difficult to understand, for numerous witnesses would already have observed both the healing and the conversation. This apparent incongruity is consistent with what redaction critics commonly describe as editorial fatigue: Matthew preserves Mark's command for silence even though, by relocating the episode, he has substantially altered the narrative circumstances that originally made the command meaningful.

The following episode further illustrates Matthew's departure from Mark's narrative. Jesus enters Capernaum to heal the centurion's servant and then proceeds to Simon's house to heal his mother-in-law. In Mark, by contrast, the healed man's public proclamation prevents Jesus from entering towns (this includes Capernaum) openly, forcing him to remain in the countryside while the crowds seek him out. Matthew omits this consequence entirely. Having already portrayed Jesus's fame as widespread earlier in his gospel, he no longer has any need for Mark's explanation of how that fame arose or why Jesus's movements became restricted.

1.5.2 In Luke

The author of Luke also relocates this episode, placing it immediately after the calling of Simon, Andrew, James, and John and, uniquely to Luke, the miraculous catch of fish. In [Luke 5:12–16](#), he presents the following account:

Once when he was in one of the cities, a man covered with a skin disease was there.

When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I am willing. Be made clean."

Immediately the skin disease left him.

And he ordered him to tell no one. "But go, show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses

commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds were gathering to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.

Meanwhile, he would slip away to deserted places and pray.

The man was healed after Jesus touched him.

Luke follows Mark’s narrative more closely than Matthew. He retains both the command for the healed man to tell no one and the subsequent spread of Jesus’s reputation. Unlike Mark, however, Luke no longer states that the man disobeyed Jesus by going “out and proclaiming it freely”. Instead, he simply observes that “more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad”, leaving the cause implicit. Likewise, rather than explaining that Jesus could no longer enter towns openly and therefore remained in the countryside, Luke merely notes that Jesus would frequently withdraw to deserted places to pray.

Never-the-less, Luke has relocated the episode considerably. In Mark, the healing occurs at the very beginning of Jesus’s public ministry, immediately after the first preaching tour of Galilee. By this point in Luke’s narrative, however, Jesus has already preached in Nazareth, cast out a demon in the synagogue at Capernaum, healed Simon’s mother-in-law, healed many others, preached throughout Galilee, called his first disciples, and performed the miraculous catch of fish. Consequently, the statement that “more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad” loses much of its force, since Luke has already portrayed Jesus as widely known throughout the region. This may represent another instance of editorial fatigue, in which Luke preserves Mark’s narrative consequence while relocating the episode to a point where it no longer fits the surrounding context as naturally.

1.6 Heals one who is paralyzed

At the beginning of Mark 2, Jesus returns to Capernaum after what appears to have been an extended preaching tour throughout Galilee. The author narrates the healing of a paralytic in [Mark 2:1–12](#):

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.

So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door, and he was speaking the word to them.

Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.

And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Child, your sins are forgiven.”

Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves, and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, stand up, take your mat, and go to your home.”

And he stood up and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

The man obeyed Jesus’s command to stand up.

This episode appears to provide the narrative consequence of the healed man with the skin disease disregarding Jesus’s command for silence. At the end of the previous chapter, Mark explained that Jesus could no longer enter towns openly because news of his miracles had spread so widely. Consequently, when Jesus finally returns to Capernaum after several days, the crowds are so great that a group carrying a paralytic cannot reach him through the doorway and instead lower the man through the roof.

Unlike the earlier miracles, however, the healing itself is no longer the principal focus of the narrative. Instead, Mark constructs the episode around the theological question of Jesus’s authority to forgive sins. Before healing the paralytic, Jesus declares that his sins are forgiven, prompting an internal objection from the scribes that only God can forgive sins. The subsequent healing is then presented as visible evidence that Jesus possesses such authority. Thus, the miracle functions not merely as an act of healing but as confirmation of a theological claim.

The setting also raises several interesting literary questions. The house is so crowded that even the doorway is impassable, yet a number of scribes are already seated inside. Mark offers no explanation as to how they came to be present or why they occupy places within the house while those seeking Jesus’s help remain outside. Their role in the narrative is almost entirely theological: they silently question Jesus’s authority, providing the occasion for his teaching concerning the forgiveness of sins. Their presence therefore appears to serve the development of Mark’s theological argument more than the progression of the narrative itself.

Finally, this episode introduces a significant development in Jesus’s ministry. Earlier miracles consisted simply of healings and exorcisms. Here, for the first time, the miracle is explicitly connected to Jesus’s authority to forgive sins. This is particularly striking because John’s baptism had already been proclaimed as “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” ([Mark 1:4](#)). Mark now shifts the emphasis from forgiveness associated with John’s baptism to forgiveness exercised directly through Jesus himself, further distinguishing Jesus’s ministry from that of John the Baptist.

1.6.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew includes this healing and the surrounding text, but the situation of them lowering the body into the house of Jesus is removed: In [Matthew 9:1–8](#):

And after getting into a boat he crossed the sea and came to his own town.

And some people were carrying to him a paralyzed man lying on a stretcher.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, child; your sins are forgiven.”

Then some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.”

But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?

For which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Stand up, take your bed, and go to your home.”

And he stood up and went to his home.

When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

The man obeyed Jesus’s command to stand up.

Although Matthew greatly simplifies the narrative, he preserves its central theological point. As in Mark, Jesus first pronounces the forgiveness of the man’s sins before commanding him to stand and walk, thereby presenting the physical healing as evidence of his authority to forgive sins. The dialogue concerning blasphemy is likewise retained almost verbatim.

The surrounding circumstances, however, are considerably altered. In Mark, Jesus has returned to Capernaum after an extended preaching tour, the house is so crowded that the paralytic must be lowered through the roof, and the scribes are described as sitting inside, silently “questioning in their hearts”. Matthew removes all of these details. There is no crowded house, no roof, no explanation of how the paralytic reaches Jesus, and no mention of the scribes being seated. Likewise, Matthew shortens the description of the scribes’ internal objections. Whereas Mark describes them as “questioning in their hearts”, Matthew simply states that they said “to themselves” that Jesus was blaspheming. Both expressions convey an internal objection rather than a public confrontation, but Matthew’s wording is more concise and continues his general tendency to abbreviate Mark’s narrative.

This abbreviation extends into the following episode. In Mark, Jesus explicitly leaves the crowded house, goes out beside the Sea of Galilee, teaches the gathered crowds, and only then encounters Levi at his tax-collection booth. Matthew removes this entire transition. Immediately after the healing, the narrative simply continues, “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew...” The elaborate setting that Mark carefully establishes has disappeared, and Jesus is already outdoors. Once again, Matthew preserves the sequence of events while eliminating much of the narrative detail that connected them.

Matthew also modifies the conclusion. Whereas Mark ends with the crowd declaring, “We have never seen anything like this!”, Matthew instead records that “they glorified God who had given such authority to human beings.” The emphasis thus shifts away from the unprecedented nature of the miracle itself toward the divine authority exercised through Jesus. This subtle change is characteristic of Matthew’s editorial style, in which Mark’s vivid narrative details are frequently abbreviated while the theological message is retained or further emphasized.

1.6.2 In Luke

In [Luke 5:17–26](#):

One day while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every

village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were sitting nearby, and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but, finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”

Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, “Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the one who was paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your stretcher and go to your home.”

Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God.

Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen incredible things today.”

The man obeyed Jesus’s command to stand up.

Luke preserves Mark’s account much more faithfully than Matthew, but he nevertheless expands the setting considerably. In Mark, the scribes are simply present among the crowds gathered to hear Jesus. Luke, however, introduces not only scribes but also Pharisees and teachers of the law, explaining that they had come from “every village of Galilee and Judea” and even from Jerusalem. Thus, what is in Mark a local gathering in Capernaum becomes, in Luke, an assembly of religious authorities representing virtually the whole of the Jewish homeland. This considerably elevates the significance of the encounter, for Jesus is no longer merely addressing local critics but figures who have come from throughout the country to observe him. Such widespread recognition has no parallel in Mark, where Jesus’s fame has, at this stage, been confined largely to Galilee.

Luke also adapts the physical setting. Mark describes the men as digging through the roof before lowering the paralytic into the house, a description consistent with the flat roofs of modest Galilean homes, which were commonly constructed from wooden beams covered with brush, reeds, and packed earth. Luke instead states that the paralytic was lowered “through the tiles”. This change has often been understood as Luke adapting Mark’s Galilean setting for readers more familiar with Greco-Roman architecture, where tiled roofs were more common. In either case, reaching the roof itself would not have been particularly remarkable, as flat roofs were typically accessible by means of an exterior staircase or ladder. Indeed, the men’s ascent to the roof would not itself have been unusual. According to [Deuteronomy 22:8](#), Israelite houses were expected to have flat roofs protected by a parapet, indicating that roofs were intended for regular use and were normally accessible by an exterior staircase or ladder. The remarkable feature of Mark’s account is therefore not that the men reached the roof, but that they opened it in order to lower the paralytic before Jesus.

Luke likewise retains the dramatic setting in which the paralytic is lowered into the midst of the assembled crowd, unlike Matthew, who omits the entire episode involving the roof. More generally, Luke consistently preserves Mark’s narrative in greater detail than Matthew while making a number of characteristic editorial modifications that broaden the significance of the event. In particular, the presence of religious authorities from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem transforms what is a local controversy in Mark into one that foreshadows the wider opposition Jesus will increasingly encounter during his ministry.

Luke’s expanded setting also raises an interesting literary question. By introducing Pharisees and teachers

of the law from “every village of Galilee and Judea” and even from Jerusalem, the author transforms what was, in Mark, a local gathering into an assembly of religious authorities from across the Jewish homeland. Such a distinguished audience naturally creates the expectation of a substantial theological exchange. More fundamentally, it invites questions about the gathering itself. How had these teachers become aware of Jesus so early in his ministry? Had they coordinated a common investigation, or had they arrived independently? If so, what prompted them all to converge upon Capernaum at approximately the same time? One might therefore expect some explanation of why they had come, what questions they wished to ask, an extended discussion of Jesus’s authority, or a debate concerning his interpretation of the Law. Yet none of this material is provided. Apart from the objection that only God can forgive sins, the narrative proceeds almost exactly as it does in Mark. The religious authorities ask no further questions, Jesus offers no extended teaching beyond his brief response, and the episode concludes without any discussion, resolution, or lasting interaction. The expanded audience therefore functions primarily to heighten the importance of the episode rather than to contribute additional substance to the narrative.

This contrast is particularly striking because Luke has greatly increased the prominence of the audience while leaving the substance of the encounter essentially unchanged. The enlarged gathering serves primarily to magnify the significance of Jesus’s declaration that he possesses authority to forgive sins, but it contributes little to the narrative itself. Had such a national gathering of religious authorities actually convened to investigate Jesus, one might reasonably expect the encounter to have generated far more extensive discussion than the brief exchange preserved by Luke. Instead, the larger audience functions chiefly as a literary device, elevating the importance of the miracle without substantially altering the underlying narrative inherited from Mark.

Finally, Luke preserves the narrative sequence more closely than Matthew. The healing still follows Jesus’s preaching tour and his withdrawal to deserted places after the healing of the man with the skin disease, maintaining the impression that Jesus’s growing reputation has naturally drawn ever larger crowds and increasingly prominent religious leaders to hear and challenge him.

Summary and conclusion of the introduction to Mark

The opening portion of Mark³ presents a remarkably compressed account of the beginning of Jesus's public ministry and contains the highest concentration of miracle narratives in the gospel. The effect is to draw the reader immediately into the story of Jesus as a miracle worker, encouraging continued engagement with the narrative. Within this introductory sequence, Jesus calls his first disciples, performs three individually narrated miracles, heals many others, casts out numerous demons, undertakes his first preaching tour throughout Galilee, and returns to Capernaum to heal a man with a withered hand.

Several literary themes are introduced that continue throughout the remainder of the gospel. The first is Jesus's authority over the natural and supernatural worlds. Demons obey his commands instantly, diseases disappear immediately, and crowds gather wherever he goes. In contrast, human beings repeatedly fail to respond appropriately. The healed man afflicted with the skin disease disregards Jesus's explicit command for silence, and this tension between Jesus's absolute authority over illness and demons and his comparatively limited success in directing human behaviour becomes a recurring feature of Mark's narrative.

A second theme is the so-called "Messianic Secret". This tension first appears in the opening miracle, where the demon correctly identifies Jesus while being commanded to remain silent. Jesus repeatedly commands demons and those whom he has healed not to reveal his identity or proclaim his miracles. Yet these commands are either rendered unnecessary, because the miracles have already been witnessed publicly, or are ignored altogether. The result is a narrative in which Jesus's identity is simultaneously revealed and concealed, a paradox that has occupied biblical scholars for more than a century.

The first part also contains several internal tensions. Jesus's reputation spreads rapidly following the exorcism in the synagogue, the evening healings in Capernaum, and the subsequent preaching tour throughout Galilee. Never-the-less, the healing of a single man with a skin disease is later presented as the event that suddenly prevents Jesus from entering towns openly. Likewise, although Jesus's miracles are portrayed as occurring before large crowds and throughout Galilee, later gospel traditions depict many of these same communities as rejecting his message. Also, Jesus repeatedly seeks solitude or privacy, yet every attempt is frustrated by growing crowds. Whether these tensions arose from the author's literary aims, from the traditions available to him, or from subsequent theological development is open to interpretation, but they are integral features of the narrative.

The author of Mark's narrative alternates between microscopic and telescopic description. The first day of Jesus's ministry is recounted in remarkable detail, whereas the subsequent preaching tour throughout Galilee (presumably lasting far longer) is reduced to a brief summary punctuated by a single miracle. This uneven pacing suggests the author's literary priorities rather than an attempt to provide a continuous chronological account.

Comparison with Matthew and Luke demonstrates that neither author was content simply to reproduce Mark's account. Both repeatedly rearrange Mark's chronology, relocate miracle stories, abbreviate or expand individual narratives, and modify details to serve their own literary and theological purposes. Matthew frequently groups miracles into thematic collections and emphasizes the fulfillment of Scripture, while Luke systematically distances Jesus from John the Baptist, enlarges the geographical scope of Jesus's ministry, and reshapes the opening of the gospel to present Jesus's ministry as beginning directly through the power of the Holy Spirit rather than as a continuation of John's work. Their willingness to rearrange chronology demonstrates that strict chronological sequence was subordinate to literary and theological objectives. These editorial changes illustrate that the later authors were not merely copying Mark but actively interpreting and rewriting his narrative.

Thus, the sequence culminating in Mark 2:12 serves both as the introduction to Jesus's public ministry and as the literary foundation upon which Matthew and Luke construct their own narratives. Careful comparison of these parallel narratives reveals a consistent pattern of literary revision, allowing the editorial priorities of each author to be identified with remarkable clarity.

³As mentioned, the original author did not have chapter divisions, and the continuous non-stop sequence of miraculous deeds of Jesus ends at Mark 2:12.

The final narrative in this introductory sequence, the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1–12), also introduces the first of five consecutive controversy stories in which Jesus comes into conflict with the Pharisees and other Jewish authorities. With this episode, the narrative begins to shift from demonstrating Jesus’s miraculous authority to exploring the growing opposition that will ultimately lead to his death.

1.7 Healing a withered hand

The author of Mark next recounts the calling of the tax collector Levi, followed by discussions concerning fasting and the observance of the Sabbath. The healing of the man with the withered hand appears to occur immediately after the dispute over plucking grain on the Sabbath, for in [Mark 3:1-6](#):

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand.

They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward."

Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.

He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."

He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

The man's hand was restored as he obeyed Jesus's command to stretch it out.

The narrative appears to continue the sequence of events that began with Jesus's return to Capernaum. Although Mark does not explicitly identify the location of the synagogue, the previous episodes have all taken place in or around Capernaum, and immediately after this account Jesus departs for the Sea of Galilee. It is therefore plausible that this miracle likewise occurs in Capernaum.

Unlike the earlier miracles, the central issue is no longer the healing itself but the legality of healing on the Sabbath. Mark presents the Pharisees as watching Jesus carefully in the hope that he will heal the man, thereby providing grounds to accuse him. Curiously, however, the text offers no explanation for why the Pharisees are so intent upon following Jesus from one setting to another. The previous chapter concluded with a dispute over plucking grain on the Sabbath, and now the same opponents appear immediately in the synagogue, apparently anticipating that Jesus will perform another miracle. The narrative simply assumes their continued presence without explaining how they knew where Jesus would be or why they expected this particular confrontation.

The conclusion of the episode is likewise striking. Immediately after witnessing the restoration of the man's hand, the Pharisees are said to conspire with the Herodians to destroy Jesus. The Herodians have not previously appeared in Mark, nor are they introduced or explained. Their sudden appearance therefore raises additional questions. Why are supporters of the Herodian dynasty involved in what has thus far been a religious dispute concerning Sabbath observance? Mark provides no answer, merely introducing them as political allies of the Pharisees in opposition to Jesus. Their inclusion serves primarily to foreshadow the growing coalition that will eventually lead to Jesus's death.

The introduction of the Herodians is particularly striking. They have not previously appeared in Mark, nor are they explained. As supporters of the Herodian dynasty, their interests would naturally have been political rather than theological. Nothing in the preceding dispute over Sabbath observance appears to concern the administration of Galilee or the interests of Herod Antipas. Their sudden alliance with the Pharisees therefore serves primarily as a literary indication that opposition to Jesus had broadened beyond religious disagreement to include politically connected groups, even though Mark offers no explanation for why the Herodians would have become involved at this early stage.

Finally, the legal issue itself is more nuanced than the narrative might initially suggest. Jewish law did not prohibit all healing on the Sabbath. The preservation of life ordinarily took precedence over Sabbath restrictions, and even in later rabbinic discussions the question was generally not whether healing was

permissible, but under what circumstances it was permitted. Mark therefore frames the controversy not simply as one concerning healing on the Sabbath, but as a broader debate over the proper interpretation of the Sabbath and the authority by which Jesus interpreted it.

These episodes are not independent miracle stories but a carefully constructed series of controversies. Mark first presents objections concerning Jesus's authority to forgive sins, then his association with sinners, followed by questions regarding fasting. The focus then shifts to two consecutive disputes concerning the Sabbath: first the disciples' plucking of grain and then Jesus's healing of a man with a withered hand. Each episode intensifies the conflict, culminating in the Pharisees' decision to conspire with the Herodians against Jesus. The sequence therefore marks the transition from curiosity and questioning to organized opposition.

1.7.1 In Matthew

Of this carefully constructed pentad of controversy stories in Mark, which progressively demonstrates Jesus's authority while simultaneously escalating the opposition of the Pharisees, the author of Matthew preserves only the final two as consecutive narratives, relocating them much later in his gospel. In [Matthew 12:9–14](#), he writes:

He left that place and entered their synagogue; a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, "Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?" so that they might accuse him.

He said to them, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other.

But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

The man's hand was restored as he obeyed Jesus's command to stretch it out.

Matthew presents a considerably abbreviated version of Mark's account while preserving its central theological message. One notable editorial change is that the initiative in the discussion now comes from the Pharisees. In Mark, Jesus directs the entire encounter. He calls the man with the withered hand forward, poses the central legal question, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?", and only then performs the healing. The Pharisees merely watch in silence until they later conspire against him. In Matthew, however, the Pharisees initiate the confrontation by asking, "Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?", the author explicitly noting that they did so "so that they might accuse him". The narrative is thus transformed from one in which Jesus controls the discussion to one in which he responds to a deliberate challenge from his opponents.

Matthew also adds an argument unique to his gospel. Jesus appeals to a practical example that would have been familiar in contemporary Jewish discussions concerning Sabbath observance: if it is acceptable to rescue a sheep that has fallen into a pit on the Sabbath, then it is all the more appropriate to restore a human being. This is an appeal to a form of reasoning that his audience would readily have recognized: if compassion justifies rescuing an animal on the Sabbath, then it certainly justifies restoring a human being. Matthew therefore strengthens Jesus's legal defence by providing an explicit argument before the miracle is performed.

Finally, Matthew continues his characteristic tendency to abbreviate Mark. He omits Jesus's anger and grief at the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts, as well as the presence of the Herodians in the final conspiracy against Jesus. The opposition therefore appears somewhat less politically charged than in Mark, where the alliance between the Pharisees and the Herodians marks a significant escalation in the hostility directed toward Jesus.

1.7.2 In Luke

Luke preserves the same sequence of five controversy stories found in Mark, beginning with the healing of the paralytic and Jesus's authority to forgive sins and culminating in the healing of the man with the withered hand. The account appears in [Luke 6:6–11](#):

On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered.

The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see whether he would cure on the Sabbath, so that they might find grounds to bring an accusation against him.

But he knew what they were thinking, and he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand in the middle." He got up and stood there.

Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?"

After looking around at all of them, he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was restored.

But they were filled with fury and began discussing with one another what they might do to Jesus.

The man's hand was restored as he obeyed Jesus's command to stretch it out.

Once again, Luke follows Mark more closely than Matthew. The central legal question remains Jesus's: "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" Thus, as in Mark, Jesus directs the encounter rather than merely responding to an accusation. Luke does, however, make one notable alteration. Whereas Mark simply has Jesus tell the man, "Come forward", Luke instead commands, "Come and stand in the middle." By placing the man in the centre of the gathering before the healing occurs, Luke heightens the public nature of the miracle, ensuring that both the assembled worshippers and the religious authorities become direct witnesses to what follows.

Luke also modifies the conclusion. Like Matthew, he omits the Herodians entirely. Instead of describing a conspiracy between the Pharisees and the Herodians, Luke simply states that the scribes and Pharisees "were filled with fury" and began discussing what they might do to Jesus. The emphasis therefore shifts away from a developing political alliance and toward the emotional reaction of Jesus's opponents.

1.7.3 Pushing reality

This episode naturally raises the question of how such an event would have been received by those who allegedly witnessed it. A hand that had become withered and was then immediately "restored" (or, as the author of Matthew put it, "restored, as sound as the other") would have constituted an extraordinary miracle, no less remarkable in the first century than it would be today. According to all three synoptic gospels, the miracle is performed publicly in the synagogue before numerous witnesses, including scribes and Pharisees who had come specifically to observe Jesus. Yet the narrative records no astonishment, no attempt to verify what had occurred, and no discussion of the miracle itself. Instead, the religious authorities immediately turn to the question of how they might accuse or oppose Jesus. The miracle functions primarily as the setting for the controversy rather than as the subject of it, an emphasis that reflects the authors' theological interests more than an exploration of how such an unprecedented event might realistically have been received.

1.8 Healing many

The author of Mark next presents a summary of Jesus's growing popularity in [Mark 3:7–12](#):

Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him;

hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.

He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him, for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.

Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"

But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

Those who were ill sought to be healed by touching Jesus.

This summary follows the healing of the man with the withered hand and precedes the appointment of the Twelve and the accusation that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul. Unlike the preceding miracle narratives, this passage summarizes Jesus's ministry rather than describing a single event. It emphasizes the enormous crowds now following him from throughout the surrounding regions, so many in fact that Jesus instructs his disciples to keep a boat ready lest he be crushed by the multitude. The passage also introduces a new mechanism of healing: rather than Jesus touching the sick or commanding them to act, the crowds themselves attempt to touch Jesus in the hope of being healed. At the same time, Mark again returns to the theme of the Messianic Secret, as the unclean spirits recognize Jesus and proclaim his identity while he commands them to remain silent.

1.8.1 In Matthew

Matthew preserves a parallel account in [Matthew 12:15–21](#). Like Mark, it follows the healing of the man with the withered hand and precedes the accusation that Jesus casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul. The appointment of the twelve, however, has been relocated much earlier in the gospel ([Matthew 10:1–4](#)), illustrating once again Matthew's willingness to reorganize Mark's chronology:

When Jesus became aware of this, he departed.

Many followed him, and he cured all of them, and he ordered them not to make him known.

This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

"Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the gentiles will hope."

No mechanism of healing is described.

Matthew substantially abbreviates Mark's account. Indeed, were it not for its position between the healing of the man with the withered hand and the Beelzebul controversy, together with a handful of shared elements, it would not be immediately apparent that Matthew is reworking Mark's summary of Jesus's ministry. The references to the immense crowds arriving from many different regions, the waiting boat, the people pressing upon Jesus to touch him, and the unclean spirits proclaiming him to be the Son of God are all omitted. Instead, Matthew simply states that Jesus healed all who followed him and then commanded them not to make him known. This command is adapted from Mark's injunction directed toward the demons. In Mark, the command prevents the demons from revealing Jesus's identity; in Matthew, however, it is addressed to those who have been healed. Consequently, the purpose of the command becomes less explicit. The text

does not specify what the healed people were to refrain from making known, leaving the reader to infer that they were not to publicize either Jesus's identity or his miraculous works.

Matthew then introduces a lengthy quotation from [Isaiah 42:1–4](#), identifying Jesus with the Servant of the Lord. As elsewhere in Matthew, the quotation is presented as the fulfillment of Scripture. In its original context, however, the passage forms part of Isaiah's first Servant Song and describes the Lord's chosen servant in the prophet's own historical setting. It is not presented by Isaiah as a prediction concerning a future Messiah but is instead reinterpreted by Matthew as finding its fullest realization in Jesus.

1.8.2 In Luke

Luke likewise preserves an abbreviated version of Mark's summary in [Luke 6:17–19](#), which immediately follows the healing of the withered hand and the appointing of the twelve, but the author of Luke moves the subsequent narrative concerning Beelzebul elsewhere in his gospel:

He came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.

They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.

And everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Those who were ill were healed by touching Jesus.

Luke again follows Mark more closely than Matthew. He retains the great crowds, the geographical references to Judea, Jerusalem, and the region of Tyre and Sidon, and the description of people seeking healing by touching Jesus. He omits, however, the withdrawal to the sea, the waiting boat, the regions east of the Jordan and Idumea, and the confession of the unclean spirits. The latter omission is readily explained, for Luke has already incorporated that material much earlier in his gospel ([Luke 4:41](#)), where the demons likewise recognize Jesus and are commanded to remain silent.

One interesting point of agreement between Matthew and Luke deserves notice. Whereas Mark states only that those afflicted with diseases pressed upon Jesus in order to touch him, both Matthew and Luke explicitly state that Jesus healed all who came to him. This is one of the comparatively few places where Matthew and Luke agree in wording or emphasis against Mark. Whether this reflects a shared interpretive tendency or some other influence remains a matter of debate, but the agreement is noteworthy.

1.9 Calming the storm

Following the initial sequence of miracles, the author of Mark recounts Jesus's rejection by his family, the accusation that he was possessed by Beelzebul, and a substantial collection of parables before introducing a carefully constructed sequence of three increasingly dramatic miracle narratives. Up to this point, Jesus has demonstrated authority over disease and individual unclean spirits. He will now successively demonstrate authority over the natural world by calming a violent storm, over an overwhelming demonic force by casting out "Legion", and finally over death itself by raising Jairus's daughter. These three miracles are narrated in rapid succession, with very little intervening teaching or narrative development, creating one of the most dramatic demonstrations of Jesus's authority in the gospel. The sequence begins with Jesus calming the storm in [Mark 4:35–41](#):

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."

And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.

A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

And waking up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be silent! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea, and they become calm.

Unlike the preceding miracles, which involve healing disease or casting out demons, this miracle demonstrates Jesus's authority over the natural world itself. The verb translated "rebuked" (Greek: *epitimāō*) is particularly noteworthy. Earlier in Mark, Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit in the synagogue using this same verb, while Luke later uses it when Jesus rebukes Simon's mother-in-law's fever. Whether the authors intended the storm itself to be understood as demonic is uncertain. At the very least, however, the repeated use of the same verb portrays the wind and the sea as subject to Jesus's authority in much the same way as demons and disease.

Equally significant is the order of events. Jesus first rebukes the wind and the sea, bringing about an immediate calm, and only afterwards asks the disciples, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" Their lack of faith is therefore addressed only after they have been rescued. The miracle itself prompts the disciples' astonishment, leading them to ask, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Earlier miracles demonstrated Jesus's authority over demons and illness; this episode extends that authority to the forces of nature themselves. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the calming of the sea is repeatedly portrayed as an act of Yahweh, and Mark's narrative naturally invites comparison with those traditions without explicitly citing them.

This episode marks the first occasion on which Jesus explicitly rebukes his own disciples for their lack of faith. Although they have already witnessed numerous exorcisms, healings, and demonstrations of Jesus's authority, they nevertheless fear that they are about to perish. Only after calming the storm does Jesus ask, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" This brief exchange introduces a theme that will recur throughout Mark: despite witnessing increasingly extraordinary miracles, the disciples repeatedly fail to appreciate the significance of what they have seen. The motif is only beginning here, but it will become increasingly prominent as the narrative progresses.

1.9.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew relocates this miracle to the same general section in which he places the healing of Simon's mother-in-law, immediately following the Sermon on the Mount. The parallel account appears in [Matthew 8:23–27](#):

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.

A windstorm suddenly arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves, but he was asleep.

And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"

Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a dead calm.

They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea, and they become calm.

Matthew preserves the narrative almost unchanged, making only a few notable editorial modifications. The most significant is the reversal of the sequence of events. In Mark, Jesus first calms the storm and only then questions the disciples concerning their lack of faith. Matthew reverses this order. Before performing the miracle, Jesus rebukes the disciples, asking, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Only afterwards does he rebuke the wind and the sea. The emphasis is therefore subtly altered. In Mark, the disciples are challenged after they have witnessed Jesus's power; in Matthew, they are first challenged for their lack of trust before Jesus demonstrates that power.

Apart from relocating the episode much earlier in his gospel, the author of Matthew leaves the remainder of the narrative largely unchanged. Unlike many of the earlier miracle stories, he neither substantially abbreviates the account nor introduces significant theological additions. The miracle remains a demonstration of Jesus's authority over nature, culminating in the disciples' amazement that even the wind and the sea obey him.

1.9.2 In Luke

Luke likewise preserves the story with comparatively few alterations. He retains the account of Jesus's true family, relocates the intervening collection of parables, and then narrates the calming of the storm in [Luke 8:22–25](#):

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake."

So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep.

A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger.

They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

And waking up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm.

Then he said to them, "Where is your faith?"

They were terrified and amazed and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him?"

Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea, and they become calm.

Luke follows Mark even more closely than Matthew. As in Mark, Jesus first rebukes the wind and the waves, after which he asks the disciples, “Where is your faith?” Luke’s question is shorter and more direct than Mark’s, but the sequence of events is preserved. He also retains the same verb describing Jesus’s rebuke of the storm, once again emphasizing Jesus’s authority over the forces of nature.

Compared with many of the preceding miracle narratives, this episode exhibits remarkably little redactional development. Matthew’s principal alteration is to reverse the order of Jesus’s rebuke of the disciples and the calming of the storm, while Luke follows Mark very closely, making only minor stylistic changes. Although both authors relocate the miracle within their respective gospels, the narrative itself, its theological emphasis, and its central literary features remain substantially the same in all three synoptic accounts.

1.10 Casting out a legion

While the previous narrative was essentially left unchanged by the authors of Matthew or Luke, the next narrative in this sequence of three longer miracle narratives sees many more revisions in Matthew and Luke. In [Mark 5:1-20](#), the author writes:

They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes.

And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met him.

He lived among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain, for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces, and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him, and he shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.”

For he had said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”

Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.”

[The man] begged [Jesus] earnestly not to send them out of the region. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding, and the unclean spirits begged him, “Send us into the swine; let us enter them.”

So [Jesus] gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, stampeded down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened.

They came to Jesus and saw the man possessed by demons sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion, and they became frightened. Those who had seen what had happened to the man possessed by demons and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood.

As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused and said to him, “Go home to your own people, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you.”

And [the man] went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

The demons leave after negotiating with Jesus.

Now Jesus encounters another demon-possessed man, but unlike the previous exorcisms, the unclean spirit does not depart immediately after Jesus’s command. Instead, the narrative pauses for an extended dialogue. Jesus asks the demon its name (something he never does elsewhere in the gospels), and the reply is, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” A Roman legion at this time consisted of at least five thousand soldiers, and the narrative emphasizes that the possessed man contained an extraordinarily large number of demons. This is reinforced when the demons are permitted to enter a herd of approximately two thousand swine, demonstrating that the name “Legion” is intended to convey not merely a single spirit but an overwhelming multitude. From a literary perspective, Jesus’s question serves primarily to inform the reader of the un-

precedented scale of the possession. Unlike every other exorcism in the gospels, the dialogue interrupts the action to reveal that Jesus is confronting not a single demon but an entire host.

The location of the miracle is itself textually unstable. In the earliest and generally strongest manuscripts of Mark, the location is given as the “region of the Gerasenes”. This is likely the earliest recoverable reading, but it creates an obvious geographical problem: Gerasa, usually identified with modern Jerash, lies far to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee and cannot plausibly be the immediate setting for swine rushing down a steep bank into the lake. Later manuscripts therefore preserve alternative readings, especially “Gadarenes” and “Gergesenes”. “Gadarenes” is geographically more plausible, since Gadara was closer to the lake and its territory may have extended toward it, though the city itself was still not on the shore. “Gergesenes” appears to be a still later attempt to solve the problem by identifying the episode with a location nearer the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The variation is therefore best explained as the work of copyists or textual traditions attempting to correct a difficult place name. The earliest reading, “Gerasenes”, was probably preserved despite its geographical awkwardness, while the later readings attempt to make the narrative fit the topography more comfortably.

The mechanism of the exorcism is again left unexplained, but the narrative differs from the earlier accounts in another important respect. The demons plead not to be sent out of the region and instead request permission to enter a nearby herd of swine. The author offers no explanation as to why an exorcism would result in the demons to be sent out of not only the man but also sent out of the region, and offers no explanation as to why the demons wish to remain in the region or why Jesus grants their request. After entering the swine, however, the entire herd rushes into the sea and drowns. This raises an obvious question left unanswered by the text: if the swine immediately die, do the demons not once again lose their hosts?

The destruction of approximately two thousand swine also represents a substantial economic loss for their owners. A labourer earned approximately one denarius per day, and a swine likely cost between ten and thirty denarii. Thus, even using the lower estimate, the destruction of approximately two thousand swine represented an economic loss equivalent to about twenty thousand days’ wages; roughly fifty-five years of labour for a single worker. The loss was not merely the market value of the animals. A herd of approximately two thousand swine also represented a substantial food supply. Even if each animal yielded only 40–60 kg of usable meat after slaughter, the herd would have provided roughly 80,000–120,000 kg of pork. At a modest ration of 250 g of meat per person per day, this would be enough to feed about one thousand people for roughly one year and a smaller community for considerably longer. The loss was therefore not only immediate but reproductive: the herd’s breeding stock was destroyed, meaning that future litters, future meat, future trade, and future wealth were also lost. The owners would not merely have had to replace two thousand animals; they would have had to reconstitute an entire productive herd from scratch. The swineherds flee to report what has happened, and the local population responds not with celebration but by asking Jesus to leave the region. Unlike most previous miracle stories, the miraculous act appears to benefit one individual while imposing a considerable cost upon the surrounding community.

The conclusion of the narrative is equally unusual. Elsewhere in Mark, Jesus repeatedly instructs those he heals, or the demons themselves, to remain silent concerning his identity and miraculous works. Here, however, Jesus gives precisely the opposite instruction, telling the formerly possessed man to return home and proclaim what the Lord has done for him. Equally striking is that the man obeys. This is one of the few instances in Mark where a direct command given by Jesus is carried out exactly as instructed.

Another reversal concerns discipleship. Throughout the gospel, individuals are invited to follow Jesus, while others either hesitate or fail to understand his mission. Here, in contrast, the man immediately wishes to accompany Jesus, yet Jesus refuses his request and instead commissions him to proclaim what has happened throughout the Decapolis.

Additionally, the author attributes extraordinary physical strength to the possessed man. He is said repeatedly to have broken chains and shattered shackles despite repeated attempts to restrain him. Taken literally, this exceeds ordinary human physical capability. Human muscles are generally incapable of exerting sufficient force to break sound iron restraints before injury occurs to the muscles, tendons, or bones themselves. The narrative therefore portrays the possessed man as possessing supernatural strength even before Jesus

casts out the demons.

One curious feature of the narrative is that the demons immediately approach Jesus despite apparently recognizing both his identity and his authority over them. Rather than attempting to avoid him, they run to meet him, acknowledge him as the Son of the Most High God, and plead not to be tormented. Mark offers no explanation for why the demons initiate the encounter, leaving the reader to infer either that the confrontation is unavoidable or that the demons are compelled to acknowledge Jesus's authority despite their fear.

From a literary perspective, this episode functions as the central panel of a carefully constructed sequence of three extraordinary miracles. Jesus first demonstrates authority over the natural world by calming the storm as he crosses the Sea of Galilee. Upon reaching the opposite shore, he immediately confronts and casts out "Legion", the largest and most formidable demonic force described in the gospel. Having accomplished nothing else during the journey and being asked to leave the region, he immediately returns across the lake, where he raises Jairus's daughter from the dead. The narrative therefore consists almost entirely of three successive miracles with very little intervening action or teaching. The journey across the lake serves primarily to connect these episodes, producing a rapid succession of increasingly dramatic demonstrations of Jesus's authority over nature, the demonic realm, and finally death itself.

Taken together, this miracle differs markedly from the earlier miracle stories in Mark. Jesus engages in an extended dialogue with the demons, grants their request concerning the swine, causes a substantial economic loss to the local population, commissions the healed man to proclaim the miracle rather than remain silent, and declines the man's request to become one of his followers. The narrative therefore stands apart from the preceding exorcisms in both its structure and its theological emphases.

1.10.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew significantly abbreviates this story in [Matthew 8:28-24](#):

When he came to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes, two men possessed by demons came out of the tombs and met him.

They were so fierce that no one could pass that way.

Suddenly they shouted, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

Now a large herd of swine was feeding at some distance from them. The demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine."

And he said to them, "Go!" So they came out and entered the swine, and suddenly, the whole herd stampeded down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the water.

The swineherds ran off, and, going into the town, they told the whole story about what had happened to the men possessed by demons.

Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him to leave their region.

The demons leave after Jesus commands them simply, "Go!"

Matthew drastically condenses Mark's account. Most strikingly, the single demon-possessed man becomes two men, yet all reference to "Legion" and the unusually large number of demons is omitted. The lengthy dialogue between Jesus and the demons disappears entirely. Jesus neither asks their name nor grants their request after an extended exchange; instead, the demons immediately ask to enter the swine, and Jesus responds with the single command, "Go!" The exorcism itself is therefore reduced to the briefest possible form.

Matthew also omits the aftermath found in Mark. The healed men neither request to accompany Jesus nor are they commissioned to proclaim what has happened. Consequently, if Mark were not available for comparison, there would be no indication that one of the men had been possessed by an exceptionally large number of demons or that Jesus had engaged in any negotiation with them. Matthew's version instead presents a straightforward demonstration of Jesus's authority, in which a single spoken command is sufficient to expel the demons.

Humour: One occasionally encounters attempts to reconcile the two accounts literally. Some argue that Mark simply chose to mention only one of the two men without denying the existence of the other. Others propose that the accounts describe two separate visits to the region: on one occasion Jesus cast a multitude of demons from a single man, while on another he expelled a demon from each of two men. Such harmonizations are possible as matters of logic, although they are not suggested by the texts themselves and are generally not adopted in critical scholarship.

1.10.2 In Luke

The author of Luke follows Mark much more closely than Matthew does, retaining the dialogue with the demons and the name "Legion". However, Luke introduces several notable additions and modifications in [Luke 8:26–39](#):

Then they arrived at the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

As he stepped out on shore, a man from the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had not worn any clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs.

When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, shouting, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me," for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man.

(For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.)

Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?"

He said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him.

They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding, and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission.

Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country.

Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.

And they became frightened. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, for they were seized with great fear.

So he got into the boat and returned.

The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him,

but Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”

So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

After Jesus gives the demons permission, they appear to voluntarily leave the man and enter the swine.

Compared with Mark, the author of Luke makes several noteworthy changes. Most immediately, Luke states that the possessed man came from a “city” (*polis*), even though Jesus has only just stepped ashore. Likewise, after the swine are destroyed, the swineherds “ran off” to report the incident in the “city.” The Greek word *polis* ordinarily refers to a city or established urban settlement rather than a village, making the author of Luke’s geographical description more specific than in Mark.

One possible candidate for this *polis* is Hippos, one of the cities of the Decapolis situated on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee approximately opposite Capernaum. Unlike the various manuscript readings of Gerasa, Gadara, and Gergesa, Hippos was unquestionably a *polis* and therefore fits Luke’s terminology well. It also overlooks the Sea of Galilee from a steep escarpment. Nevertheless, Hippos itself was situated some distance inland from the shoreline and therefore cannot be identified with certainty as the location of the miracle. Moreover, Hippos does not resolve the textual problem inherited from Mark. Two of the three manuscript traditions identify the event with Gerasa or Gadara, both of which were themselves independent cities of the Decapolis. If either of these readings is correct, the narrative is referring to the territory of those cities rather than to Hippos. The third reading, Gergesa, appears to be a later attempt to associate the miracle with a location nearer the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Luke’s reference to a *polis* therefore provides a plausible urban setting for the narrative but does not eliminate the long-standing uncertainty regarding the precise location of the event.

Luke also adds that the possessed man had gone without clothing for a long time, further emphasizing both his isolation and the severity of his condition.

The description of the man’s extraordinary strength is likewise expanded. Not only had he repeatedly broken chains and shackles, but Luke adds that he had been kept under guard and nevertheless escaped. This suggests that his confinement was not merely an occasional attempt by bystanders but a sustained effort to prevent him from harming himself or others. Despite being watched as well as physically restrained, he repeatedly broke free and was driven by the demon into the wilderness. Although the text does not specify who maintained the guard, the expression suggests a level of organized supervision beyond the more incidental attempts at restraint described by Mark.

Luke also provides an explanation absent from Mark for why the demons request permission to enter the swine: they beg not to be sent into “the abyss”. This raises an interesting question left unanswered by the narrative. If expulsion from a human host would send the demons into the abyss, what becomes of them once the swine immediately drown? The text offers no explanation, nor does it clarify why intelligent beings seeking to avoid the abyss would willingly enter hosts whose deaths follow almost instantly.

Apart from these additions, Luke follows Mark closely. He retains the dialogue with the demons, the name “Legion”, the destruction of the swine, the request that Jesus leave the region, and the commissioning of the healed man to proclaim what God had done for him.

1.11 Resurrecting a daughter

This is the climax of Mark's carefully constructed sequence of three extraordinary miracles. Jesus has already demonstrated authority over nature by calming the storm and over the demonic realm by casting out "Legion". He now demonstrates authority over death itself by restoring Jairus' daughter to life in [Mark 5:21-43](#):

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him, and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and pleaded with him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live."

So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse.

She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well."

Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my cloak?"

And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?' "

He looked all around to see who had done it.

But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

While he was still speaking, some people came from the synagogue leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?"

But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the synagogue leader, "Do not be afraid; only believe."

He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.

When they came to the synagogue leader's house, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."

And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was.

Taking her by the hand, he said to her, "Talitha kum," which means, "Little girl, get up!"

And immediately the girl stood up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At

this they were overcome with amazement.

He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.

The girl is resurrected when commanded to stand up.

This narrative forms the climax of Mark's carefully constructed sequence of three extraordinary miracles. Jesus has already demonstrated authority over nature by calming the storm and over the demonic realm by casting out "Legion". He now demonstrates authority over death itself by restoring Jairus's daughter to life. The progression is deliberate: the miracles steadily increase in scale until Jesus is shown exercising authority over the one power that would ordinarily be regarded as final.

Mark also employs one of his characteristic literary techniques, often referred to as a "Markan sandwich" or *intercalation*.⁴ The request to heal Jairus's dying daughter is interrupted by the account of the woman suffering from a flow of blood before the narrative returns to Jairus. The two stories are linked in several ways. Both involve females, both culminate in healing and restoration, and the number twelve appears prominently: the woman has suffered for twelve years, while Jairus's daughter is twelve years old. The interruption also serves to transform the expected miracle. Jairus initially seeks a healer for his dying daughter, but by the time Jesus reaches the house, the child has died. The narrative has therefore shifted from the healing of the sick to the raising of the dead.

From a literary perspective, the interruption creates dramatic tension by delaying Jesus's arrival. Chronologically, however, the delay appears surprisingly brief. The woman touches Jesus's cloak, Jesus briefly searches for the person responsible, the woman identifies herself, and Jesus pronounces her healed. Only then do messengers arrive announcing the girl's death. The episode itself contains no indication that a substantial amount of time has elapsed, making it difficult to attribute the child's death solely to the interruption. Rather than functioning as a realistic account of elapsed time, the inserted episode appears primarily to serve the narrative purpose of allowing the child to die before Jesus arrives, thereby transforming the miracle into one of resurrection rather than healing.

The healing of the woman also raises another interesting question. Mark has already described crowds pressing closely around Jesus, and later in the gospel many people seek merely to touch him in order to be healed. Yet this particular touch is distinguished from all the others. Jesus immediately perceives that "power" has gone out from him and asks who touched his cloak, despite the disciples pointing out that he is surrounded by a crowd. The narrative therefore presents this healing as qualitatively different from the ordinary contact of the surrounding multitude, ultimately attributing it to the woman's faith.

The interpretation of the miracle is perhaps its most significant feature. Jairus seeks Jesus because his daughter is dying, expecting that a healer might yet save her life. Once the messengers announce that she has died, they naturally conclude that there is no longer any reason to trouble Jesus. Their assumption reflects the ordinary expectation that death marks the end of a healer's ability to act. Jesus, however, overturns that expectation by restoring the child to life. In doing so, Mark completes the progression established by the preceding miracles: Jesus exercises authority not only over disease, nature, and the demonic realm, but over death itself.

The conclusion also returns to a familiar tension within Mark's gospel. Immediately after restoring the girl to life, Jesus orders those present not to tell anyone what has happened. This follows only one narrative after Jesus instructed the formerly demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes to proclaim publicly what had happened to him. Mark offers no explanation for these differing instructions, leaving the contrast as another example of the recurring tension between the public manifestation of Jesus's miraculous power and his repeated attempts to restrict knowledge of his identity and works.

⁴The first example of this literary technique in Mark occurs in Mark 3:20–35. Jesus's family hears of the situation and sets out to restrain him. Their journey is interrupted by the account of the scribes accusing Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul. Only after this intervening narrative does Jesus's family arrive, at which point Jesus redefines who constitutes his true family: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." As this earlier intercalation does not involve a miracle, it was not discussed in the present chapter.

1.11.1 In Matthew

Despite Mark's clear chronological sequence of events, the author of Matthew substantially rearranges the narrative. In Mark, the calming of the storm, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac, and the raising of Jairus's daughter occur in rapid succession over what appears to be no more than two days:

1. On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."
2. They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes.
3. When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him.

Matthew preserves the order of the calming of the storm and the casting out of the demons but then interrupts the sequence. In Matthew 9:1, Jesus returns by boat to "his own town," where Matthew inserts the healing of the paralytic, the calling of Matthew, and the discussions concerning eating with sinners and fasting. The sequence of five controversy stories found in Mark is therefore broken apart. Only after these additions does Matthew return to the story of Jairus's daughter in [Matthew 9:18-26](#):

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples.

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well."

Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well."

And the woman was made well from that moment.

When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping."

And they laughed at him.

But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

And the report of this spread through all of that district.

The relocation is made explicit by Matthew's own narrative. The story begins, "While he was saying these things," referring to Jesus's discussion with the disciples of John the Baptist. Those disciples are entirely absent from Mark's account. Matthew therefore does more than relocate the narrative: he deliberately integrates it into its new literary context, demonstrating that preserving Mark's chronology was subordinate to his own thematic organization.

As elsewhere in his gospel, Matthew significantly abbreviates Mark's account, reducing it to approximately forty percent of its original length. He omits Jairus's name and no longer identifies him as the leader of the local synagogue. More importantly, however, he fundamentally changes the opening of the story. In Mark, Jairus comes seeking a healer because his daughter is dying. Only after Jesus is delayed by the woman suffering from a flow of blood do messengers arrive announcing that the girl has died, prompting the conclusion that Jesus's help is no longer of any value. Matthew removes this development entirely. The leader instead approaches Jesus saying that his daughter "has just died" and asks Jesus to restore her to life. The miracle is therefore presented from the outset as a resurrection rather than a healing transformed into a resurrection.

This change also alters the literary function of the interruption involving the woman suffering from a flow of blood. In Mark, the interruption delays Jesus's arrival and transforms the anticipated healing into the

raising of the dead. In Matthew, however, the girl is already dead before the father approaches Jesus, so the interruption no longer performs this narrative role. It instead functions simply as another demonstration of Jesus's healing power before the resurrection itself.

Matthew likewise streamlines the healing of the woman. In Mark, Jesus perceives that power has gone out from him, asks who touched his cloak, receives the incredulous response of his disciples, and only after the woman identifies herself does he address her. Matthew removes all of these intermediate details. Jesus immediately turns, recognizes the woman, and assures her that her faith has healed her. The healing becomes a direct and deliberate act rather than one that initially appears to occur without Jesus's conscious intention.

The resurrection narrative is similarly simplified. Matthew adds the detail that flute players had already gathered for the funeral, reinforcing that the girl was believed to be dead. As in Mark, Jesus declares that she is sleeping, is ridiculed by the mourners, and sends them outside. The mechanism of the miracle, however, is altered. In Mark, Jesus takes the girl by the hand and then commands, "Talitha kum," whereupon she rises. In Matthew, the spoken Aramaic command disappears altogether. Jesus simply takes the girl by the hand, and she gets up. Once again, Matthew removes the intermediate steps found in Mark and presents the miracle in its simplest possible form.

The conclusion also differs significantly. In Mark, Jesus strictly commands those present not to reveal what has happened. Matthew omits this command entirely and instead concludes, "And the report of this spread through all of that district." The secrecy motif that characterizes Mark is therefore absent, and the miracle immediately becomes public knowledge.

Finally, Matthew's account raises an interesting question in light of his later condemnation of Capernaum. According to Matthew's own narrative, this town witnessed not only numerous healings and exorcisms but also the restoration of a dead girl to life. Yet Jesus later pronounces that Capernaum will fare worse on the day of judgment than Sodom because it failed to repent. Matthew therefore presents even the raising of the dead as insufficient, by itself, to produce belief or repentance. Miracles may authenticate Jesus's authority, but they do not compel faith.

1.11.2 In Luke

The author of Luke is much more faithful to the the passage in Mark in [Luke 8:40-56](#):

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.

Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus's feet and began pleading with him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying.

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him.

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her.

She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, and immediately her flow of blood stopped.

Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?"

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are hemming you in and pressing against you."

But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I noticed that power had gone out from me."

When the woman realized that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed.

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

While he was still speaking, someone came from the synagogue leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer."

When Jesus heard this, he replied, "Do not be afraid. Only believe, and she will be saved."

When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James and the child's father and mother.

Everyone was weeping and grieving for her, but he said, "Do not cry, for she is not dead but sleeping."

And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.

But taking her by the hand, he called out, "Child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and she stood up at once, and he directed them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶ Her parents were astounded, but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.

Most of Luke's account closely follows Mark, preserving both the overall structure and the sequence of events. Jairus remains named as the leader of the synagogue, his daughter is still dying when he first approaches Jesus, the interruption by the woman suffering from a flow of blood remains, and the secrecy command following the miracle is retained. Nevertheless, Luke introduces several noteworthy modifications.

Luke begins the narrative by modifying the reception Jesus receives upon returning across the Sea of Galilee. Whereas Mark merely states that "a great crowd gathered around him," Luke writes that "the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him." The change presents Jesus as an eagerly anticipated figure whose return has been expected, further emphasizing the favourable reception he enjoys among the Galilean crowds.

Luke further strengthens the impression that Jesus returned to the same community from which he had departed, almost certainly Capernaum or its immediate vicinity. In Mark, a great crowd simply gathers around Jesus upon his return. Luke instead states that the crowd welcomed him because they had been waiting for him. Given the compressed chronology of the preceding narrative, in which Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, cast out the demons from the Gerasene man, and immediately returned, Luke's wording naturally suggests that the inhabitants had witnessed Jesus depart the previous evening and were anticipating his return the following day.

Second, Luke heightens the emotional impact of the story by stating that Jairus's daughter was his *only* daughter, a detail absent from Mark. Secondly, while Mark has the "disciples" collectively respond to Jesus's question regarding who touched him, Luke instead has Simon speak for the group: "Master, the crowds are hemming you in and pressing against you." This is consistent with Luke's frequent tendency to present Simon as the spokesman for the disciples.

Luke also softens Mark's criticism of physicians. In Mark, the woman had "suffered much under many physicians," had spent all that she possessed, and had only grown worse. Luke omits the criticism of the physicians themselves, stating only that she had spent all she had and that no one had been able to cure her.

The account of the healing likewise differs slightly. As in Mark, Jesus becomes aware that power has gone out from him and asks who touched him. Luke, however, first states that everyone denied touching Jesus before Simon explains that the crowds were pressing in on him from every side. Only after Jesus insists that power has gone out from him does the woman come forward and publicly explain why she touched his cloak and how she was immediately healed.

Luke's description of Jairus's daughter is also strengthened. Whereas Mark simply states that the girl got up after Jesus commanded her, Luke explicitly writes that "her spirit returned," making it clear that the author understood this as the restoration of life rather than merely the recovery of consciousness. Luke nevertheless

retains the command to give her something to eat, a detail that emphasizes the ordinary physical state of the restored child.

Finally, Luke preserves Mark's command that the parents tell no one what had happened. This remains difficult to reconcile with the surrounding circumstances. The girl had died in the presence of numerous witnesses, mourners had already gathered at the house, and Jesus had sent many of them outside immediately before restoring her to life. Once the girl was seen alive, the miracle would inevitably have become public knowledge. Unlike Matthew, who omits the secrecy command altogether and simply states that news of the miracle spread throughout the district, Luke faithfully preserves Mark's tension between the public nature of Jesus's miracles and his repeated commands that they not be publicized.

1.12 Escaping a crowd in Nazareth

Mark 6 begins with Jesus returning to Nazareth in [Mark 6:1-6](#):

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.

On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded.

They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?”

And they took offense at him.

Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown and among their own kin and in their own house.”

And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.

And he was amazed at their unbelief.

The sick were cured when Jesus touched them.

First, this episode forms a continuous part of the surrounding narrative. The opening statement, “He left that place and came to his hometown,” explicitly links Jesus’s return to Nazareth with the preceding account of the raising of Jairus’s daughter, preserving the chronological flow of the narrative.

This passage, however, also introduces several tensions, both within the gospels and with later Christian theology. The people of Nazareth express astonishment at Jesus’s wisdom and miraculous powers, asking where he acquired such abilities. Their reaction suggests that they had not previously regarded him as extraordinary despite having known him for most of his life. This sits somewhat uneasily alongside Luke’s account of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, where “all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” If Jesus had already displayed such remarkable wisdom as a child, one might expect at least some of his fellow townspeople to have recognized that he was unusual long before the beginning of his public ministry. Mark, by contrast, presents both Jesus’s family and his hometown as surprised by his sudden emergence as a teacher and miracle worker. Read on its own, Mark’s narrative is consistent with the impression that Jesus’s public ministry represented a dramatic change from the life previously known to those around him.

The statement that Jesus “could do no deed of power there” has likewise generated considerable discussion. Earlier in the narrative, the people of Nazareth ask, “What deeds of power are being done by his hands!” Their question presupposes that they were already aware of Jesus’s miracles, whether through reports or prior knowledge. Yet only a few verses later, Mark states that Jesus *could* do no deed of power there, apart from healing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. The explanation immediately follows: “Jesus was amazed at their unbelief.” The narrative therefore presents a connection between the people’s lack of faith and Jesus’s inability to perform further miracles. Whether this reflects a theological principle, a literary device, or an early tradition concerning the role of faith is open to interpretation. It nevertheless stands in some tension with later theological understandings of Jesus’s omnipotence, for it raises the question of why the disbelief of others should limit the exercise of divine power. The emphasis on faith also anticipates numerous later passages in the gospels in which faith is explicitly associated with healing, a motif that has continued to play a central role in many later Christian healing traditions. The juxtaposition of the crowd’s acknowledgment that miraculous deeds “are being done by his hands” with the subsequent statement that he “could do no deed of power there” also creates an internal tension within the narrative itself, one that Mark leaves unresolved.

1.12.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew relocates this episode considerably later in Jesus's ministry. Rather than following the raising of Jairus's daughter, as it does in Mark, it now follows a lengthy discourse in which Jesus teaches the crowds using a series of parables. Matthew then writes in [Matthew 13:53–58](#):

When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.

He came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that

they were astounded and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?"

And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor except in their own hometown and in their own house."

And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

No miracles are described.

Apart from a few minor editorial changes, Matthew follows Mark closely. The principal difference is the placement of the episode within the narrative. In Mark, Jesus leaves the house of Jairus and immediately returns to his hometown. Matthew instead concludes the discourse of parables with the transition, "When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place. He came to his hometown..." The author therefore intentionally relocates the rejection at Nazareth, integrating it into a different literary context and once again demonstrating that preserving Mark's chronology was subordinate to his own narrative organization.

1.12.2 In Luke

Rather than placing Jesus's rejection at Nazareth after an extended period of public ministry, as in Mark and Matthew, the author of Luke moves it to the very beginning of Jesus's ministry. Immediately after returning from the wilderness, Jesus comes to Nazareth, reads from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue, declares that the prophecy has been fulfilled, and is ultimately rejected by the people of his hometown in [Luke 4:16–30](#):

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

They said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'"

And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months and there was a severe famine over all the land, yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many with a skin disease in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.

They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Although this narrative exhibits significant literary dependence on Mark, Luke has transformed it into one of the defining events at the outset of Jesus’s ministry. This relocation creates a noticeable tension with the other synoptic gospels. If Jesus’s first public appearance in Nazareth ended with the townspeople attempting to throw him from a cliff, it is difficult to explain why neither Mark nor Matthew mentions such a dramatic event. Conversely, in both Mark and Matthew, Jesus’s visit to Nazareth occurs much later in his ministry and is comparatively restrained. The people express astonishment at his wisdom and deeds of power, take offense at him, and reject his teaching, but there is no indication that they had previously attempted to kill him, nor is there any renewed attempt to do so. Luke’s version therefore appears to be more than a simple relocation of Mark’s narrative; it substantially intensifies the hostility shown toward Jesus while making the rejection at Nazareth the inaugural event of his public ministry.

Luke also uses this episode to replace the beginning of Jesus’s ministry found in Mark and Matthew. In those gospels, Jesus begins preaching only after hearing that John the Baptist has been arrested, creating the impression that his ministry follows and succeeds John’s. Luke removes this connection altogether. Instead, Jesus’s ministry begins immediately after his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, empowered by the Holy Spirit, with the rejection at Nazareth serving as the inaugural public event. In doing so, Luke distances Jesus’s ministry from that of John the Baptist and establishes from the outset the themes of prophetic rejection and opposition that will recur throughout his gospel.

Finally, Luke’s placement of this episode provides an explanation, within his own narrative, for why Jesus conducts virtually none of his subsequent ministry in Nazareth. Having been rejected and driven from his hometown at the very beginning of his public ministry, Jesus never again establishes Nazareth as a centre of his teaching or miraculous activity.

1.13 The feeding of five thousand men

The next cycle of three miracles comes with the feeding of the five thousand men in [Mark 6:31–45](#):

He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.

As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.

When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.”

But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?”

And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.”

When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.”

Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass.

So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and he divided the two fish among them all.

And all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.

Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

The manner in which the loaves and fish are multiplied is not described.

The narrative begins with Jesus attempting to withdraw with his disciples to a deserted place so that they might rest, as they had not even had time to eat. The plan immediately fails, however, as many people recognize where the boat is heading and travel there on foot, arriving before Jesus and the disciples. Since the Sea of Galilee is relatively small, it is certainly conceivable that people travelling overland could outpace a boat making a longer crossing. Mark, however, provides no explanation for how the crowd determined the boat’s destination with such confidence or how they coordinated their journey. If the crowd truly numbered five thousand men, and perhaps considerably more when women and children are included, the movement itself would have been remarkable. Thousands of people travelling along the narrow roads surrounding the Sea of Galilee would have formed a procession stretching for several kilometres, clearly visible to anyone in the surrounding countryside.

As evening approaches, the disciples propose dismissing the crowd so that they can purchase food in the surrounding villages. They estimate that feeding everyone would require approximately two hundred denarii, roughly two hundred days’ wages for a labourer, emphasizing the practical impossibility of the situation.

Rather than accepting this assessment, Jesus asks what food is already available. The disciples first have to determine what provisions they possess before reporting that they have only five loaves of bread and two fish.

The size of the crowd also raises a broader historical question. Mark explicitly states that five thousand *men* were present, leaving unstated how many women and children may also have accompanied them. Such a gathering would have greatly exceeded the estimated population of Capernaum itself and would have required people from numerous towns and villages around the northern and western shores of the Sea of Galilee to converge on a single location. Throughout Mark, Jesus repeatedly attracts large crowds, but nowhere else is a gathering of this magnitude described. The narrative therefore presents an event involving a substantial proportion of the population of the surrounding region.

Another literary feature continues a pattern already observed throughout the gospel. Mark states that Jesus “began to teach them many things,” yet none of this teaching is recorded. Instead, the narrative immediately shifts its attention to the miracle itself. As elsewhere in Mark, the reader is informed that Jesus delivered remarkable teaching, and the audience’s response is described, but the substance of the discourse is omitted. Once again, the miracle, rather than the teaching that attracted the crowd, becomes the focus of the narrative.

The mechanism of the miracle itself is left entirely unexplained. Jesus blesses the bread and fish and distributes them through the disciples, after which the entire crowd is fed and twelve baskets of leftovers are collected. The narrative does not describe when or how the food increases, nor does it indicate whether the multiplication occurs in Jesus’s hands, in the disciples’ hands, or among the people themselves. As in many of Mark’s miracle stories, the emphasis is placed on the result rather than on the mechanism by which the miracle occurs.

Several details introduced here become significant later in the gospel. Mark specifies that the people sat on the “green grass” in organized groups of hundreds and fifties, giving the event an unusually orderly character. Finally, the collection of twelve baskets of leftovers anticipates the later feeding of the four thousand, where different numbers of people, loaves, baskets, and even a different Greek word for the baskets are used. These differences strongly suggest that Mark intended the two feeding narratives to be understood as distinct events rather than as alternative versions of the same tradition.

1.13.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew, as before, significantly abbreviates this narrative in [Matthew 14:13–21](#):

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”

They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.”

And he said, “Bring them here to me.”

Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve

baskets full.

And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The manner in which the loaves and fish are multiplied is not described.

Again, the author of Matthew abbreviates Mark's narrative, although the overall structure remains largely unchanged. The principal difference lies in the dialogue preceding the miracle. In Mark, Jesus first instructs the disciples to feed the crowd, prompting their objection that doing so would require approximately two hundred denarii worth of bread. Jesus then asks how much food is actually available, instructing them to go and find out. Only after making inquiries do the disciples return and report that they have five loaves and two fish. Matthew compresses this entire exchange. The intermediate discussion disappears: the disciples immediately state that they have only five loaves and two fish, and Jesus proceeds directly to the miracle. As elsewhere in his gospel, Matthew removes the incidental details and intermediate steps found in Mark, presenting a more concise and direct account.

Matthew likewise omits Mark's statement that the people were organized into groups of hundreds" and fifties," simply recording that Jesus instructed the crowd to sit on the grass. The orderly arrangement described in Mark is therefore absent, once again illustrating Matthew's tendency to eliminate details that are not essential to the theological or narrative point of the episode.

1.13.2 In Luke

[Luke 9:10–17](#):

On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done.

Then, taking them along, he slipped quietly into a city called Bethsaida.

When the crowds found out about it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed to be cured.

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside to lodge and get provisions, for we are here in a deserted place."

But he said to them, "You give them something to eat."

They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."

For there were about five thousand men.

And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each."

They did so and had them all sit down.

And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

And all ate and were filled, and what was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

The manner in which the loaves and fish are multiplied is not described.

The author of Luke also abbreviates Mark's narrative, although not to the same extent as Matthew. Whereas Matthew omits the discussion of purchasing food altogether, Luke retains it in abbreviated form. The disciples no longer estimate the cost of feeding the crowd before Jesus asks what provisions are available. Instead, after Jesus instructs them to feed the people, they simply reply that they have only five loaves and

two fish, adding almost as an afterthought, “unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” Luke also preserves the arrangement of the crowd into groups of fifty, although unlike Mark he no longer mentions the larger groupings of one hundred, nor does he explain the purpose of this organization.

The most significant change concerns the setting. In Mark, Jesus and the disciples attempt to withdraw by boat to a deserted place where they might rest, but the crowd follows them on foot and reaches the destination first. After the miracle, Jesus immediately sends the disciples ahead by boat to the other side, to Bethsaida,” making it clear that the feeding did not itself occur there. Luke relocates the miracle to Bethsaida, writing that Jesus slipped quietly into a city called Bethsaida,” where the crowds subsequently found him. In doing so, Luke removes Mark’s narrative of the crowd following Jesus along the shore to an isolated location.

This editorial change, however, introduces a new difficulty. Luke otherwise follows Mark closely and retains the disciples’ request that Jesus dismiss the crowd so they can find food and lodging, explaining, “for we are here in a deserted place.” In Mark, this statement naturally follows from the setting. In Luke, however, the miracle has just been relocated to Bethsaida, one of the larger settlements on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The description of the location as a deserted place” therefore appears inconsistent with Luke’s own revision. This may represent another example of editorial fatigue, in which the author modifies the setting inherited from Mark but inadvertently preserves dialogue that assumes the original narrative.

1.13.3 In John

The feeding of the five thousand men is the only miracle, apart from the resurrection, that appears in all four canonical gospels. The author of John recounts the event in [John 6:1–15](#):

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.

A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.

Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.

When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?”

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.”

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.”

Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all.

Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.”

So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea,

Immediately before this episode, however, John's narrative is centred in Jerusalem. The previous chapter concludes with Jesus there, yet John simply begins the next chapter by stating that Jesus crossed to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. No journey north is described, nor is there any explanation for how a large Galilean crowd had already gathered to follow him because they had seen the signs he had performed. Unlike Mark, where the crowd follows Jesus after he and the disciples attempt to withdraw by boat, John simply assumes the existence of this large following.

The setting also differs. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus lands on the shore and encounters a crowd that has already arrived. In John, Jesus first ascends a mountain with his disciples and sits down there, only afterward noticing the crowd approaching. The miracle therefore takes place in a different setting and under different circumstances.

John also introduces a chronological detail absent from the synoptic gospels by noting that the Passover was near. This provides an important temporal marker and prepares the reader for the lengthy Bread of Life discourse that follows the miracle later in the chapter.

The sequence leading to the miracle is likewise substantially altered. In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Jesus first spends the day teaching the crowd, and only as evening approaches does the question of food arise. As elsewhere in the synoptic gospels, however, the substance of this teaching is never recorded. John omits this introductory teaching altogether. Before Jesus has even addressed the crowd, he asks Philip where bread might be obtained. John immediately explains that this was not a genuine question but a test, adding that Jesus already knew what he intended to do. This authorial explanation is unique to the Fourth gospel.

The discussion concerning the food is also reorganized. In Mark, the disciples first object that feeding such a crowd would require approximately two hundred denarii worth of bread. Jesus then asks how much food is available and instructs them to determine what provisions they have. Only after making inquiries do they return and report that they possess five loaves and two fish. Matthew abbreviates this sequence, while Luke retains only part of it. John presents a different conversation altogether. Philip responds that two hundred denarii would not purchase enough bread for everyone even to receive a small portion, after which Andrew introduces a boy who possesses five *barley* loaves and two fish. Neither the boy nor the barley loaves appears in the synoptic accounts, and there is no search among the disciples to discover what food is available.

The mechanism of the miracle remains unexplained, as in the synoptic gospels. Jesus gives thanks, distributes the food, and everyone eats until satisfied. John nevertheless describes the event somewhat differently, emphasizing that the twelve baskets were filled with fragments remaining from the five barley loaves. More significantly, John consistently refers to the miracle as a "sign", characteristic of the Fourth gospel's presentation of Jesus's miraculous works as signs pointing to his identity.

Finally, John concludes the episode with a scene found nowhere else in the gospels. The crowd interprets the miracle as evidence that Jesus is the expected prophet and attempts to seize him by force in order to make him king. Jesus therefore withdraws alone to the mountain. This political response is entirely absent from the synoptic narratives. Likewise, unlike Mark, Matthew, and Luke, John does not conclude the miracle with the end of a day's teaching. Instead, the miracle itself becomes the foundation for the extensive Bread of Life discourse that follows, giving the miracle a distinctly theological role within John's narrative.

1.13.4 The integration of this story into the gospels

Although the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle, apart from the resurrection, recorded in all four canonical gospels, it is integrated into the surrounding narrative in different ways.

The authors of Mark and Matthew preserve essentially the same sequence of events. The feeding concludes late in the day, whereupon Jesus immediately sends the disciples ahead by boat while he dismisses the crowd. That very evening Jesus walks across the Sea of Galilee to join them. After landing at Gennesaret, Jesus is immediately recognized, and the people bring the sick to him from throughout the surrounding region, where they are healed simply by touching his cloak. The three episodes therefore form a continuous narrative: the feeding of the multitude, Jesus's mastery over nature by walking on the sea, and the subsequent mass healings at Gennesaret.

The author of John likewise places the walking on the water immediately after the feeding. The surrounding narrative, however, is substantially different. Following the miracle, the crowd attempts to seize Jesus and make him king, prompting him to withdraw alone into the mountain. Only after this do the disciples depart by boat, and Jesus later joins them by walking across the sea. The following day, rather than arriving at Gennesaret and immediately narrating further miracles, John records the crowd searching for Jesus and finding him at Capernaum, where the feeding becomes the foundation for the lengthy Bread of Life discourse. Thus, while John preserves the same two miracles in succession, he integrates them into a markedly different narrative that emphasizes Jesus's identity and teaching rather than continuing with further miracle stories.

Luke, by contrast, preserves the feeding of the five thousand but does not narrate the subsequent sequence found in the other gospels. His account therefore neither confirms nor contradicts the chronology preserved by Mark, Matthew, and John but simply proceeds in a different direction.

1.14 Jesus walking on water

Immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, we now see Jesus walking on water. In [Mark 6:45–52](#), the author writes:

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.

When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came toward them early in the morning, walking on the sea.

He intended to pass them by. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.

But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.

And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Jesus walks upon the water and the wind ceases when he enters the boat.

The chronology of the narrative deserves some attention. Before the feeding of the five thousand, Mark merely states that “when it grew late,” the disciples suggested dismissing the crowd so that they could purchase food. After the miracle, however, Jesus dismisses the crowd, sends the disciples ahead by boat, ascends the mountain alone to pray, and only later, “when evening came,” are the disciples described as being out on the sea while Jesus remains on land. Finally, it is not until the fourth watch of the night, approximately between 3:00 and 6:00 AM, that Jesus walks across the water toward them. Mark therefore allows sufficient time for all of these events to occur, although he provides no indication of precisely how long the feeding itself lasted.

Matthew’s chronology is subtly different. There, the disciples first raise the question of food “when it was evening,” whereas in Mark they are already well out upon the lake by evening. The two accounts therefore compress the sequence somewhat differently, although both place the walking on the water during the same night as the feeding.

Unlike many of Jesus’s other miracles, no mechanism is described. Jesus simply walks upon the surface of the sea as though it were solid ground. The miracle is presented without explanation, and, as elsewhere in Mark, the narrative emphasizes the event itself rather than any description of how it occurs.

Several features of the account are unusual. First, Mark alone states that Jesus “intended to pass them by”. The remark appears surprising, for Jesus has just observed the disciples struggling against the wind for over nine hours, yet his stated intention is not immediately to join them but to continue past them. Only after the disciples mistake him for a ghost and cry out in fear does Jesus speak to reassure them and enter the boat, at which point the wind immediately ceases. Had the disciples remained silent, the narrative leaves unanswered whether Jesus would indeed have continued walking past them or whether the statement serves some other literary purpose.

The disciples’ reaction is likewise puzzling. Mark concludes that they were “utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” The connection between the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water is never explained. Neither is it made clear in what sense the disciples failed to understand the miracle of the loaves or why their hearts are described as hardened. Earlier in the gospel, they had already witnessed Jesus calm a storm simply by speaking, yet they again respond with astonishment. Mark offers no explanation for why these successive demonstrations of authority over

nature fail to produce understanding among Jesus's closest followers. This recurring inability of the disciples to comprehend Jesus's identity and works becomes one of the central literary themes of the gospel.

By this point in Mark's narrative, the disciples have already witnessed Jesus calm a storm, cast out a multitude of demons, raise Jairus's daughter, and feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Their continued astonishment at yet another miracle therefore raises an obvious narrative question. Mark anticipates this difficulty by explaining that they did "not understand about the loaves" and that "their hearts were hardened". The gospel repeatedly portrays the disciples as failing to comprehend the significance of Jesus's miracles, despite having personally witnessed an extraordinary succession of increasingly dramatic demonstrations of his power.

1.14.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew substantially revises Mark's account in [Matthew 14:22–33](#):

Immediately he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

He said, "Come."

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Jesus walks upon the water, Simon also walks upon the water by faith, and the wind ceases when they enter the boat.

The overall chronology remains similar to Mark's. After dismissing the crowds, Jesus sends the disciples ahead by boat and ascends the mountain alone to pray. By evening, the disciples are already far from land, struggling against an adverse wind, and it is not until early the following morning that Jesus comes to them walking upon the sea. Like Mark, Matthew therefore portrays the disciples as battling the wind for most of the night before Jesus reaches them.

Several important details, however, are altered. Most notably, Matthew removes Mark's statement that Jesus "intended to pass them by". Instead, Jesus simply approaches the boat. The potentially puzzling implication that Jesus planned to continue past the struggling disciples disappears, and the narrative becomes more straightforward: Jesus comes to assist them.

Matthew also inserts an entirely new episode found nowhere else in the gospels. Simon asks Jesus to command him to come out upon the water, and, at Jesus's invitation, he begins walking toward him. Only when Simon notices the strength of the wind does he become afraid, lose confidence, and begin to sink. Jesus immediately rescues him, attributing Simon's failure not to the wind itself but to his lack of faith. The miracle therefore becomes not merely a demonstration of Jesus's authority over nature but also a lesson concerning faith and doubt, a theme characteristic of Matthew's gospel.

As in Mark, the wind ceases only after Jesus enters the boat, although Matthew now includes Simon among those who return to the vessel. The conclusion of the narrative is likewise transformed. Mark ends by stating that the disciples were astonished because they did not understand about the "loaves" and that their "hearts were hardened". Matthew removes this criticism altogether. Rather than remaining confused, the disciples respond by worshiping Jesus and declaring, "Truly you are the Son of God." The author therefore replaces Mark's recurring portrayal of the disciples as failing to comprehend Jesus's identity with an explicit confession recognizing who Jesus is. Once again, Matthew modifies Mark's narrative in a manner that presents both Jesus and his disciples in a more favourable light.

1.14.2 In Luke

The author of Luke is the only one not to include this narrative.

1.14.3 In John

The author of John presents a considerably shorter and substantially different account of Jesus walking on the water in [John 6:15–21](#):

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.

When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified.

But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Jesus walks upon the water, the wind ceases when he enters the boat, and the boat is immediately transported to the shore.

John begins where the preceding narrative ended. After the crowd attempts to seize Jesus and make him king, Jesus withdraws farther into the mountain while, as evening approaches, the disciples descend to the sea and set out by boat for Capernaum. This differs from Mark and Matthew, where by evening the disciples are already well out upon the lake while Jesus remains praying on the mountain.

The chronology is likewise simplified. Mark explicitly states that Jesus reaches the disciples during the fourth watch of the night, implying that they had struggled against the wind for most of the night. Matthew similarly places the encounter early the following morning. John omits any such indication of time. Instead, he merely records that the disciples had rowed approximately three or four miles before Jesus approached them walking upon the sea. The lengthy overnight struggle present in Mark and Matthew therefore disappears.

John also removes several distinctive features of Mark’s narrative. Jesus no longer “intends to pass them by” but simply approaches the boat. There is no suggestion that the disciples fail to understand the significance of the feeding of the five thousand, nor is there any statement that their hearts were hardened. Instead, after Jesus reassures them, they are simply willing to receive him into the boat.

The conclusion is likewise unique. In Mark and Matthew, the wind ceases after Jesus enters the boat. John says nothing about the wind stopping. Instead, he states that “immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.” The wording naturally suggests that the voyage was completed instantaneously, introducing a miracle found nowhere else in the gospels. Whether the author intended the boat’s immediate arrival to be understood as a supernatural event or merely compressed the remainder of the journey is not stated, but in either case the conclusion differs markedly from the synoptic tradition.

Another distinctive feature of John’s account is the prominence given to the concept of “signs”. Whereas Mark, Matthew, and Luke simply recount the feeding as one of Jesus’s miracles, John explicitly states that the crowd followed Jesus because they had witnessed the “signs” he had performed, and after the feeding they again identify the miracle itself as a “sign”. Throughout the Fourth gospel, Jesus’s miracles are consistently presented as signs pointing to his identity and mission rather than merely demonstrations of miraculous power. John therefore assigns a theological significance to the feeding that is absent from the synoptic tradition, making it the foundation for the subsequent Bread of Life discourse.

1.15 Healings in Gennesaret

After crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and the disciples arrive at Gennesaret, where the author of Mark records another summary of Jesus's ministry rather than an individual miracle narrative. In [Mark 6:53–56](#), the author writes:

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Some of the sick were healed by touching the fringe of Jesus's cloak.

This passage is another summary of Jesus's healing activity rather than an individual miracle narrative. No specific person is named, no particular illness is described, and no individual healing is narrated. Instead, the author describes people throughout the region recognizing Jesus, bringing the sick to wherever he was, and seeking opportunities for them to touch even the fringe of his cloak.

The passage does not suggest that touching Jesus's clothing was the only way he healed in Gennesaret. Rather, it presents this as one mode of healing available to those who could reach him. As in the earlier account of the woman suffering from a flow of blood, physical contact with Jesus or his clothing is portrayed as sufficient for healing, though the author does not describe the individual circumstances of those healings. The emphasis is therefore not on a single miracle or even a single method, but on the widespread expectation that proximity to Jesus could bring healing.

1.15.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew abbreviates Mark's summary in [Matthew 14:34–36](#):

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word to that whole surrounding region, and people brought all who were sick to him and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Some of the sick were healed by touching the fringe of Jesus's cloak.

The narrative is essentially the same as in Mark but is considerably condensed. Matthew retains the recognition of Jesus at Gennesaret, the gathering of the sick from the surrounding region, and the statement that those who touched the fringe of his cloak were healed. He omits, however, Mark's broader description of Jesus travelling throughout villages, towns, and the countryside along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Once again, Matthew streamlines Mark's account by removing incidental geographical and narrative details while preserving the central point of the passage: Jesus's reputation had spread throughout the region, and many sought healing through contact with him.

1.15.2 In John

Immediately following the account of Jesus walking on the water, the author of John explicitly continues the chronology into the next day. The crowd that had remained on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee realizes that Jesus had not departed with his disciples, yet subsequently discovers him at Capernaum on the western shore. The crowd therefore travels by boat across the lake in search of him. Upon finding Jesus, a lengthy discussion follows concerning the feeding of the five thousand, during which Jesus identifies himself as the “bread of life” and contrasts physical bread with the eternal life that he offers. The discourse concludes by stating that Jesus taught these things in the synagogue at Capernaum.

John’s account says the crowd crossed by boat to Capernaum the next day. If the crowd still numbered thousands, this would imply an extraordinary number of boats or repeated crossings. Even assuming twenty passengers per boat, five thousand people would require approximately 250 boatloads, and ten thousand people approximately 500. The logistical scale of such a crossing is therefore considerable, especially if the narrative is read as referring to the same large crowd that had been fed the previous day.

John therefore presents a clear and continuous sequence of events: the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walking on the water during the night, the crowd searching for him the following day, and the Bread of Life discourse at Capernaum. This sequence is incompatible with the chronology preserved by Mark and Matthew. In those gospels, after Jesus walks on the water, he and the disciples land at Gennesaret, where Jesus is immediately recognized and embarks on an extended healing ministry throughout the surrounding region before any subsequent journey to Capernaum is described. John, by contrast, has Jesus proceed directly to Capernaum, where the miracle of the loaves immediately becomes the subject of an extended theological discourse.

1.16 Casting out the Syrophoenician woman's daughter's demon

The next miracle takes Jesus beyond the traditional boundaries of Galilee. In [Mark 7:24–30](#), the author writes:

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre.

He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.”

And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

The demon leaves the child when Jesus declares that it has gone.

This episode is remarkable for several reasons. First, Jesus travels to the region of Tyre, the only journey into predominantly Gentile territory recorded during his public ministry in Mark. The author gives no explanation for why Jesus undertakes this journey, and apart from this single encounter, records no preaching, teaching, or healing in the region. Given the distance from Galilee, the journey would have occupied several days, making it striking that this lone miracle is the only event preserved.

The dialogue between Jesus and the woman is also unusual. Unlike the many Jewish petitioners earlier in the gospel, the woman is explicitly identified as a Gentile of Syrophoenician origin. When she asks Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter, he responds with a metaphor in which the “children” are to be fed before the “dogs”. Within the context of the narrative, the children clearly represent Israel, while the dogs represent the Gentiles. Rather than taking offence or leaving, the woman accepts the metaphor and replies that even the dogs beneath the table eat the children’s crumbs. Her response acknowledges Jesus’s priority toward Israel while nevertheless arguing that even the smallest share of his ministry is sufficient to heal her daughter.

Jesus then grants her request, but significantly explains his decision by saying, “For saying that, you may go.” Within the narrative, Jesus explicitly links the exorcism not to the woman’s need, nor to her faith, but to her reply. She has accepted Jesus’s metaphor, placing herself among the “dogs” who receive only the crumbs from the children’s table, and it is only after this response that Jesus agrees to heal her daughter. Unlike many earlier miracle stories, no command is addressed to the demon. Jesus simply declares that it has already left the child, and when the woman returns home she finds that this is so. The miracle therefore takes place entirely at a distance, with neither Jesus nor the reader witnessing the exorcism itself.

The narrative also raises several unanswered questions. Jesus had entered the region hoping to remain unnoticed, yet the woman immediately learns of his presence. The author does not explain how she heard that Jesus had arrived, nor why she alone seeks him out. Likewise, after discovering that her daughter has been healed, no further response is recorded. Unlike many earlier miracle stories, there is no description of crowds gathering, no report that news of the miracle spread throughout Tyre, and no indication that Jesus’s brief journey into Gentile territory had any broader effect. The episode therefore remains an isolated encounter whose significance lies primarily in the exchange between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman rather than in the miracle itself.

1.16.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew retells the episode with several significant changes in [Matthew 15:21–28](#):

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.”

But he did not answer her at all.

And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.”

He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.”
And her daughter was healed from that moment.

The daughter is healed when Jesus grants the woman’s request.

Matthew first broadens the setting from the region of Tyre alone to the district of Tyre and Sidon. He also changes the woman’s identity. Whereas Mark describes her as a Gentile of Syrophoenician origin, Matthew identifies her as a Canaanite woman, deliberately employing an ancient designation that evokes Israel’s traditional enemies. From the outset she addresses Jesus as “Lord” and “Son of David,” titles absent from Mark, yet Jesus initially gives her no reply whatsoever. Instead, the disciples intervene, urging him to send her away because she continues to call after them.

Matthew then inserts a statement with no parallel in Mark: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This is one of the clearest declarations in Matthew concerning the scope of Jesus’s earthly ministry. Before the dialogue concerning the children and the dogs even begins, Jesus explicitly states that his mission is directed to Israel. The subsequent healing of a Gentile therefore appears as an exception rather than as part of his ordinary ministry.

The familiar exchange concerning the children and the dogs then follows. As in Mark, the woman accepts Jesus’s metaphor and replies that even the dogs eat the crumbs falling from their masters’ table. Matthew, however, significantly changes Jesus’s explanation for granting her request. In Mark, Jesus says, “For saying that, you may go,” explicitly linking the exorcism to the woman’s reply. Matthew instead declares, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” The emphasis therefore shifts from the woman’s response in the dialogue itself to her faith. Although she still accepts the metaphor and persists despite the apparent rejection, Matthew no longer presents her words alone as the reason for the healing. Instead, the miracle becomes another example of Matthew’s recurring association between faith and healing.

Finally, Matthew simplifies the miracle itself. As in Mark, no command is directed to the demon and the exorcism occurs at a distance. Unlike Mark, however, the narrative does not conclude with the woman returning home to discover that the demon has already left her daughter. Instead, the author simply states that the daughter was healed “from that moment,” bringing the account to a more direct and concise conclusion.

1.17 Healing the deaf man

The next miracle recorded by the author of Mark is the healing of a deaf man with a speech impediment in [Mark 7:31–37](#):

Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went by way of Sidon toward the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.

He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one, but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Jesus heals the man after touching his ears and tongue and commanding them to be opened.

The narrative begins with another lengthy journey. Having travelled to the regions of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus now returns toward the Sea of Galilee through the Decapolis, a predominantly Gentile region east of the lake. As with the preceding journey to Tyre, the author provides no explanation for why Jesus travelled there, nor does he describe any broader ministry in the area. Despite what would have been several days of travel, only a single healing is recorded.

The miracle itself is unusual. Earlier in Mark, Jesus healed by speaking a command, taking someone by the hand, laying on hands, or, in some cases, without even being physically present. Here, however, Jesus deliberately takes the man aside in private, away from the crowd, and performs a sequence of physical actions before speaking a command. He places his fingers in the man’s ears, spits, touches the man’s tongue, looks toward heaven, sighs, and finally commands, “Ephphatha” (“Be opened”). The narrative offers no explanation for why this healing requires such an elaborate sequence of actions when many earlier miracles had occurred immediately through a word of command or even by the sick merely touching Jesus’s clothing. Whether these actions are intended to reassure the deaf man, to symbolize the restoration of hearing and speech, or simply to distinguish this miracle from earlier ones is left unexplained.

As elsewhere in Mark, Jesus again commands those present to tell no one what has happened. Once again, the command is ignored: the more Jesus insists upon silence, the more enthusiastically the people proclaim the miracle. This repeated pattern has become one of the characteristic features of Mark’s gospel. The command is consistently ineffective, yet no consequences are ever described for those who disregard it.

Finally, the people’s response summarizes the effect of the miracle. They proclaim that Jesus “has done everything well” and marvel that he enables the deaf to hear and the mute to speak. The emphasis therefore falls not only upon the restoration of a single individual but also upon the growing reputation that accompanies Jesus wherever he travels, even beyond the predominantly Jewish regions surrounding the Sea of Galilee.

1.17.1 In Matthew

Neither the author of Matthew nor the author of Luke recounts Mark's healing of the deaf man with a speech impediment. Instead, immediately after the encounter with the Canaanite woman, Matthew inserts a brief summary of Jesus's healing ministry in [Matthew 15:29-31](#):

After Jesus had left that place, he passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down.

Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the maimed, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

The mechanisms of the healings is not made known.

Rather than reproducing Mark's detailed account of a single healing, Matthew replaces it with a general summary. Jesus continues his journey to the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee, ascends a mountain, and is met by great crowds bringing people afflicted with a wide variety of disabilities and illnesses. The author lists the lame, the blind, the maimed, the mute, and many others, but does not describe any individual miracle or explain how any of the healings take place.

The effect is characteristic of Matthew's treatment of Mark. The unusual sequence of actions recorded by Mark (placing fingers in the man's ears, touching his tongue with spittle, looking toward heaven, sighing, and speaking the Aramaic command) is omitted entirely. Instead, the emphasis shifts from the method of healing to its result: the crowds witness the restoration of many people and praise the God of Israel. Once again, Matthew streamlines Mark's narrative by replacing an individual miracle rich in incidental detail with a concise summary emphasizing Jesus's successful healing ministry.

1.18 Feeding of the four thousand men

The author of Mark next recounts a second miraculous feeding in [Mark 8:1–10](#):

In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat,

he called his disciples and said to them, “I have compassion for the crowd because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance.”

His disciples replied, “How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?”

He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?”

They said, “Seven.”

Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute, and they distributed them to the crowd.

They had also a few small fish, and after blessing them he ordered that these, too, should be distributed.

They ate and were filled, and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.

And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

The manner in which the loaves and fish are multiplied is not described.

Unlike the earlier feeding of the five thousand, this narrative is only loosely connected to what precedes it. No specific location is given beyond the statement that the crowd is in a deserted place, nor is it explained where the people have come from. The story therefore stands largely on its own, with little geographical or narrative context.

This time, however, the crowd has remained with Jesus for three days and has exhausted its provisions. Jesus explains that if he dismisses them without food, they may collapse on their journey home, adding that some have travelled from a considerable distance. The narrative therefore implies that the people originally brought food with them but have now consumed it. It does not explain why such a large crowd had remained in this isolated location for three days, nor why Jesus was teaching there rather than in one of the surrounding towns or villages.

As in the earlier feeding, the mechanism of the miracle is left entirely unexplained. Jesus asks how many loaves are available, gives thanks, distributes the bread and fish through the disciples, and the entire crowd is fed, with seven baskets of leftovers remaining. Once again, the emphasis is placed entirely upon the outcome rather than upon the manner in which the food is multiplied.

One feature of the narrative is particularly striking. According to Mark’s chronology, these same disciples had previously witnessed the feeding of five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Nevertheless, when confronted with another hungry crowd, they ask, “How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?” Within the narrative, the disciples appear to have learned little from the earlier miracle. Their continued inability to anticipate what Jesus is about to do is consistent with Mark’s recurring portrayal of the disciples as repeatedly failing to comprehend the significance of Jesus’s words and deeds, despite having witnessed numerous extraordinary miracles firsthand.

After the crowd has eaten, Jesus immediately departs by boat with his disciples for the district of Dalmanutha. This location is otherwise unknown, and no archaeological site has been securely identified with it. The name has therefore generated considerable discussion, although the narrative provides no further

geographical information beyond placing it on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

1.18.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew makes only a few changes to Mark's account in [Matthew 15:32–39](#):

Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for the crowd because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat, and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.”

The disciples said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?”

Jesus asked them, “How many loaves have you?”

They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.”

Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

And all of them ate and were filled, and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 After sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

The manner in which the loaves and fish are multiplied is not described.

The miracle itself is narrated in much the same way as in Mark. Matthew condenses the description slightly, combining the report of the available provisions into a single statement that the disciples had seven loaves and a few small fish. As in Mark, the mechanism by which the food is multiplied is left entirely unexplained.

Matthew's most significant change is narrative rather than theological. Unlike Mark, who introduces the crowd with only the vague statement that “there was again a great crowd,” Matthew connects this episode directly to the preceding summary of Jesus's healing ministry. The four thousand are therefore naturally understood to be the same crowds who had gathered around Jesus after he ascended the mountain near the Sea of Galilee. Matthew thus provides a continuous setting for the miracle, whereas Mark presents it as a more isolated narrative with little geographical or chronological context.

By contrast, Mark does not explicitly associate the crowd with Jesus's preceding ministry in the Decapolis. Although the feeding follows immediately after the healing of the deaf man in the narrative, the author simply introduces “a great crowd” without identifying its origin or explaining how it came to be gathered in the deserted place.

Matthew also changes Jesus's destination after the miracle. Whereas Mark has Jesus sail to the district of Dalmanutha, a location otherwise unknown, Matthew instead names the region of Magadan. The exact identification of Magadan remains uncertain, although it has often been associated with Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. If this identification is correct, Matthew replaces Mark's obscure destination with a location better known to his readers. Nevertheless, as in Mark, no events are subsequently narrated there before the gospel moves on to the next episode.

1.18.2 The request for a sign

Immediately following the feeding of the four thousand, both Mark and Matthew record an encounter in which the Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign from heaven. In gospel of [Mark 8:11–12](#), the author writes that the Pharisees

began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply

in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.”

The author of Matthew records the same encounter in gospel of [Matthew 16:1–4](#), although there Jesus adds that no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah.

This passage forms a striking contrast with the gospel of John. There, the feeding of the five thousand is explicitly described as a “sign”. The crowd follows Jesus because they have seen the signs that he performed, and after the miraculous feeding they again identify what they have witnessed as a sign. Indeed, the entire Bread of Life discourse that follows is built upon the theological significance of that sign. By contrast, neither Mark nor Matthew ever describes either miraculous feeding as a sign. Instead, immediately after the second feeding, Jesus refuses the Pharisees’ request for one. Thus, although the same miracle tradition is preserved in all four gospels, John presents the feeding as a sign revealing Jesus’s identity, whereas Mark and Matthew explicitly distinguish Jesus’s miracles from the kind of sign demanded by his opponents.

1.19 Jesus heals a blind man

The next miracle recorded by the author of Mark is the healing of a blind man in [Mark 8:22–26](#):

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him.

He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?”

And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.”

Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again, and he looked intently, and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”

The man’s sight is restored after Jesus twice lays his hands upon him.

This miracle resembles the preceding healing of the deaf man in several respects. As before, Jesus takes the man aside from the crowd and employs physical actions rather than simply issuing a word of command. He places saliva upon the man’s eyes, lays his hands on him, and then asks whether the man can see. The use of saliva is therefore repeated, making this the second consecutive miracle in Mark in which Jesus employs this unusual method. Neither Matthew nor Luke preserves either of these saliva healings.

The most remarkable feature of the narrative, however, is that the healing is only partial at first. After Jesus’s initial actions, the man reports that he can indeed see, but that people appear “like trees, walking”. Jesus then lays his hands upon the man’s eyes a second time, after which his sight is fully restored. This is the only miracle in the canonical gospels in which a healing occurs in two distinct stages. Unlike the many other healings in which Jesus’s word or touch immediately produces the desired result, this miracle reaches its conclusion only after a second laying on of hands.

As in several earlier miracles, Jesus again instructs the healed man not to publicize what has occurred, this time telling him not even to enter the village. No explanation is given for this command, nor does the author record whether the man obeyed it.

This miracle is unique to Mark. Neither Matthew nor Luke recounts the episode, although the gospel of John later records a different healing of a blind man in which Jesus also uses saliva, there by making mud from the saliva and applying it to the man’s eyes before instructing him to wash.

1.20 Casting a spirit out from a boy

The next major event is Jesus's transfiguration. Since this is not a miracle performed by Jesus in the same sense as the preceding narratives, we shall instead continue with the story that immediately follows, in which Jesus casts an unclean spirit out of a boy in [Mark 9:14-29](#):

When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and some scribes arguing with them. When the whole crowd saw [Jesus], they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him.

He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?"

Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak, and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid, and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so."

He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me."

And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?"

And he said, "From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, help us! Have compassion on us!"

Jesus said to him, "If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes."

Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!"

After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead."

But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.

When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

Jesus returns from the mountain to discover a crowd gathered around the disciples and the scribes arguing with them. The cause of the dispute is soon revealed: the disciples had been unable to cast the spirit out of a boy, despite having previously been given authority over unclean spirits. Jesus responds with frustration, lamenting the unbelief of the generation before commanding that the boy be brought to him. After a brief conversation with the boy's father concerning both the duration of the affliction and the necessity of faith, Jesus rebukes the spirit with a word of command. The spirit convulses the boy violently before departing, leaving him apparently lifeless. Jesus then takes him by the hand, lifts him up, and the boy stands.

Several features of the narrative invite comment. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus had explicitly granted the Twelve authority over unclean spirits, and Mark records that they successfully cast out many demons during their preaching mission. Their inability to cast out this spirit therefore requires an explanation. Jesus later tells them privately that "this kind can come out only through prayer." This explanation, however, raises an interesting question. If Jesus recognized that this spirit belonged to a category requiring prayer, why does

he first express disappointment at the disciples' failure? Moreover, Mark does not describe Jesus himself praying before rebuking the spirit. Instead, the exorcism appears to occur solely through his command, leaving the relationship between Jesus's explanation and his own actions somewhat unclear.

Another curious detail occurs immediately before the exorcism. Mark states that Jesus acted "when [he] saw that a crowd came running together". The significance of this observation is not explained. It does not appear to affect either the boy's condition or the spirit itself, nor does the narrative indicate why the arrival of additional spectators should prompt Jesus to act at that particular moment. As with several other details in Mark's miracle stories, the author introduces the observation without further explanation, leaving its narrative purpose uncertain.

1.20.1 In Matthew

As always, the author of Matthew significantly abbreviates the narrative: [Matthew 17:14–20](#):

When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has epilepsy and suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him."

Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me."

And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured from that moment.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"

He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

The narrative is reduced to its theological essentials. The disciples are unable to cast out the demon, Jesus laments the unbelief of the generation, rebukes the demon, and immediately cures the boy. Matthew omits the extended dialogue between Jesus and the father, the violent convulsions of the boy, the apparent death of the child, and Jesus lifting him to his feet. As elsewhere, Matthew removes the incidental details and intermediate steps found in Mark.

Matthew also modifies the father's description of the boy. Rather than saying that he has an unclean spirit that renders him unable to speak, the father describes him as suffering from epilepsy, although Jesus nevertheless rebukes a demon. The narrative therefore retains the exorcism while introducing a more medical description of the boy's condition.

The most significant change concerns the explanation for the disciples' failure. In Mark, Jesus explains that "this kind can come out only through prayer," an explanation that sits somewhat awkwardly with the narrative, since Jesus himself does not pray before rebuking the spirit. Matthew replaces this entirely. Rather than introducing a special category of demon requiring a different method of exorcism, he attributes the disciples' failure simply to their lack of faith and then incorporates the saying that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains. This explanation is much more consistent with Jesus's earlier lament concerning the unbelief of the generation and with Matthew's broader emphasis on faith as the prerequisite for miraculous deeds. The saying itself appears to have been copied from another context and reused here because it provides a more harmonious explanation for why the disciples were unable to cast out the demon.

1.20.2 In Luke

The author of Luke also abbreviates Mark's narrative, although in a different manner, in [Luke 9:37–43](#):

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him.

Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not."

Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."

While he was being brought forward, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions.

But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Like elsewhere in this gospel, the author of Luke replaces Mark's "unclean spirit" with a "demon". He also shortens the father's description of the boy's condition. The spirit no longer renders the child unable to speak or repeatedly throws him into fire and water to destroy him. Instead, Luke simply describes a spirit that seizes the boy, causes him to scream, convulse, and foam at the mouth, and scarcely leaves him. Luke also adds that the boy is the man's only child, increasing the emotional impact of the narrative.

The sequence of the exorcism is likewise altered. In Mark, the spirit violently convulses the boy only after Jesus rebukes it and before finally coming out, creating the impression that it continues to exert power over the child, if only briefly, even after Jesus has commanded it to depart. Luke removes this sequence entirely. The demon throws the boy to the ground while he is still being brought to Jesus, but once Jesus rebukes the demon, it is immediately cast out, the boy is healed, and he is returned to his father. Luke therefore removes any suggestion that the demon could continue to afflict the child after Jesus has spoken, presenting Jesus's authority over the demon as immediate and absolute.

Luke omits nearly all of the dialogue found in Mark. Gone are Jesus's conversation with the father concerning the duration of the affliction, the father's plea, "I believe; help my unbelief," the observation that a crowd was running together, the boy's apparent death, Jesus lifting him to his feet, and the subsequent discussion with the disciples concerning why they had failed. Consequently, Luke also omits Mark's explanation that "this kind can come out only through prayer," avoiding the tension created by Jesus's own failure to pray before rebuking the spirit. The narrative instead concludes simply by stating that all were astounded at the greatness of God.

1.21 Healing a blind man at Jericho

The final healing miracle before Jesus enters Jerusalem occurs as he leaves Jericho in [Mark 10:46–52](#):

They came to Jericho.

As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.”

And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.”

So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.”

Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.”

Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Jesus declares that Bartimaeus’s faith has restored his sight.

The author of Mark emphasizes that even this blind beggar, living in Jericho far from Jesus’s Galilean ministry, not only recognizes Jesus by name but also addresses him as the “Son of David,” an explicitly messianic title. Despite repeated attempts by the crowd to silence him, Bartimaeus continues to call out until Jesus summons him.

Unlike the previous healing of the blind man at Bethsaida, this miracle is presented very simply. There is no gradual restoration of sight, no use of saliva, and no physical action beyond Jesus speaking to the man. Instead, Jesus declares, “Your faith has made you well,” continuing Mark’s recurring association between faith and healing. Bartimaeus immediately regains his sight.

The conclusion is also noteworthy. Rather than merely returning home, as in many earlier healing narratives, Bartimaeus immediately follows Jesus “on the way.” Since this miracle occurs as Jesus is leaving Jericho for Jerusalem, Bartimaeus becomes one of the few individuals healed by Jesus who is explicitly described as joining him on the final journey toward Jerusalem and the events of his execution. Nevertheless, despite this explicit statement that he became a follower, Bartimaeus is never mentioned again in Mark. He plays no further role in the gospel, and the narrative gives no indication of what became of him after joining Jesus on the road to Jerusalem.

1.21.1 In Matthew

The author of Matthew once again changes the single individual in Mark into two, writing in [Matthew 20:29–34](#):

As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.

There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”

The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet, but they shouted even more loudly, “Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!”

Jesus stood still and called them, saying, “What do you want me to do for you?”

They said to him, “Lord, let our eyes be opened.”

Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes.

Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.

Jesus restores their sight by touching their eyes.

As elsewhere in his gospel, Matthew abbreviates Mark’s narrative and removes many of its incidental details. Bartimaeus is no longer named, and the single blind beggar becomes two blind men sitting by the roadside. They nevertheless continue to address Jesus as the “Son of David,” preserving the explicitly messianic title found in Mark.

The mechanism of the miracle is also changed. In Mark, Jesus declares, “Your faith has made you well,” after which Bartimaeus immediately regains his sight. Matthew removes this explanation entirely. Instead, moved with compassion, Jesus touches the men’s eyes, and they immediately receive their sight. This continues a recurring Matthean pattern in which Jesus’s physical touch, rather than an explicit declaration concerning the recipient’s faith, becomes the immediate means by which healing occurs. It is also noteworthy that, although Jesus again heals by touching the eyes, Matthew—like Mark in this narrative—makes no mention of saliva, in contrast to the earlier healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. Both men then follow Jesus, just as Bartimaeus does in Mark, and yet, as in Mark, neither is mentioned again.

1.21.2 In Luke

The author of Luke follows Mark closely, but introduces one noteworthy geographical change in [Luke 18:35–43](#):

As [Jesus] approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening.

They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

Then he shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he shouted even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him, and when he came near,

he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

He said, “Lord, let me see again.”

Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.”

Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God, and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

Jesus declares that the beggar’s faith has restored his sight.

The principal difference concerns the setting. Mark introduces the miracle rather awkwardly by stating, “They came to Jericho,” immediately followed by, “As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho....” Nothing is narrated as occurring within the city itself. Luke appears to simplify this sequence by relocating the miracle to Jesus’s approach to Jericho, writing instead, “As he approached Jericho....” The blind man, now unnamed, is therefore encountered before Jesus enters the city rather than as he departs.

This change creates a different narrative. In Mark, Jesus and the large crowd are already leaving Jericho when Bartimaeus calls out to him. In Luke, Jesus is approaching the city, accompanied by a crowd whose origin is not explained. Whether Luke intentionally relocated the miracle for narrative simplicity or simply interpreted Mark’s wording differently cannot be determined, but the result is that the two accounts place the healing on opposite sides of Jericho.

Apart from this geographical change and the omission of Bartimaeus’s name, Luke follows Mark closely. The blind man continues to recognize Jesus as the “Son of David,” the crowd attempts to silence him, Jesus asks what he desires, and the healing is again attributed to the man’s faith. Luke concludes by adding that the healed man glorified God and that all the people praised God after witnessing the miracle, a conclusion that is characteristic of Luke’s emphasis on praise and the public glorification of God.

It should be noted that Luke clearly intends this healing to occur before Jesus enters Jericho. Immediately afterward, the author writes in [Luke 19:1–4](#), “He entered Jericho and was passing through it.” Luke then narrates the encounter with Zacchaeus, who “climbs a sycamore tree because Jesus was going to pass that way.” The sequence leaves little room for ambiguity: the healing has already occurred before Jesus enters the city. By contrast, both Mark and Matthew explicitly place the healing as Jesus is leaving Jericho. Thus, the difference is not merely one of emphasis but of chronology, for Luke intentionally describes Jesus entering the city immediately after the miracle.

1.22 Cursing the fig tree

The final miracle performed by Jesus during his public ministry is unlike any of the preceding miracles. Rather than healing the sick, restoring sight, or casting out an unclean spirit, Jesus destroys a fig tree in [Mark 11:12–14](#) and [Mark 11:20–24](#):

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.

Then they came to Jerusalem...and when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.

Then Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.”

Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

This miracle is unique within the synoptic gospels, for it is the only miracle that is destructive rather than restorative. Mark explicitly notes that Jesus was hungry and approached the tree to look for fruit, but immediately adds that “it was not the season for figs.” Nevertheless, Jesus pronounces a curse upon the tree, and by the following morning it has withered to its roots.

The narrative functions primarily as a symbolic lesson. Simon observes the withered tree, and Jesus immediately turns the event into a discourse on faith and prayer, teaching that those who truly believe can even command a mountain to be cast into the sea. Unlike the earlier miracles, however, this one benefits no one directly. The tree is destroyed, no person is healed, and the miracle serves only as the occasion for Jesus’s subsequent teaching.

The episode therefore raises several natural questions. If Jesus possessed the miraculous ability to multiply loaves of bread to feed thousands only a short time earlier, why is there no comparable provision for himself and his disciples that morning in Bethany? Likewise, if the tree bore no fruit because it was not the season for figs, why curse it rather than simply pass by, or why not bless it so that it produces fruit despite being out of season? Mark offers no explanation beyond the symbolic role the miracle plays in the narrative. Read literally, the episode stands in marked contrast to Jesus’s earlier miracles, all of which brought healing, restoration, or relief to those in need.

The symbolism of the withered fig tree has been interpreted in many ways, most commonly as representing divine judgment upon unfruitfulness or upon Israel and its Temple. Whatever symbolic meaning the author intended, the narrative itself presents a striking conclusion to Jesus’s public ministry: his final miracle before his execution is not an act of healing but an act of judgment against a tree that, according to Mark’s own narrative, was not expected to bear fruit because it was not the season for figs.

1.22.1 In Matthew

In [Matthew 21:18–22](#), the author significantly alters the chronology of the story:

In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry.

And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves.

Then he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!”

And the fig tree withered at once.

When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?”

Jesus answered them, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.”

Matthew compresses what are two distinct events in Mark into a single continuous narrative. In Mark, Jesus curses the fig tree on one day, enters Jerusalem, returns to Bethany for the night, and only the following morning do the disciples discover that the tree has withered. Matthew removes the intervening day altogether. Instead, the fig tree withers immediately after Jesus pronounces the curse, and the disciples witness the miracle as it happens, prompting them to ask how the tree could have withered so quickly.

The result is a substantially different sequence of events. In Mark, the withered tree is discovered only after the passage of a night, whereas in Matthew the miracle is instantaneous. The two chronologies cannot readily be reconciled, although the theological lesson remains unchanged. Jesus again uses the withered tree as the occasion to teach about the power of faith and prayer. Likewise, the questions raised by the narrative itself remain the same: the tree bore no fruit because, according to Mark, it was not the season for figs, and the miracle remains unique among Jesus’s public miracles in being an act of destruction rather than one of healing or restoration.

Matthew also omits one of the most striking details found in Mark. Mark explicitly explains that the tree had no figs because “it was not the season for figs.” Matthew removes this statement entirely. As a result, the reason for the tree’s lack of fruit is no longer given, and the apparent difficulty of Jesus cursing a tree for failing to bear fruit out of season disappears from the narrative. Whether this omission reflects a deliberate attempt to simplify the story or an effort to avoid the tension present in Mark cannot be determined with certainty, but the effect is to make Jesus’s action appear considerably less problematic.

1.22.2 In Luke

The author of Luke omits the cursing of the fig tree altogether, despite otherwise following the general outline of Jesus's final journey to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Luke includes a unique parable concerning a barren fig tree in [Luke 13:6–9](#):

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.

So he said to the man working the vineyard, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’

He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

The contrast with Mark and Matthew is striking. In Luke's parable, the owner of the vineyard assumes the role that Jesus occupies in the miracle narratives of Mark and Matthew: he finds a fig tree without fruit and initially wishes to remove it. The crucial difference lies in the reason for the judgment. The owner has sought fruit for three consecutive years without success, making the decision understandable within the narrative. Even then, the gardener intervenes, asking that the tree be given one further year to be cultivated and fertilized before any final decision is made.

In Mark and Matthew, by contrast, Jesus curses the fig tree immediately after finding no fruit on it. Mark explicitly explains that “it was not the season for figs,” while Matthew omits this detail but retains the immediate judgment. Read literally, the tree may have been perfectly healthy and simply behaving according to the natural growing season. Unlike Luke's parable, where the tree is afforded every reasonable opportunity to become fruitful, the miracle narratives in Mark and Matthew present immediate destruction without any comparable period of patience or cultivation. The curse also permanently removes what would otherwise have remained a source of fruit for future travellers and pilgrims once the season for figs had arrived.

The end of Mark

After Jesus curses the fig tree and it withers, the author of Mark records no further miracles performed by Jesus. From his entry into Jerusalem in Mark 11 until his execution and burial at the end of Mark 15, Jesus neither heals the sick nor casts out demons. The enormous crowds that had repeatedly surrounded him throughout his Galilean ministry likewise disappear from the narrative. Instead, Jesus spends his days teaching and debating in Jerusalem before returning peacefully each evening with his disciples to Bethany. Despite the setting being Jerusalem during the Passover, with its greatly increased population and numerous opportunities for public displays of miraculous power, the gospel contains no further accounts of Jesus performing miracles. The focus of the narrative shifts entirely from miraculous acts to confrontation with the religious authorities, Jesus's arrest, trial, execution, and burial.

The preceding sections have examined every miracle attributed to Jesus during his public ministry in the gospel of Mark. Each narrative has been analyzed individually, and where parallel accounts exist in the other synoptic gospels or John, they have been compared and contrasted. These comparisons reveal that Matthew and Luke did not simply copy Mark verbatim. Rather, they repeatedly rearranged the chronology, abbreviated or expanded narratives, altered the mechanisms by which miracles occurred, omitted or added details, and, at times, presented the same events in ways that are difficult to reconcile with one another. The cumulative effect is that each author presents a distinct literary and theological portrait of Jesus as a miracle worker.

The following sections therefore examine the remaining miracle narratives unique to Matthew, followed by those unique to Luke, and finally those found only in John. Together, these accounts complete the survey of every miracle attributed to Jesus in the four canonical gospels.

2 Miracles of Jesus in Matthew

Having examined the miracles recorded in Mark and their parallels in the other Gospels, we now turn to those miracle narratives found in Matthew but absent from Mark. Most are unique to Matthew, although two have analogous accounts in Luke.

These include the healing of the centurion's servant, the healing of two blind men, the healing of a demon-possessed mute, the summary of Jesus healing every disease and every sickness during a preaching tour, the healing of a demon-possessed blind and mute man, the finding of a coin in the mouth of a fish, and the healing of the blind and the lame in the Temple. The healing of the centurion's servant has a closely related parallel in Luke, while the healing of the demon-possessed blind and mute man corresponds to Luke's account of a demon-possessed man who is mute but not blind.

Taken together, these narratives illustrate several distinctive features of Matthew's Gospel. The evangelist frequently expands Mark's miracle tradition by introducing additional healings, by emphasizing the role of faith, and by incorporating miracle accounts into broader theological themes, particularly those concerning the identity of Jesus, the fulfilment of Scripture, and the response of both disciples and opponents. The following sections examine each of these narratives in turn, comparing them with their parallels where appropriate.

2.1 Healing the centurion's servant

The first miracle narrated by the author of Matthew that does not appear in Mark is the healing of the centurion's servant in [Matthew 8:5–13](#):

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress."

And he said to him, "I will come and cure him."

The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it."

When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will take their places at the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith."

And the servant was healed in that hour.

The servant is healed according to the centurion's faith.

Matthew presents this as a direct encounter between Jesus and the centurion. The centurion himself approaches Jesus, pleads on behalf of his servant, and explains why he believes that Jesus need only speak a word for the healing to occur. The entire episode consists of a single, uninterrupted conversation between the two men, after which Jesus grants the request and declares, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." The miracle therefore takes place at a distance, with no command directed toward the servant and no physical contact between Jesus and the one being healed.

The episode also provides Matthew with an opportunity to emphasize the importance of faith. Jesus explicitly commends the centurion, declaring that he has found no greater faith in Israel, before contrasting the future inclusion of many from the east and west with the exclusion of some who considered themselves heirs of the kingdom. The healing is thus presented not merely as a miracle but also as an illustration of the faith of a Gentile.

Matthew immediately follows this account with the healing of Simon's mother-in-law in Capernaum. In Mark, however, the healing of Simon's mother-in-law is the second miracle recorded in the gospel and occurs at the very beginning of Jesus's public ministry. Matthew therefore inserts the healing of the centurion's servant before it, relocating Simon's mother-in-law's healing while preserving the common setting of Capernaum.

2.1.1 In Luke

The author of Luke recounts the same miracle in a substantially different form in [Luke 7:1–10](#):

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave.

When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us."

And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant

be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.”

When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and, turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”

When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

The servant is healed according to the centurion’s faith.

The overall structure of the narrative differs markedly from that in Matthew. Instead of approaching Jesus personally, the centurion first sends a delegation of Jewish elders to plead on his behalf. These elders introduce information absent from Matthew, explaining that the centurion loves the Jewish people and was responsible for building their synagogue. This portrayal establishes him as a respected benefactor of the local Jewish community before Jesus ever hears the centurion’s own words.

Jesus agrees to accompany the delegation toward the centurion’s house. Before he arrives, however, the centurion sends a second group of intermediaries, this time his friends, to deliver his message. Through them, the centurion explains that he did not consider himself worthy to receive Jesus into his home and therefore “did not presume” to come to Jesus personally. The familiar comparison with military authority, found in Matthew, is then repeated almost verbatim, emphasizing the centurion’s belief that Jesus need only speak a command for his slave to be healed.

Unlike Matthew, the narrative contains no direct conversation between Jesus and the centurion. The two men never meet. Instead, Luke replaces Matthew’s brief exchange with a sequence of mediated encounters: the Jewish elders first persuade Jesus to come, Jesus begins the journey, and the centurion’s friends then deliver the centurion’s message. Nevertheless, the miracle itself remains the same. Without ever seeing the slave, and without entering the centurion’s house, Jesus heals him from a distance, once again attributing the miracle to the centurion’s remarkable faith.

The author of Luke’s statement that the centurion built the local synagogue implies that he was a man of considerable wealth, influence, and standing within the community. Whether this reflects a retired officer settled in Capernaum or an active centurion stationed there cannot be determined from the text. In either case, however, a centurion would have occupied a substantially higher social and economic position than an ordinary soldier, making such benefaction at least plausible.

What is striking, however, is that this prominent figure disappears from the narrative as quickly as he appears. Jesus declares that he has found no greater faith “even in Israel,” a remarkable commendation given the many disciples and followers already introduced in the gospel. Yet the centurion is never mentioned again. Despite residing in Capernaum, the centre of much of Jesus’s Galilean ministry, he plays no further role in the narrative. The episode therefore functions as a self-contained account whose primary purpose is to illustrate extraordinary faith rather than to introduce a recurring character.

2.2 Jesus heals two blind men

The next miracle is unique to the gospel of Matthew. Immediately after the raising of Jairus's daughter, the author writes in [Matthew 9:27–31](#):

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" 28 When he entered the house, the blind men came to him,

and Jesus said to them, "Do you have faith that I can do this?"

They said to him, "Yes, Lord."

Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith, let it be done to you."

And their eyes were opened.

Then Jesus sternly ordered them, "See that no one knows of this."

But they went away and spread the news about him through all of that district.

Jesus restores the men's sight by touching their eyes.

The opening of the narrative places this event immediately after the raising of Jairus's daughter in Capernaum: Jesus simply "went on from there." This differs significantly from Mark, where the very next event after the raising of Jairus's daughter is Jesus's departure for Nazareth. Matthew therefore inserts this miracle, together with the following exorcism, before relocating the visit to Nazareth to Matthew 13.

This account also exhibits several characteristics found elsewhere in Matthew. In Mark, Jesus encounters one demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes and one blind beggar near Jericho. Matthew consistently doubles these figures, describing two demon-possessed men in the corresponding Gerasene narrative and two blind beggars near Jericho. Likewise, this miracle concerns two blind men who, like the blind men near Jericho, address Jesus as the "Son of David."

Although the story shares several features with Matthew's later healing of the two blind men near Jericho, it is otherwise unparalleled in the synoptic gospels. The men express confidence that Jesus can heal them, Jesus explicitly asks whether they believe, and he restores their sight only after they affirm their faith. As in several earlier miracles, Jesus commands those who have been healed not to publicize the event. Once again, however, the command is ignored, and the men immediately spread news of the miracle throughout the surrounding district.

The emphasis upon faith is also characteristic of Matthew. Jesus declares, "According to your faith let it be done to you," explicitly making the men's faith the basis upon which the healing is granted. This theme recurs throughout Matthew's gospel more frequently than in Mark and forms one of the author's characteristic emphases.

2.3 Jesus heals a demon-possessed mute

The next miracle, also unique to Matthew, immediately follows in [Matthew 9:32–34](#):

After they had gone away, a demon-possessed man who was mute was brought to him.

And when the demon had been cast out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed and said, “Never has anything like this been seen in Israel.”

But the Pharisees were saying, “By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons.”

The manner in which Jesus casts out the demon is not described.

The narrative follows immediately after the healing of the two blind men. As soon as they “had gone away,” a man possessed by a demon and unable to speak is brought to Jesus. The account is remarkably brief. Unlike many earlier exorcisms, no dialogue takes place, no command is recorded, and the departure of the demon is not described. The author simply states that the demon was cast out, whereupon the man immediately began to speak.

The reaction of the crowd is noteworthy. They proclaim that “Never has anything like this been seen in Israel.” This is a striking statement, given that Matthew has already narrated numerous miracles, including the healing of the paralytic, the stilling of the storm, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniacs, the raising of Jairus’s daughter, and the healing of the two blind men immediately beforehand. The author’s intent appears to be to emphasize the extraordinary nature of this particular miracle despite the many miraculous events that have already occurred.

This episode also contributes to an interesting narrative tension. By this point in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus has performed numerous miracles in and around Capernaum before large crowds. Yet only a few chapters later, Jesus condemns Capernaum for its unbelief, declaring that if the miracles performed there had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until the present day. The contrast between the repeated demonstrations of miraculous power and the city’s subsequent condemnation is therefore one of the recurring themes in Matthew’s narrative.

Finally, the closing verse anticipates a later controversy. The Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the ruler of the demons, an accusation that Matthew develops at much greater length in Matthew 12. This brief statement therefore foreshadows one of the principal conflicts between Jesus and the religious authorities that follows later in the gospel.

2.4 Heals every disease and sickness

Matthew next inserts a summary of Jesus's ministry in [Matthew 9:35–38](#):

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

No mechanism for the healings is described.

Rather than narrating an individual miracle, Matthew presents a summary of Jesus's activities. Jesus is said to travel throughout “all the cities and villages,” presumably referring to Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing “every disease and every sickness.” No specific healings are described, nor is any indication given as to how these cures were performed.

Taken literally, this summary presents an extraordinary picture of Jesus's ministry. If Jesus truly travelled throughout all the cities and villages healing every disease and every sickness, the scale of the healing activity would have been immense. Yet the gospel provides no individual examples from this tour, and no contemporary non-Christian source records such a widespread transformation in the health of the population. The author's purpose is therefore not to document particular miracles but to emphasize the comprehensive scope of Jesus's ministry.

The passage is also a literary composition drawing together themes found elsewhere in the gospels. Jesus's itinerant ministry through towns and villages recalls earlier summaries in Mark, although Matthew has already incorporated those passages elsewhere in his gospel. Likewise, the description of the crowds as “like sheep without a shepherd” echoes Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand, even though Matthew omitted that phrase from his parallel version of the feeding miracle. Finally, the saying, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few,” closely parallels Luke 10:2, where it introduces the mission of the seventy-two disciples rather than summarizing Jesus's own ministry. Matthew therefore combines material from different traditions into a transitional passage that bridges the miracle narratives of chapters 8–9 with the commissioning of the Twelve in chapter 10.

2.5 Jesus heals a demon-possessed blind and mute man

In a narrative largely derived from Mark, the author of Matthew introduces a miracle that is absent from his source in [Matthew 12:22–37](#):

Then they brought to him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see.

All the crowds were amazed and were saying, “Can this be the Son of David?”

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this man casts out the demons.”

He knew what they were thinking and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how, then, will his kingdom stand? If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man? Then indeed the house can be plundered. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

The mechanism of the healing is not described.

The miracle serves as the introduction to a discourse that otherwise has a close parallel in Mark. In Mark, the accusation that Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebul follows the episode in which Jesus’s family attempts to restrain him because they believe he has gone out of his mind. Matthew omits that narrative entirely and instead introduces the controversy with the healing of a man who is simultaneously blind, mute, and demon-possessed. The miracle therefore provides an immediate explanation for why the crowds begin to ask whether Jesus might be the Son of David and why the Pharisees respond with the accusation that he is in league with Beelzebul.

As elsewhere in Matthew, the miracle itself is narrated very briefly. No command is directed to either the man or the demon, and no description is given of how the exorcism or healing takes place. The reader is simply told that the man is cured, regaining both speech and sight. The emphasis then shifts almost immediately from the miracle itself to the ensuing theological dispute.

The Pharisees attribute Jesus’s ability to cast out demons to Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. Jesus responds that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, arguing that if Satan were casting out Satan, his own kingdom would collapse. This forms the basis of his rebuttal and leads into the discussion of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The logic of this argument has nevertheless been questioned. It assumes that Satan’s kingdom would necessarily be weakened by demons being cast out. One could instead imagine a temporary exorcism serving a broader strategy of deception, especially in light of Matthew’s later statement that an unclean spirit may return to a person with seven spirits more wicked than itself after finding the house “empty, swept, and put in order.” Within that framework, the casting out of a demon would not necessarily be contrary to the interests of Beelzebul. Whether Jesus’s argument is intended as a formal logical proof or as a rhetorical

response to his opponents is therefore open to interpretation.

2.5.1 In Mark

The parallel passage in Mark lacks the introductory miracle and instead begins with a different narrative in [Mark 3:20–30](#):

Then he went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat.

When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”

And he called them to him and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin”

—for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Unlike Matthew, Mark introduces the Beelzebul controversy with a very different narrative. Before the scribes accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the ruler of the demons, Jesus’s own family attempts to restrain him because people were saying that “He has gone out of his mind.” Only then do the scribes arrive from Jerusalem and make their accusation, to which Jesus responds with the parable of the divided kingdom and the warning concerning blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Matthew substantially reshapes this sequence. He omits the account of Jesus’s family attempting to restrain him and instead introduces the controversy with the healing of a man who is blind, mute, and demon-possessed. He also expands Jesus’s response by adding further material, including the familiar denunciation, “You brood of vipers,” together with the discussion of good and bad trees and the accountability of every careless word.

The omission of Jesus’s family is particularly noteworthy. Earlier in Mark, Jesus’s family likewise attempts to restrain him, and the author concludes the episode by redefining Jesus’s true family as those who do the will of God. Matthew removes the suggestion that Jesus’s family believed him to be out of his mind. This editorial decision is consistent with Matthew’s broader presentation of Jesus’s origins, which includes the virgin birth, the visit of the magi, and other infancy narratives that emphasize Jesus’s unique identity from the very beginning of his life. Whether this omission reflects a theological concern, a literary preference, or both cannot be determined with certainty, but it illustrates Matthew’s tendency to reshape Mark’s narrative in ways that accord with his own presentation of Jesus.

2.5.2 In Luke

The author of Luke likewise introduces the Beelzebul controversy with a miracle in [Luke 11:14–26](#):

Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed.

But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.”

Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven.

But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself

is laid waste, and a divided household falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?—for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ When it returns, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first.”

The mechanism of the healing is not described.

Like Matthew, Luke precedes the Beelzebul controversy with an exorcism rather than following Mark’s narrative in which the accusation arises independently of any particular miracle. Luke’s miracle is, however, less elaborate than Matthew’s: the afflicted man is possessed by a demon that renders him mute, whereas Matthew’s man is both blind and mute in addition to being demon-possessed. As in Matthew, the miracle itself is narrated very briefly. No command to the demon is recorded, and the emphasis immediately shifts from the healing to the ensuing debate.

Luke also rearranges a number of sayings found elsewhere in the synoptic gospels. Unlike Matthew, he includes a demand that Jesus produce “a sign from heaven” immediately following the accusation that he casts out demons by Beelzebul. Matthew records the request for a sign in a different context, following the Beelzebul controversy in [Matthew 12:38–42](#), where Jesus responds with the assertion that the only sign will be that of Jonah, while Mark likewise places it later, after the feeding of the four thousand in [Mark 8:11–13](#). Luke therefore combines these traditions into a single narrative.

Conversely, Luke omits Jesus’s warning concerning blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which both Mark and Matthew include as part of the Beelzebul controversy. Instead, he concludes the discourse with the parable of the returning unclean spirit, in which an expelled demon revisits its former dwelling, finds it “swept and put in order,” and returns with seven spirits more evil than itself. Matthew also preserves this saying, but in a different location, immediately after the discussion of the sign of Jonah in [Matthew 12:43–45](#). Luke thus redistributes the same material, combining some elements while separating others.

Finally, like the author of Matthew, Luke omits altogether Mark’s introduction in which Jesus’s family attempts to restrain him because people are saying that he has gone out of his mind. Instead, Luke preserves only the later episode in which Jesus’s mother and brothers seek him, relocating it to [Luke 8:19–21](#), well before this controversy. In doing so, Luke dismantles Mark’s literary intercalation and removes the suggestion that Jesus’s own family believed him to be mentally unstable.

2.6 The coin in the fish's mouth

The next miracle in Matthew not already in Mark is only found much later in [Matthew 17:24–27](#):

When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?”

He said, “Yes, he does.”

And when he came home, Jesus spoke of it first, asking, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children or from others?”

When Peter said, “From others,”

Jesus said to him, “Then the children are free. However, so that we do not give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me.”

No mechanism for this miracle is described.

This miracle is unique to Matthew and has no parallel in the other gospels. Unlike the other miracles recorded thus far, it is neither a healing, an exorcism, nor a miracle performed before a crowd. Instead, it serves a practical purpose: providing the money needed to pay the temple tax. The miracle is also narrated unusually briefly. Jesus simply instructs Simon that the first fish he catches will contain a coin sufficient to pay the tax for them both. Matthew never explicitly records Simon catching the fish or finding the coin; the successful outcome is left implicit. As elsewhere, no mechanism is offered to explain how the coin came to be in the fish's mouth.

One point of note is that the word translated “coin” is *στατήρ* (stater), which was worth two didrachmas: exactly enough to pay the temple tax for two people.

2.7 Miracles at the temple

After the cleansing of the temple, the author of Matthew inserts a brief miracle narrative that has no parallel in Mark or Luke. He writes in [Matthew 21:14–17](#):

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them.

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did and heard the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David,”

they became angry and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?”

Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself’?”

He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

The mechanism of the healings is not described.

This scene is unique to Matthew. Immediately after cleansing the Temple, Jesus is approached by the blind and the lame, whom he heals within the Temple precincts. No individual healings are described, nor is any indication given of how they are performed. The author simply states that Jesus cured them before turning the reader’s attention to the reaction of the religious authorities.

The chief priests and scribes become indignant not only because of the healings but also because the children are crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” In response, Jesus quotes [Psalm 8:2](#), following the wording of the Greek Septuagint: “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself.” The Hebrew text differs slightly, speaking instead of God establishing “strength” from the mouths of infants. Matthew’s use of the Septuagint therefore fits the immediate context, in which the children are praising Jesus in the Temple.

The inclusion of these healings is noteworthy. Given the prominence Matthew assigns to miracles throughout his gospel, one might expect such public healings within the Temple itself to have been preserved by Mark or Luke as well. Yet neither gospel records this episode. Instead, Matthew alone combines healings in the Temple with the children’s acclamations, thereby presenting Jesus’s final visit to the Temple as one in which both miraculous works and public recognition of his messianic status occur together.

3 Miracles of Jesus in Luke

We now turn to the miracles recorded in Luke that are absent from Mark and Matthew. Most of these narratives are unique to Luke, although the miraculous catch of fish has a closely related counterpart in John's post-resurrection account by the Sea of Tiberias.

These miracles include Jesus passing through a hostile crowd at Nazareth, the miraculous catch of fish, the raising of the widow's son at Nain, the healing of a crippled woman on the Sabbath, the healing of a man with edema on the Sabbath, the healing of ten men with a skin disease, and the healing of the high priest's slave's ear during Jesus's arrest.

Taken together, these narratives illustrate several characteristic features of Luke's Gospel. Luke frequently presents miracles as the setting for extended teaching, particularly concerning the Sabbath, faith, compassion, and the inclusion of those on the margins of society. Unlike Mark, who often groups miracles into concentrated periods of activity, Luke commonly inserts isolated miracle narratives into longer sections devoted primarily to Jesus's teaching and his journey toward Jerusalem. The following sections examine each of these miracles in turn, comparing them with related narratives in the other Gospels where appropriate.

3.1 Passes through the crowd

The first miracle found only in Luke occurs in the opening narrative of Jesus's ministry, when he is rejected at Nazareth in [Luke 4:28–30](#):

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

No mechanism is described here.

Unlike Mark and Matthew, where Jesus's visit to Nazareth occurs well into his Galilean ministry and ends with the townspeople expressing unbelief, Luke relocates the episode to the very beginning of Jesus's public ministry. Moreover, Luke greatly intensifies the hostility. Rather than merely taking offense at Jesus, the people of Nazareth attempt to kill him by leading him to the edge of a cliff.

The conclusion of the episode is equally striking. Having been surrounded by an angry crowd intent on throwing him from the cliff, Jesus simply "passed through the midst of them and went on his way." No explanation is given as to how he escaped, whether the crowd was miraculously prevented from seizing him or whether they simply allowed him to leave. The mechanism is left entirely unexplained.

This scene has no parallel in the corresponding passages of Mark or Matthew. There, Jesus's visit to Nazareth ends with the familiar saying that a prophet is not honoured in his own hometown and with the observation that the people's unbelief limited the miracles performed there. Luke, by contrast, transforms the episode into an attempted execution followed by Jesus's unexplained escape. This also raises an interesting narrative question: if the people of Nazareth had already attempted to kill Jesus at the very outset of his ministry, it is not immediately clear why the later visits to Nazareth described in Mark and Matthew contain no recollection of such a dramatic event.

3.2 The miraculous catch of fish

Unlike Mark and Matthew, where the calling of the first disciples contains no miracle, Luke introduces the calling of Simon, James, and John with a miraculous catch of fish in [Luke 5:1–11](#):

Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets.

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore.

Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’s knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

No mechanism for the miracle is described.

In Mark, Jesus simply calls Simon and Andrew as they are casting their nets, followed shortly thereafter by James and John. No motivation is given beyond Jesus’s command, and all four immediately leave their livelihoods to follow him. Matthew follows the same sequence while making the narrative more symmetrical.

Luke, however, introduces a miracle that provides a reason for Simon, James, and John to respond so dramatically. After an unsuccessful night of fishing, Jesus instructs Simon to let down the nets once more. The resulting catch is so great that the nets begin to tear and two boats are filled almost to the point of sinking. Faced with this event, Simon falls before Jesus, confesses his sinfulness, and is then told that he will henceforth be “catching people.” Thus, in Luke, the call of the first disciples follows immediately from a miracle that demonstrates Jesus’s extraordinary authority.

3.2.1 In John

A remarkably similar miracle appears in the closing chapter of John, but in a very different setting: [John 21:1–14](#):

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way.

Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples.

Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?”

They answered him, “No.”

He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.”

So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.

That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!”

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the sea.

But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.

Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.”

So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them, and though there were so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”

Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

No mechanism for the miracle is described.

The parallels between the two narratives are striking. In both accounts, the disciples fish throughout the night without success. Jesus then instructs them to cast their nets once more, whereupon they catch an extraordinary number of fish. In Luke, the nets begin to tear under the weight of the catch; in John, the net contains one hundred fifty-three large fish, yet it does not tear. In both narratives, the miraculous catch immediately precedes a significant development in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples.

The principal difference lies in the setting. Luke places the miracle at the very beginning of Jesus’s ministry, using it to explain why Simon, James, and John abandoned their occupation to follow him. John, by contrast, places the miracle after the resurrection, where it serves as one of Jesus’s final appearances to the disciples.

If Luke’s account is taken as the event that originally called the first disciples, it is noteworthy that in John’s version the first disciple to recognize Jesus is not Simon but “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” who declares, “It is the Lord!” Only then does Simon react by jumping into the sea to reach Jesus. Whether John intentionally echoes Luke’s earlier miracle or preserves an independent but similar tradition remains open to interpretation.

3.3 Resurrecting a widow's son

A second resurrection miracle, unique to Luke, is found in [Luke 7:11–17](#):

Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him.

As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow, and with her was a large crowd from the town.

When the Lord saw her, he was moved with compassion for her and said to her, "Do not cry."

Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stopped. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!"

The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Fear seized all of them, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

This word about him spread throughout the whole of Judea and all the surrounding region.

Jesus commands the dead man to rise.

This miracle is unique to Luke. As in Luke's account of Jairus's daughter, the deceased is identified as an only child: the dead man is his widowed mother's "only son," just as Jairus's child is described earlier by Luke as his "only daughter." The emphasis upon the mother's plight heightens the compassion that motivates Jesus to intervene.

Unlike many earlier miracles, this one is performed openly before a large number of witnesses. Jesus encounters a funeral procession as it is leaving the town, accompanied by "a large crowd" from Nain. After touching the bier, he simply commands, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man immediately sits up and begins to speak, whereupon Jesus returns him to his mother.

The public nature of the event is particularly striking. Many of Jesus's earlier miracles are performed privately or before relatively small groups of people, and on several occasions Jesus instructs those present not to publicize what has occurred. Here, however, the miracle takes place in the midst of a funeral procession before a large crowd, and no such command to silence is given. Instead, the narrative concludes by stating that news of the event spread throughout Judea and the surrounding region.

Taken at face value, this would have been one of the most public and dramatic miracles attributed to Jesus in any of the gospels. Yet the episode is recorded only by Luke and is not mentioned by Mark, Matthew, or John. More generally, if a person were publicly restoring the dead to life before large crowds in first-century Judea, one might expect such an extraordinary event to have attracted wider contemporary attention. Whether Luke is preserving an otherwise unknown tradition or shaping his narrative for theological purposes cannot be determined from the text itself.

3.4 Seven demons cast out of Mary Magdalene

Luke briefly mentions Mary Magdalene for the first time in [Luke 8:1–3](#):

Soon afterward he went on through one town and village after another, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities:

1. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and
2. Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and
3. Susanna, and
4. many others,

who ministered to them out of their own resources.

Luke records neither the circumstances nor the mechanism by which Mary Magdalene was delivered from the seven demons.

The only other reference to this exorcism occurs in the longer ending of Mark, in [Mark 16:9](#):

Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.

Since Mark 16:9–20 is absent from the oldest and most reliable manuscripts of Mark, many scholars regard it as a later addition. The reference to Mary Magdalene's exorcism in verse 9 is therefore often understood as depending on Luke 8:2 rather than preserving an independent tradition.

No Gospel narrates the exorcism itself. Apart from this brief notice, Mary Magdalene appears primarily as a witness to Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and the discovery of the empty tomb. She is also notably absent from the Acts of the Apostles, despite her prominence in the resurrection narratives.

3.5 Jesus heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath

Later, Luke records another healing performed on the Sabbath in [Luke 13:10–17](#):

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.”

When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day.”

But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?”

When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.

The woman is healed when Jesus lays his hands on her.

This miracle is unique to Luke. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus casts out a demon in a synagogue on the Sabbath and later heals a man with a withered hand, likewise on the Sabbath. Those earlier episodes also provoke controversy over what may be done on the Sabbath. Here, however, Luke presents a different setting and a different objection. Rather than challenging Jesus directly, the leader of the synagogue addresses the crowd, insisting that there are six days on which people may come to be healed and that such cures should not take place on the Sabbath.

An unusual feature of the account is the description of the woman’s condition. She is said to have “a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years,” yet Jesus neither rebukes a demon nor commands an unclean spirit to leave, as he does elsewhere in the gospels. Instead, he declares, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment,” lays his hands upon her, and she immediately stands upright. Later in the discussion, however, Jesus describes her as one “whom Satan bound for eighteen long years.” The narrative therefore associates her disability with Satan, but it leaves ambiguous whether Luke intends the condition to be understood as a case of demonic possession or as an affliction ultimately attributable to Satan’s power.

The miracle is framed primarily as a Sabbath controversy rather than as a demonstration of healing power. Jesus argues that if people untie their ox or donkey on the Sabbath to lead it to water, then surely it is appropriate to free this “daughter of Abraham” from her long bondage on that day as well. The discussion therefore shifts quickly from the miracle itself to the interpretation of the Sabbath.

Unlike the earlier portions of the gospels, where miracles often occur in clusters, this episode appears as an isolated miracle within a long section devoted primarily to Jesus’s teachings and parables during his journey toward Jerusalem. The miracle serves chiefly as the setting for another Sabbath controversy, allowing Jesus to contrast his interpretation of the Sabbath with that of the synagogue leader. As in several earlier disputes, the narrative concludes with Jesus’s opponents being put to shame while the crowd rejoices at the remarkable things he has done.

3.6 Jesus heals a man with edema on the Sabbath

Luke records another Sabbath healing in [Luke 14:1–6](#):

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had edema.

And Jesus asked the experts in the law and Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath or not?”

But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him and sent him away.

Then he said to them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?”

And they could not reply to this.

No mechanism for the healing is described.

This is the third narrative in Luke in which Jesus explicitly defends healing on the Sabbath and the second such account that is unique to Luke. As in the preceding account of the crippled woman, the miracle itself is described only briefly. Jesus simply takes hold of the man, heals him, and dismisses him. The emphasis immediately shifts from the cure to the ensuing discussion concerning what is lawful on the Sabbath.

The setting is also distinctive. Unlike the earlier Sabbath controversies, this episode takes place not in a synagogue but in the house of a leading Pharisee during a Sabbath meal. Luke alone repeatedly places Jesus in the homes of Pharisees, using such meals as occasions for theological discussion and controversy. Likewise, Luke alone records Jesus being anointed in the house of a Pharisee. The private setting therefore provides another opportunity for Jesus to challenge the prevailing interpretation of the Sabbath before an audience of religious leaders.

The miracle is isolated within a lengthy section of teaching rather than forming part of a sequence of miracle stories. Indeed, by this stage of Luke’s gospel, Sabbath healings have become a recurring literary motif. Earlier, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath and defended his actions; immediately preceding this episode, Luke uniquely records the healing of the crippled woman, again followed by a debate over the Sabbath. Here the pattern is repeated once more. The repetition suggests that Luke deliberately uses these miracle narratives not only to display Jesus’s healing power but also to develop his interpretation of the Sabbath and his recurring disputes with the Pharisees and experts in the law.

One consequence of this editorial emphasis is that relatively little attention is devoted to other aspects of Jesus’s public teaching during this portion of the gospel. Earlier narratives, such as the feeding of the four thousand, imply that Jesus taught large crowds for extended periods, yet little of that teaching is preserved. Here, by contrast, the focus is once again placed on a Sabbath healing and the controversy that follows, making this theme one of Luke’s most frequently revisited subjects.

3.7 Jesus heals ten men with skin disease

The next miracle unique to Luke is [Luke 17:11–19](#):

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

As he entered a village, ten men with a skin disease approached him.

Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

And as they went, they were made clean.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’s feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine? Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?”

Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

The men are healed as they obey Jesus’s command.

This is Luke’s second account involving people with a skin disease. As in the earlier healing recorded by all three synoptic gospels, Jesus instructs those afflicted to present themselves to the priests, in accordance with the requirements of the Mosaic law. Unlike the earlier account, however, there are now ten men rather than one, and the healing does not occur immediately. Instead, Luke states that “as they went, they were made clean,” so the miracle takes place while they are obeying Jesus’s instruction.

The narrative’s emphasis is not on the healing itself but on the response to it. Of the ten men who are healed, only one returns to thank Jesus, and Luke identifies him as a Samaritan. Jesus contrasts the gratitude of this foreigner with the absence of the other nine, concluding, “Your faith has made you well.” As with the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke again portrays a Samaritan as the exemplary figure. This is a recurring feature of Luke’s gospel, in which outsiders often respond more positively to Jesus than those who might have been expected to do so.

The Samaritans occupied an unusual position within first-century Judaism. They accepted a version of the Torah but worshipped at Mount Gerizim rather than at the Temple in Jerusalem, a difference that contributed to longstanding hostility between Jews and Samaritans. Luke’s decision to make the grateful man a Samaritan therefore heightens the force of the narrative, for it is the outsider, rather than those traditionally associated with the covenant, who recognizes and gives thanks for what God has done.

Like several of Luke’s later miracle narratives, this account appears as an isolated episode within an extended section devoted primarily to Jesus’s journey toward Jerusalem and his teachings. The miracle functions chiefly as the setting for a lesson on faith and gratitude rather than as a demonstration of healing itself.

3.8 Jesus heals the high priest's slave's ear

During Jesus's arrest, Luke alone records that Jesus healed the slave whose ear had been cut off. The account is found in [Luke 22:47–51](#):

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him,

but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?"

When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?"

Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him.

Jesus heals the ear by touching it.

This miracle is unique to Luke, although all four gospels record the cutting off of the slave's ear. Luke alone adds that Jesus touched the injured ear and restored it.

1. **Mark:** But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

2. **Matthew:** Suddenly one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will die by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"

3. **John:** Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus.

Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Luke therefore preserves the fullest version of the episode. Like John, he specifies that it was the slave's right ear that was cut off, but unlike the other evangelists, he records that Jesus immediately healed the injury. The miracle is narrated very briefly: Jesus simply says, "No more of this!" touches the ear, and heals it. No further description of the healing is given.

The addition also alters the character of the scene. In Mark, Matthew, and John, the episode concludes with Jesus rebuking the use of the sword and accepting his arrest. Luke retains this emphasis but adds one final act of compassion before Jesus is taken into custody. Even as one of those sent to arrest him has been injured by one of his own followers, Jesus heals the wound. The miracle also removes the lasting physical consequence of the disciple's impulsive act, leaving the slave unharmed as the arrest proceeds.

4 Miracles of Jesus in John

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John records relatively few miracles. These include the turning of water into wine, the healing of a royal official's son, the healing of a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years, the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walking on the water, the healing of a man born blind, the raising of Lazarus after four days in the tomb, and the miraculous catch of fish following the resurrection.

John's presentation of these miracles differs markedly from that of the Synoptic Gospels. Rather than recording numerous healings, exorcisms, and summaries of miraculous activity, John selects a small number of carefully developed episodes. The miracles are typically followed by extended theological discussions in which their significance is explored, and the narrative emphasis shifts from the miraculous event itself to what it reveals about Jesus's identity and mission. Indeed, John explicitly identifies the turning of water into wine and the healing of the royal official's son as Jesus's first and second "signs", establishing a pattern in which miraculous works function primarily as revelations of who Jesus is rather than simply demonstrations of supernatural power.

The following sections examine those miracles recorded in John that have no counterparts in the Synoptic Gospels, while also noting the parallels where John recounts miracles that are also found in Mark, Matthew, or Luke.

4.1 Turning water into wine

The first miracle in the gospel of John occurs at a wedding in Cana of Galilee in [John 2:1–11](#):

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”

And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come.”

His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.

He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet.” So they took it.

When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

The water becomes wine after the servants obey Jesus’s instructions.

This is the first miracle in John’s gospel, although the author deliberately refers to it not as a miracle but as the first of Jesus’s “signs.” Unlike the miracles that introduce Jesus’s ministry in the synoptic gospels, this one neither heals the sick, casts out demons, nor raises the dead. Instead, it supplies wine for a wedding celebration after the original supply has been exhausted.

The quantity of wine produced is extraordinary. John specifies that there were six stone jars, each capable of holding twenty to thirty gallons (approximately seventy-five to one hundred fifteen litres). Thus, Jesus transforms roughly one hundred twenty to one hundred eighty gallons (five hundred fifty to eight hundred twenty litres) of water into wine, equivalent to approximately seven hundred to one thousand standard bottles of wine. The miracle therefore provides not merely enough wine to continue the celebration but an enormous surplus. Moreover, the steward remarks that it is of unusually high quality, observing that the best wine has been served last rather than first. The emphasis is therefore upon both abundance and excellence.

The narrative also presents an interesting chronological contrast with the synoptic gospels. In John, this event occurs within days of Jesus’s baptism and the calling of his first disciples. There is no account of forty days in the wilderness or of a temptation by Satan. Instead, Jesus begins his public ministry almost immediately by attending a wedding feast.

Another striking feature is the role of Jesus’s mother. When the wine runs out, she informs Jesus of the problem and appears confident that he can resolve it, despite this being explicitly identified as Jesus’s first sign. John offers no explanation for the source of her confidence. Jesus initially responds, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come,” suggesting reluctance to act. Nevertheless, after his mother instructs the servants to do whatever he tells them, Jesus performs the sign without further discussion. The narrative does not explain what prompted this apparent change of mind.

Finally, only a small number of people know what has happened. The servants who draw the wine know its origin, but the steward and the wedding guests do not. John concludes by explaining the significance of

the event: “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.” Thus, unlike the public miracles that dominate the synoptic gospels, John’s first sign is witnessed and understood by only a select few, with the emphasis placed not upon public acclaim but upon revealing Jesus’s identity to his disciples.

The narrative also contains an interesting tension. John concludes by identifying this event as “the first of his signs,” suggesting that it marks the deliberate beginning of Jesus’s public revelation. Yet immediately beforehand Jesus appears reluctant to intervene, replying to his mother, “My hour has not yet come.” Despite this response, he nevertheless performs the sign after Mary instructs the servants to obey him. John offers no explanation for this apparent change. The reader is therefore left to reconcile Jesus’s initial reluctance with the evangelist’s presentation of the miracle as the intentional beginning of his series of signs.

4.2 Heals the son of a royal official

Next, we have Jesus's first healing in [John 4:46–54](#):

Then he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine.

Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum.

When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies."

Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live."

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him."

The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household.

Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

The son is healed when Jesus spoke the word.

This is the first healing recorded in John, and the author explicitly identifies it as Jesus's "second sign." Unlike the synoptic gospels, where Jesus's early ministry is dominated by numerous healings and exorcisms, John records relatively few miracles, each serving as a "sign" that reveals Jesus's identity.

The narrative is also notable for Jesus's initial response. When the official asks him to come to Capernaum, Jesus replies, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The rebuke appears surprising, for the official has already travelled from Capernaum to Cana because he believes Jesus can help his dying son. The Greek, however, uses the plural "you", suggesting that Jesus is addressing not merely the official but the Galileans more generally, whose faith John has already associated with the signs they had witnessed.

The official's faith then develops in stages. Initially, he believes Jesus is capable of healing his son if he accompanies him to Capernaum. When Jesus instead says, "Go; your son will live," the official believes Jesus's word and returns home alone. Finally, after confirming from his servants the precise hour at which the fever left his son, he himself believed, "along with his whole household." The miracle therefore emphasizes not only Jesus's authority to heal at a distance but also the progression from belief based upon hope to belief confirmed by the sign itself.

This narrative also bears a number of striking similarities to the healing of the centurion's servant recorded by Matthew and Luke. In both accounts, a man of considerable social standing approaches Jesus on behalf of someone who is near death. Jesus heals the afflicted person without ever seeing him, and the healing occurs at a distance solely through Jesus's spoken word. There are, however, important differences. In Matthew and Luke, the petitioner is a centurion requesting healing for his servant, whereas John describes a royal official pleading for his son. The centurion is commended for his extraordinary faith before the healing occurs, while John's official first asks Jesus to come in person and only gradually comes to fuller belief after discovering that his son recovered at the very hour Jesus spoke. Whether these accounts preserve independent traditions or represent different versions of a similar story cannot be determined from the texts alone, but the parallels are sufficiently close to invite comparison.

4.3 Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath

The next miracle is found in [John 5:1–18](#):

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?”

The ill man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me.”

Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.”

At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath.

So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.”

But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’”

They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk’?”

Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there.

Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.”

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath.

But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.”

For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

The man is healed when Jesus commands him to stand and walk.

This is the first miracle that John places in Jerusalem. The setting is noteworthy, for the author explicitly states that many people who were ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed were lying beside the pool of Beth-zatha. Yet Jesus directs his attention to only one man, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. Unlike the mass healings frequently described in the synoptic gospels, John records only this single cure. The narrative neither explains why this man alone is chosen nor indicates what became of the many other sick people present.

As in the synoptic gospels, the healing immediately gives rise to a controversy concerning the Sabbath. The issue is initially not the healing itself but the man’s carrying of his mat, which Jesus had instructed him to do. The discussion soon broadens into a dispute over Jesus’s authority and his relationship to God. By declaring, “My Father is still working, and I also am working,” Jesus provides a theological justification for his actions that goes beyond the Sabbath arguments found in the synoptic gospels. John concludes that this statement intensified the hostility toward Jesus, for his opponents understood him not only to be violating the Sabbath but also to be making himself equal to God.

Like several of John’s other signs, the miracle is therefore narrated briefly, while the greater part of the passage is devoted to the theological discussion that follows. The healing serves primarily as the catalyst for an extended discourse rather than as the principal focus of the narrative.

4.4 Jesus heals a man blind from birth on the Sabbath

The next miracle unique to John is found in [John 9:1–12](#):

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.

His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent).

Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?”

Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.”

He kept saying, “I am he.”

But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”

He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.”

They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

The man receives his sight after washing in the Pool of Siloam.

This healing, like the previous one, takes place in Jerusalem and on the Sabbath. The narrative begins with an unusual theological question posed by the disciples: whether the man’s blindness resulted from his own sin or that of his parents. Jesus rejects both possibilities, instead explaining that the man’s blindness serves as an opportunity for “God’s works” to be revealed.

The healing itself is unlike any other recorded in the gospels. Elsewhere, Jesus occasionally uses saliva as part of a cure, such as in Mark’s healing of the deaf man and the blind man at Bethsaida. Here, however, he spits on the ground, makes mud from the saliva, spreads it upon the man’s eyes, and instructs him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. This is the only occasion on which Jesus is described as making mud as part of a healing. No explanation is given for why this particular procedure is employed.

Unlike many of the miracles in the synoptic gospels, the healing itself occupies only a small portion of the narrative. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the reaction that follows. The neighbours first debate whether the healed man is in fact the same beggar they had known. He is then brought before the Pharisees, who repeatedly question both him and his parents in an attempt to determine what has occurred. The discussion soon shifts from the miracle itself to Jesus’s identity, with some arguing that he cannot be from God because he healed on the Sabbath, while others ask how a sinner could perform such signs. Eventually the healed man is expelled from the synagogue for refusing to deny what has happened, after which Jesus finds him again and the chapter concludes with an extended discourse on spiritual blindness.

The structure of the chapter is therefore quite unlike anything found in the synoptic gospels. Rather than presenting a miracle followed by a brief reaction before moving on to the next episode, John develops the consequences of a single healing over an entire chapter. The miracle becomes the catalyst for a sustained theological and legal investigation into Jesus’s identity, the meaning of the Sabbath, and the contrast between physical sight and spiritual blindness. This literary pattern is characteristic of John’s gospel, where the miracles function not merely as demonstrations of power but as signs that introduce extended theological discussions.

4.5 Raising Lazarus from the dead

The final miracle before Jesus's arrest is the raising of Lazarus in [John 11:38–44](#):

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."

When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Lazarus returns to life when Jesus commands him to come out of the tomb.

The raising of Lazarus occupies the entirety of [John 11](#). Unlike the resurrection accounts in the synoptic gospels, where the miracle itself is narrated briefly, John devotes an entire chapter to Lazarus's illness, Jesus's deliberate delay, the discussions with Martha and Mary, the resurrection itself, and the reaction of both the crowds and the religious authorities.

A striking feature of the narrative is Jesus's deliberate postponement of his journey. After being informed that Lazarus is gravely ill, Jesus remains where he is for two more days before travelling to Bethany. By the time he arrives, Lazarus has been dead for four days, and Martha remarks that there is already "a stench". The delay is therefore presented as intentional. According to Jesus, it is so that "you may believe" and so that the glory of God may be revealed. The result is that Jesus does not merely heal a dying man but publicly restores to life a man who has been buried for several days.

As in several of John's earlier miracles, the event serves primarily as the introduction to a lengthy theological narrative. Before raising Lazarus, Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection and the life," and immediately before commanding Lazarus to come forth he prays aloud, explaining that he is doing so "for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." The miracle is therefore presented not merely as an act of compassion but as a public sign intended to demonstrate Jesus's relationship with the Father.

The account also stands in marked contrast to the synoptic gospels. Mark, Matthew, and Luke each record at least one resurrection performed by Jesus, yet none mentions Lazarus, despite John's presentation of the event as one of Jesus's most public and consequential miracles. Indeed, John immediately connects the miracle with the decision of the chief priests and Pharisees to seek Jesus's death, making it the decisive turning point leading to the Passion. Given the prominence that John assigns to the episode, its complete absence from the synoptic gospels is one of the most striking differences among the gospel narratives.

Finally, the miracle concerns two women who are otherwise well known in the gospel tradition. Martha and Mary also appear in Luke, where Jesus visits their home and commends Mary's choice to listen to his teaching. Yet Luke says nothing about their brother Lazarus or about this extraordinary event. The only other Lazarus mentioned in the New Testament is the poor man in Luke's parable of the rich man and Lazarus, who is an entirely different figure.

5 Public miracles and the problem of secrecy

One of the recurring themes in the Gospel of Mark is Jesus's repeated attempts to prevent news of his miracles from spreading. Those whom he heals are frequently instructed to tell no one, while demons are silenced whenever they publicly identify him. Modern scholarship commonly refers to this motif as the "Messianic Secret". Within the narrative itself, however, this secrecy is difficult to reconcile with the increasingly public nature of Jesus's ministry.

The first miracle in Mark already illustrates the problem. In the synagogue at Capernaum, the unclean spirit publicly proclaims Jesus to be "the Holy One of God" before the assembled congregation. Immediately afterwards Jesus expels the demon in full view of those present. The miracle is therefore neither private nor hidden: both the proclamation and the exorcism are witnessed by the congregation. From the very beginning of the narrative, Jesus's identity and miraculous powers are revealed publicly.

The same day, according to Mark, the entire city gathers at the house where Jesus is staying, bringing their sick and those possessed by demons. Jesus heals many and casts out many demons. These miracles are likewise public events. The narrative itself presents them as the beginning of Jesus's widespread reputation.

Subsequent miracles continue the same pattern. The cleansing of the leper is accompanied by a command to tell no one, yet the next verses immediately report that the man spread the news so widely that Jesus could no longer openly enter towns. The healing of the paralytic takes place in a house so crowded that the man must be lowered through the roof before a large audience. The restoration of the withered hand occurs in a synagogue during the Sabbath service before all who were present. In each case, the miracle itself is witnessed publicly, making the command to silence increasingly difficult to understand.

By the third chapter, Mark describes crowds arriving not merely from Galilee but from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, the Decapolis, Tyre, and Sidon. The geographical range is remarkable. Jesus is no longer portrayed as a local wonder-worker but as someone whose reputation has spread throughout much of the southern Levant. At this point the repeated injunctions to secrecy have largely ceased to have any practical effect. According to the narrative itself, thousands already know of his miracles.

This widespread fame creates a second difficulty. Once Jesus has become the focus of enormous crowds, the narrative frequently behaves as though those crowds no longer exist. At one moment people are pressing so closely around him that there is scarcely room to stand, while in the next episode Jesus appears to be travelling only with his disciples. No explanation is given for the disappearance of the crowds, nor for why they do not simply continue following him from one location to the next.

An example occurs during the parable of the sower. Mark introduces the episode by describing "a very large crowd" gathered beside the sea, so large that Jesus teaches from a boat while the multitude remains on the shore. Immediately afterwards, however, Jesus is suddenly alone with the disciples, who ask him privately about the meaning of the parable. The transition is presented without any indication that the crowd dispersed or that Jesus withdrew from them. Luke reproduces essentially the same sequence. The crowds simply vanish when the private explanation is required.

The same phenomenon occurs elsewhere. After Mark has described Jesus's fame spreading throughout Galilee and neighbouring regions, Jesus returns to Nazareth accompanied only by his disciples. Likewise, when he travels to Tyre, he enters a house "and did not want anyone to know he was there." Yet the narrative simultaneously maintains that people from Tyre and Sidon had previously travelled to Galilee to hear him and receive healing. How the woman in Tyre immediately recognizes Jesus is left unexplained, especially in an age without photography or portraits. More importantly, the expected crowds never materialize despite the prominence previously attributed to Jesus throughout the region.

The commissioning of the Twelve intensifies the problem still further. Jesus now authorizes six pairs of disciples to preach, cast out demons, and heal the sick. If Jesus's own ministry had already attracted enormous crowds, the parallel ministry of the Twelve would reasonably be expected to amplify his reputation

even further. Instead, the narrative continues to alternate between scenes in which Jesus is surrounded by multitudes and scenes in which he moves about almost unnoticed.

The miracle narratives themselves display a similar inconsistency. At several points people are healed merely by touching Jesus's cloak, suggesting that physical contact alone is sufficient. Elsewhere, however, Jesus employs elaborate actions such as laying on hands, placing fingers in ears, touching tongues, or applying saliva. The narrative offers no indication why such rituals are necessary when simple contact has already been shown to suffice.

Taken individually, each of these episodes can be explained in various ways. Collectively, however, they reveal a recurring literary pattern. Crowds appear whenever the narrative requires witnesses to Jesus's miracles or teaching. They disappear when the narrative requires private conversations with the disciples or unobstructed travel. Likewise, secrecy is emphasized when the author wishes to portray Jesus as concealing his identity, even after the story itself has repeatedly established that his miracles have become matters of widespread public knowledge. Rather than presenting a consistent historical chronology, the narrative appears to subordinate continuity to the immediate needs of each individual episode.

The tension between Jesus's enormous public reputation and his repeated ability to move about unnoticed reaches its greatest extent during the final journey to Jerusalem. As Jesus leaves Jericho, Mark describes "a large crowd" accompanying him. The healing of Bartimaeus takes place before this multitude, and the miracle itself would only have increased the excitement surrounding Jesus as he approached the city. The subsequent triumphal entry depicts still larger crowds spreading cloaks and branches on the road while proclaiming him the coming king. Jerusalem is therefore introduced as a city fully aware of Jesus's arrival.

Yet immediately afterwards the crowds largely disappear from the narrative. At the close of the triumphal entry, Jesus simply enters the Temple, looks around, and then departs with the Twelve to Bethany because it is late in the day. The following chapters repeatedly describe Jesus and the disciples travelling between Bethany and Jerusalem with no indication that the crowds accompany them. The same Jesus who previously could scarcely enter a town because of the crowds, and who required a boat to avoid being crushed by people seeking healing, now appears able to leave the city each evening, spend the night in Bethany, and return the following morning without attracting the multitudes that the narrative had spent the previous ten chapters describing.

This change is especially striking in light of Mark's earlier statements concerning Jesus's reputation. Earlier in the gospel, people were said to travel from Jerusalem itself to Galilee to hear Jesus and to seek healing. Crowds likewise came from Idumea, the Decapolis, Tyre, and Sidon. If inhabitants of Jerusalem were prepared to undertake journeys of many days in order to see Jesus in Galilee, one might reasonably expect that, once Jesus himself arrived in Jerusalem, those same crowds would gather around him in even greater numbers. Yet the narrative records no comparable influx of the sick, the blind, the lame, or those possessed by demons seeking healing. This absence is not explained by Jesus refusing to receive them or declining to perform miracles. Rather, the narrative simply ceases to portray the crowds behaving in the manner that it had previously emphasized. The vast numbers who had once pressed upon Jesus, filled houses beyond capacity, and travelled great distances in search of healing largely recede from the story without explanation, while the focus shifts almost entirely to Jesus's disputes with the religious authorities and the events leading to his arrest.

The contrast is even more pronounced because the gospel has repeatedly emphasized that miraculous healing required remarkably little effort. Earlier, Mark states that those who merely touched Jesus's cloak were healed. Such reports would naturally be expected to produce overwhelming crowds wherever Jesus appeared, particularly in the largest city that he visited. Instead, Jerusalem becomes primarily the setting for theological disputes with priests, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. The crowds remain present when they serve a narrative purpose, applauding Jesus's entry or listening to his teaching in the Temple, but they no longer behave as the desperate multitudes seeking healing that had characterized the Galilean ministry.

Taken together, these episodes suggest that the crowds function less as a continuously present feature of the narrative than as a literary device. They appear when witnesses are required for miracles, when Jesus's

popularity needs to be emphasized, or when public teaching is to be delivered. They disappear when the narrative requires Jesus to travel privately, converse only with the disciples, or prepare for the events of the Passion. The continuity expected of a historical narrative is repeatedly subordinated to the immediate requirements of each episode.