

Matthew's Use of Mark

Matthew preserves about 90 percent of the stories and passages that are found in Mark's Gospel, but he edits this material in accord with certain principles.

Organization

Some Markan material is moved about.

Examples:

- Five miracle stories moved to Matthew 8–9, where other miracle stories occur.
- The mission charge to the disciples is related immediately after they are selected (Matt. 10:1–42; cf. Mark 3:14–19; 6:7–13).

Abbreviation

Details or characters that are not immediately relevant are pruned away.

Examples:

- the demoniac's chains and behavior (Matt. 8:28; cf. Mark 5:2–5)
- unroofing the tiles for the paralytic (Matt. 9:2; cf. Mark 2:2–5)
- the crowd and the disciples in story of woman's healing (Matt. 9:20–22; Mark 5:24b–34)

Sophistication

Casual or colloquial expressions are rewritten in the more polished Greek of the educated class.

Examples:

- Many instances of "historical present" tense are changed (130 out of 151).
- Mark's repetitious use of words such as *and* and *immediately* is reduced.
- Clear antecedents are provided to pronouns that lack them.

Accuracy

Instances of questionable accuracy are corrected.

Examples:

- "King Herod" (Mark 6:14) becomes "Herod the tetrarch" (Matt. 14:1).

- Reference to Abiathar as high priest in Mark 2:26 is omitted (Matt. 12:4 [cf. 1 Sam. 21:1–6]).

Contextual Relevance

Some changes make things more relevant to Matthew's community.

Examples:

- Matthew omits Mark's explanation of Jewish customs (Matt. 15:1–2; cf. Mark 7:3–4) because he is writing for Christians who are either ethnically Jewish or well-acquainted with matters of Jewish tradition.
- Matthew often replaces the phrase "kingdom of God" with "kingdom of heaven" (e.g., Matt. 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15) because some Jews tried to avoid saying "God" out of respect for the sanctity of God's name.
- Where Mark uses the word village (*kōmē*), Matthew frequently uses the word city (*polis*) because he is writing for an urban community removed from rural settings.
- Matthew adds "silver" and "gold" to Jesus' injunction for the disciples to take no "copper" with them on their travels (Matt. 10:9; cf. Mark 6:8) because he is writing for a more prosperous community for which renunciation of "copper" might seem insignificant.

Character Portrayal

Matthew changes the way major characters are portrayed in the Gospel story, including Jesus, his disciples, and the religious leaders of Israel.

Jesus

- Questions that might imply a lack of knowledge on Jesus' part are omitted (Mark 5:9, 30; 6:38; 8:23; 9:12, 16, 21, 33; 10:3; 14:14).
- Statements that might imply a lack of ability or authority on Jesus' part are modified (cf. Matt. 13:58 with Mark 6:5).

- References to Jesus exhibiting human emotions are dropped: “pity” (Mark 1:41), “anger” (Mark 3:5), “sadness” (Mark 3:5), “wonder” (Mark 6:6), “indignation” (Mark 10:14), “love” (Mark 10:21).
- Stories that might seem to portray Jesus as a magician are omitted (Mark 7:31–37; 8:22–26).

The Disciples of Jesus

- “No faith” is changed to “little faith” (cf. Matt. 8:26 with Mark 4:40).
- The theme of not understanding Jesus is adjusted so that the disciples are merely slow to understand (cf. Matt 16:12 with Mark 8:21; Matt 17:9–13 with Mark 9:9–13).
- Unseemly ambition is ascribed to the mother of James and John rather than to the disciples themselves (cf. Matt. 20:20 with Mark 10:35).

- References to the disciples worshipping Jesus and calling him “Lord” or “Son of God” are added to stories taken from Mark (cf. Matt. 14:32–33 with Mark 6:51–52).

The Religious Leaders of Israel

- A scribe whom Jesus praises in Mark (12:28–34) is depicted as an opponent who puts Jesus to the test in Matthew (22:34–40).
- Friendly religious leaders such as Jairus and Joseph of Arimathea are no longer identified as religious leaders in Matthew (cf. Matt. 9:18 with Mark 5:22; Matt. 27:57 with Mark 15:43).