

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Craig A. Evans
Editor

platform for the Torah reader. Both platforms were built into niches along the southern wall on either side of the entrance to the synagogue. In the course of excavating the floor of the synagogue, a deposit of 2,000 coins was found in the earth floor that had replaced an earlier plaster floor. The coins ranged in date from the late fourth century to the early seventh century. Given the tremendous range of dates for the coins, the excavators concluded it could not have been a horde hidden at one point in the history of the community. They suggest that coins were tossed onto the synagogue floor by pilgrims, and especially Christian pilgrims, who had come to view the fulfillment of Jesus's prediction of woe.

One other particularly interesting find from the synagogue was a basalt chair that was recovered in 1927 by Ory in the rubble inside the synagogue. On the lower front panel of the chair a four-line dedicatory Aramaic inscription had been incised referring to a Yodan ben Yishma'el who had made (or donated) the chair and the steps leading to it. The chair was found close to the area of the synagogue later identified as the reader's platform. Given its location and similarity of design to chairs found at the synagogues of Hammat Tiberius and 'Ein Gedi, the chair is presumed to be an example of the "Seat of Moses." Jesus refers to "Moses' seat" in Matt 23:2-3 and to a seat of honor in Luke 14:7-11. No "seat of Moses" has been recovered in a first-century context (possibly because they were made from wood) but the recovery of the Chorazin chair (in conjunction with the finds at H. Tiberius and 'Ein Gedi) may shed some light on Jesus's references to this piece of synagogue and banquet furniture. In some cases the "Seat of Moses" may have been an actual seat for a synagogue dignitary (e.g. *archisynagoge*) or the one being honored at a banquet. The text in Luke would imply such as it makes a case for the value of humility. In other cases, as in the case of the seat found at Chorazin, the seat may have been occupied by the reader or the interpreter of the Torah or the prophets (*haftorah*). This sense of the seat of Moses would appear to underlie the reference in Matthew as the text refers to someone sitting and teaching from the seat.

C. THOMAS MCCOLLOUGH

Further reading

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CHREIA, APOPHTHEGM

Terminological and methodological considerations

Chreia, also spelt as *chria*, is a Greek term meaning "usage;" it is related to the Greek term *chreiodes*, meaning "useful." *Chreia* was a rhetorical device in ancient literature, employing a saying, aphorism, or even a deed of a well-known, authoritative figure to amplify one's own statement (see Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9:4). Some New Testament scholars apply this term of ancient rhetoric to certain sayings of Jesus, while others prefer different terms: for example, paradigm (suggested by Dibelius), pronouncement story (a term preferred by Vincent Taylor), or apophthegm (used by Bultmann and many others). The latter Greek term means "statement," or "utterance," and it has the advantage that it is always attributed to one particular person; thus, in the case of the New Testament, the connection of the saying to Jesus is emphasized (see Theissen and Merz: 191).

Form criticism, as an approach in Historical Jesus research, focuses its study especially on the various forms in which the sayings of Jesus have been transmitted. The early phase of form criticism in the New Testament can be connected to three German works, two of which have been later translated into English as well, and have become influential in world-wide scholarship. A work of Karl Ludwig Schmidt, published in 1919, initiated in Jesus research the focusing on the first stage of the transmission of the Gospel material, i.e. the stage of oral transmission: *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* (the title of this German work means, "The Framework of the Story of Jesus"). Schmidt argued that individual units can be distinguished from the Markan framework within the Gospel, and thus prepared the way for others to study these units in more detail.

In the same year, Martin Dibelius published a work in which he proposed various categories to distinguish among the sayings of Jesus on the basis of the form of the saying and of the role it played

in the life of the early church. From the German title of his book, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, the term *Formgeschichte* (“form history”) has become the name of the approach in biblical scholarship in German-speaking countries, while “form criticism” is used for it in English. Dibelius gave the following names to the classified sayings of Jesus: paradigm, tales, legends, myth, sayings. In this classification, the term “paradigm” is used for what others refer to as *chreia* and apophthegm.

In 1921 Rudolf Bultmann published his analysis of the forms in the Synoptic Gospels, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (English Translation: *History of the Synoptic Tradition*). While Dibelius focused on the role of the sayings in the life-setting (sometimes referred to as the “life-situation”) of the early church (in German: *Sitz im Leben*), Bultmann’s analysis was based on the identification of the individual units on the basis of their forms. He divided the discourses of Jesus into two main groups: apophthegms and dominical sayings, but he differentiated further sub-categories under these two main headings. Under apophthegm, he classified three sub-categories on the basis of the different settings or causes for the sayings: controversy dialogue, scholastic dialogue, and biographical apophthegm. Under dominical sayings, he categorized proverbs, prophetic and apocalyptic sayings, laws (of Jewish piety) and regulations (of the early Christian community). Bultmann offered a special treatment of two further types of the dominical sayings: the “I sayings” and the parables as well. Bultmann’s apophthegm category is basically the same as the paradigms in Dibelius’s classification. In what follows, we use apophthegm to refer to certain sayings of Jesus. We note that this term was already used by J. G. Herder in 1797, who argued that apophthegms were easier to be remembered by the apostles than composite speeches (see in Berger 64; Berger uses *chreia* and apophthegm as equivalents, see e.g. his usage “Chrie/Apophthegma” in his German textbook on form criticism: 77, 219).

Before mentioning examples of apophthegms, certain presuppositions and axioms of form criticism have to be summarized, because the use of this approach has an impact on the Historical Jesus research inasmuch as scholars differ in their views on the authenticity (historicity) of certain sayings of Jesus that are classified as apophthegms. It is interesting to observe that these presuppositions are not discussed at length by Dibelius and Bultmann; rather, they can be found only in some preliminary sentences of their works (cf. also Bock 2001: 124, n. 6; the following listing of the basic

axioms of form criticism is based on Bock 2001: 108–10; see also McKnight 17–20 and Travis 153–55).

- 1 The gospels are not primarily the work of one person, but they are “popular” literature; they belong to communities. The needs of the community shaped the form of the sayings.
- 2 The material circulated in oral form for at least two decades. The sayings material was transmitted at this oral stage as individual units. The only exception is the Passion Narrative, which was a continuous tradition from very early on. It is worth noting that Schmidt, Dibelius, and Bultmann also acknowledged that some pericopae (individual units of tradition) were grouped together already at the oral stage even outside the Passion material (see e.g. the interweaving of the story of Jairus with the story of the woman with the hemorrhage, Mark 5:21–43 par. Matt 9:18–26 and Luke 8:40–56).
- 3 The short individual units were used as the need in the congregation required; it was their usefulness that caused them to be transmitted.
- 4 The various forms of the material corresponded to the setting in which they were used. From the form one can conclude as regards the function of the material unit in the life of the congregation.
- 5 The approach of form criticism is usually combined with the appropriation of the Two Document Hypothesis; i.e. Markan priority is presupposed.
- 6 Form critics tended to assume that the shorter, simpler forms are older, and that during the course of transmission the accounts expanded, and more complex forms were created.

These axioms of form criticism are not without problems. Already during the first stage of the application of the approach, reservations were expressed, for example, by Vincent Taylor, who was the first in Britain to write an extensive work on the method, entitled, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (1933). Detailed criticisms are presented, for example, by Ladd, Travis, Muddiman, and Bock. The latter emphasizes that the study of form remains helpful and even necessary even if one does not subscribe to the Two Document Hypothesis, or does not see the congregation as active in transforming and even creating sayings and placing them into the mouth of Jesus, as many of the early and even present-day form critics

would suggest (see e.g. Bock 2001: 111). Theissen and Merz argue against the unjustified, over-critical skepticism in some historical Jesus scholarship (see Ch. 4 of their book, pp. 90–124), and they emphasize that especially with regard to the apophthegms, one can hold that they “contain something of Jesus’ character” (p. 192). They affirm that “The content of many apophthegms also suggests a historical background” (ibid.). Students of the gospels will meet different views as regards the historicity of certain apophthegms; they should always reflect on the axioms and hypotheses involved in reaching those conclusions.

Examples

It is not always self-evident, which units of the gospel tradition should be classified as apophthegms. On occasion, there are pericopae in which more than one form appears, and scholars even speak of mixed forms (see e.g. Travis 159, who warns against the self-confidence in proposing “pure forms”). However, in general an apophthegm is a saying of Jesus set in a brief context. Jesus usually responds with a saying at the end of the unit. The saying can be one sentence or a combination of ideas, but the point of the account is Jesus’ response. In the Gospel of Mark, there are three large blocks of apophthegms: Mark 2:1–3:5 (in Galilee); 10:1–45 (on a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem); 12:13–44 (in Jerusalem). In the following, we consider some examples of apophthegms, following the threefold subdivision proposed by Bultmann.

The first category is that of the controversy dialogues; these are usually occasioned by conflict over Jesus’ healings or the conduct of Jesus and his disciples. For Bultmann, the *Sitz im Leben* of these apophthegms is the polemic atmosphere of the early church. The pericope on the disciples plucking corn on the Sabbath is an example of it. We quote the apophthegm from Mark 2:23–28, and we observe how Jesus’ saying concludes the account as its didactic key point – in this case the saying contains more than one idea (RSV):

One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?” ²⁵ And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were

with him?” ²⁷ And he said to them, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; ²⁸ so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath.”

It is worth noting that the parallel versions (Luke 6:5 and Matt 12:8) have only one of the two ideas of Jesus at end of the pericope: “The Son of man is lord of the sabbath.”

The healing of the man with the withered hand on a Sabbath is another example of a controversy dialogue: Mark 3:1–6 contains both a short scene and the saying of Jesus. In this case, the saying is not the last sentence of the unit. To quote it in full (RSV):

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come here.” ⁴ And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. ⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

In Bultmann’s classification, the second subgroup among apophthegms is that of the scholastic dialogue. This kind of apophthegm has a certain similarity to the controversy dialogue; the main difference is that here the scene does not concern the opponents of Jesus, but Jesus is usually asked by his disciples or by someone seeking knowledge. The question concerning the chief commandment is an example of the category of the scholastic dialogue. In Mark 12:28–34 we read (RSV):

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one;’ ³⁰ and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³² And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; ³³ and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any question.

Another example of the scholastic dialogue is the well-known pericope about the rich young man (Mark 10:17–27 par. Matt 19:16–26 and Luke 18:18–27). May it suffice here to quote its concluding saying (Mark 10:27): “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.” We note that some scholars regard the following pericope (concerning the disciples leaving everything for Jesus, Mark 10:28–31 par.) as belonging to this apophthegm (so e.g. Bock 2001: 112). Most form critics agree in general that the forms developed during the course of the transmission, and this applies to the apophthegms as well (see e.g. Berger 219–20). The development could include more precision as regards the questioners in the apophthegm, or even in the formulation of the statement (see e.g. McKnight 27).

The last category in Bultmann’s terminology is that of the biographical apophthegm. These apophthegms contain some information about Jesus; they are little scenes from his life. One example may be Luke 9:57–62, where we read about Jesus’ encounter with three would-be disciples (RSV):

As they were going along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.”⁵⁹ To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”⁶⁰ But he said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”⁶¹ Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Another example of the biographical apophthegm is Jesus’ discourse with the two sisters, Mary and Martha, in their home, as narrated in Luke 10:38–42 (RSV):

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house.³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.”⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things;⁴² one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.”

To sum up, a *chreia* or an apophthegm tells us “something about the historical Jesus – and about Jesus in his relationships” (Theissen and Merz 193). Although the question of authenticity is discussed

by scholars in the case of certain apophthegms, and the possibility of a creative role of the first Christian congregations is raised by form critics, in general the apophthegms may be seen as – at least in their core – reliable memories of the historical Jesus treasured and transmitted by the early church.

PETER BALLA

Further reading

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- For *chreia* in the rhetoric of the classical literature, with examples, see the website “Silva Rhetoricae” at <http://rhetoric.byu.edu>

CHRIST, MESSIAH

“Christ” is among the most familiar designations of Jesus in the NT and in subsequent Christian