

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 15, Redaction Criticism Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 15, Redaction Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

The text introduces redaction criticism, a method of studying the Gospels by focusing on the theological motivations of the Gospel writers as editors. It traces the historical development of this critical approach, contrasting it with source and form criticism while noting its roots in the work of scholars like Wrede and Bultmann. **The document outlines the methodology of redaction criticism, emphasizing the comparison of Gospel accounts to identify and interpret editorial changes.** It also raises concerns about the method's potential to generate skepticism regarding the historical reliability of the Gospels. **The author identifies fallacies within redaction criticism such as relying on questionable assumptions and prioritizing complex explanations over simpler ones.** Ultimately, it advocates for a balanced approach to Gospel study.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 15 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → Synoptic Gospels).



**Newman_Synoptics
_Session15.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 15, Redaction Criticism

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpt from Dr. Robert C. Newman's lecture on Redaction Criticism:

Briefing Document: Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels

Main Theme: This lecture introduces and critiques Redaction Criticism as a method of biblical study, particularly as it applies to the Synoptic Gospels. It covers its historical development, methodology, results, and potential pitfalls, ultimately advocating for a balanced and critical approach to its application.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Definition of Redaction Criticism:** Redaction criticism is the study of the theological motivations of Gospel authors (redactors/editors) as revealed in their collection, arrangement, editing, and modification of traditional material, as well as in the composition of new material. As Norman Perrin defines it, it's concerned with *"studying the theological motivation of an author as this is revealed in the collection, arrangement, editing, and modification of traditional material and in the composition of new material or the creation of new forms within the traditions of early Christianity."*
 - **Historical Context:** Emerged in post-World War II Germany (following Form Criticism, which emerged post-WWI).
 - Built upon earlier work on the Synoptic Problem and Source Criticism (Two-Document Hypothesis: Mark and Q as sources for Matthew and Luke).
 - Influenced by Wilhelm Wrede's argument that Mark was theologically motivated rather than strictly historical.
 - Pioneered by figures like Gunther Bornkamm (Matthew), Hans Conzelmann (Luke), and Willi Marxsen (Mark).
 - Has spread to the study of Q and John.
1. **Methodology:** Careful comparison of differences between a given Gospel and its parallels (e.g., comparing Matthew to Mark and Luke).
 2. Attempting to identify differences resulting from the writer's editorial activity. This often assumes the Two-Document Hypothesis.

3. Studying these differences to determine the author's theological motivation.
 4. Reconstructing the author's outlook, circumstances, group, and audience (Sitz im Leben – "life situation"). Marxsen identifies three Sitz im Leben: the ministry of Jesus, the background of the sources (Mark and Q), and the background of the Gospel writer.
- **Results (in Liberal vs. Conservative Circles):**
 - Liberal:** Redaction criticism has led to a skepticism about the historical reliability of the Gospels, with scholars claiming that little can be known about the actual life of Jesus, but much about diverse theological groups.
 - Conservative:** Redaction criticism raises questions about the historicity of certain narratives. Robert Gundry, for example, suggests Matthew invented incidents like the visit of the Magi and the killing of the babies to make theological points, acting as a *"kind of midrash, a term borne from rabbinic literature, an imaginative retelling or invention of events to make various theological points."*
 - **Evaluation (Newman's Critique):** Newman offers favorable comments like:
 - Gospel writers selected and condensed material.
 - Detailed study of the Gospels yields valuable insights.
 - Gospel writers emphasized different features of Jesus' ministry.
 - However, he raises serious problems/fallacies:
 - **Rejection of Recorded Historical Details:** Redaction criticism is used to reject historical details in the Bible. Perrin claims, *"The Gospels do indeed yield us only a whisper of Jesus' voice."* and advocates for studying the Gospels for information about the theology of the early church and not the teaching of the historical Jesus.
 - **Generation of Hypothetical Historical Details:** Gundry infers the situation and purposes for writing Matthew from the gospel's emphases, inferring, *"Matthew shows great concern over the problem of a mixed church...The church has grown large through the influx of converts from all nations...but these converts include false as well as true disciples..."*
 - **Addition of Historical Fiction:** The mixing of historical accounts and theological embellishments. Perrin states, *"the gospel mark is the prototype that others follow and is a mixture of historical reminiscence, interpreted tradition, and the*

free creativity of prophets and the evangelist. It is, in other words, a strange mixture of history, legend, and myth. It is this fact that redaction criticism makes unmistakably clear."

- **The Sand Foundation Fallacy:** Building on questionable assumptions (e.g., Two-Document Theory, Matthew's total dependence on Mark and Q).
- **The Explanation Fallacy:** Favoring any explanation over ignorance, even if that explanation is likely wrong. *"Nearly all critics...are prone to imagine that they know a great many facets of many facts relevant to a book which, in reality, they don't know."*
- **The Dissertation Fallacy:** Driven by the PhD industry, rejecting straightforward explanations for more involved ones.
- **Argument from Silence Fallacy:** Assuming a writer invented something simply because it only appears in one Gospel. *"The fact that a given gospel writer does not mention some detail, is no guarantee that he does not know it."*
- **Psychoanalytic Fallacy:** Inferring an author's motivation from their writing, assuming differences are tendentious rather than accidental.
- **Intellectual Snobbery Fallacy:** Favoring the views of those with more academic prestige.
- **Conclusion:** Newman advocates for a sober assessment of our abilities and a "fear of God" when interpreting the Gospels.
- **Historical Accuracy of the Gospels:** Early pagan sources provide little information about Jesus but admit historical aspects that liberals deny.
- Jewish materials reflect negative reactions to Jesus as the New Testament states.
- The Gospels are principal sources on Jesus because of size, age, and provenance.
- External evidence is firm on the Gospels' authors, but must be discarded by liberals to maintain the Two-Document Theory.

Implications: Redaction criticism, while offering valuable insights into the theological perspectives of the Gospel writers, can lead to skepticism about the historical reliability of the Gospels if not applied cautiously. Its impact extends beyond academic circles, influencing pastors, denominations, the media, and individuals' faith.

4. Study Guide: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 15, Redaction Criticism

Redaction Criticism: A Study Guide

Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. What is redaction criticism, and what is its primary focus?
2. Briefly describe the historical context in which redaction criticism emerged.
3. What is the two-document theory, and why is it important to redaction criticism?
4. Outline the typical steps involved in practicing redaction criticism.
5. According to Markson, what are the three *Sitz im Leben* that need to be considered when studying a Gospel passage?
6. How does redaction criticism differ in its application between liberal and conservative circles?
7. Give an example of how Robert Gundry's use of redaction criticism led to controversy.
8. According to the source material, what are some potential problems or "fallacies" in the methodology of redaction criticism?
9. How does redaction criticism affect the study of the historical Jesus and the reliability of the Gospels, according to Perrin?
10. Explain how redaction criticism has influenced modern views of the Gospels and Christianity, particularly among educated individuals.

Quiz: Answer Key

1. Redaction criticism is a method of biblical study that focuses on the theological motivation of Gospel writers (redactors or editors) as revealed in their collection, arrangement, editing, and modification of traditional material, as well as in the composition of new material. It seeks to understand the writer's theological perspective and how it shapes the Gospel narrative.
2. Redaction criticism emerged in Germany after World War II, following earlier developments in source and form criticism. It arose from a desire to understand the theological contributions of the Gospel writers beyond simply identifying their sources.

3. The two-document theory posits that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke drew upon two main sources: the Gospel of Mark and a hypothetical collection of sayings of Jesus called "Q." This theory is important to redaction criticism because it helps analysts isolate the unique contributions of Matthew and Luke by comparing their Gospels to Mark and Q, allowing them to discern their individual theological agendas.
4. The typical steps include: (1) carefully comparing a given Gospel with its parallels, (2) attempting to discover differences that are the result of the writer's editorial activity, (3) studying these differences to determine the author's theological motivation for introducing them, (4) reconstructing the author's outlook, circumstances, group, and audience (*Sitz im Leben*).
5. Markson identified three *Sitz im Leben*: (1) the ministry of Jesus, (2) the background of the sources used by the Gospel writer (e.g., Mark and Q), and (3) the background of the Gospel writer (redactor) themselves, including their context and community.
6. In liberal circles, redaction criticism often leads to skepticism about the historical reliability of the Gospels and an emphasis on the theological perspectives of the early church. In conservative circles, it is generally more restrained but can still raise questions about the historicity of certain narratives.
7. Gundry's redaction criticism suggested that Matthew invented certain incidents, such as the visit of the Magi and the killing of the babies, to make theological points. This led to controversy and his eventual removal from the Evangelical Theological Society.
8. Potential problems include: the "sand foundation fallacy" (building on questionable assumptions like the two-document theory), the "explanation fallacy" (favoring any explanation over ignorance), the "dissertation fallacy" (rejecting straightforward explanations for complex ones), the "argument from silence fallacy" (assuming invented details if only in one gospel), the "psychoanalytic fallacy" (inferring motivation from writing), and the "intellectual snobbery fallacy" (valuing liberal views over conservative views).
9. According to Perrin, redaction criticism makes life-of-Jesus research difficult by suggesting that much of the material in the Gospels reflects the theological motivations of the evangelists or editors rather than direct information about the historical Jesus, thus emphasizing the theology of the early church over the historical Jesus.

10. Redaction criticism has influenced modern views by raising serious questions about the historical reliability of the Gospels, leading some to doubt the gospel data about Jesus and others to reject Christianity altogether. It has also provided insights into the theological concerns of the Gospel writers, allowing for a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives within early Christianity.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using redaction criticism as a method for studying the Gospels. How can these disadvantages be mitigated?
2. Explain how redaction criticism has contributed to our understanding of the theological perspectives of the individual Gospel writers. Provide specific examples from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
3. Critically evaluate the claim that redaction criticism undermines the historical reliability of the Gospels. Is it possible to reconcile redaction criticism with a belief in the Gospels as historically accurate accounts?
4. Analyze the "fallacies" of redaction criticism presented in the source material. To what extent do these criticisms weaken the validity of redaction criticism as a method of biblical study?
5. Compare and contrast the application of redaction criticism in liberal and conservative theological contexts. What are the key differences in their assumptions, methodologies, and conclusions?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Redaction Criticism:** A method of biblical study that focuses on the theological motivation of Gospel writers (redactors or editors) as revealed in their collection, arrangement, editing, and modification of traditional material, as well as in the composition of new material.
- **Redactor:** An editor; in the context of biblical studies, a redactor is a person who compiles, arranges, and edits existing material, often with a specific theological purpose.
- **Source Criticism:** A method of biblical study that attempts to identify the sources used by the authors of the biblical texts.

- **Form Criticism:** A method of biblical study that analyzes the oral traditions behind the written Gospels, focusing on the different forms (e.g., parables, miracle stories) and their function in the early Christian community.
- **Two-Document Theory:** The hypothesis that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke drew upon two main sources: the Gospel of Mark and a hypothetical collection of sayings of Jesus called "Q."
- **Q:** A hypothetical collection of sayings of Jesus believed by many scholars to have been used by Matthew and Luke.
- ***Sitz im Leben*:** A German term meaning "setting in life" or "life situation." In biblical studies, it refers to the social, historical, and cultural context in which a particular text or tradition originated.
- **Midrash:** A term from rabbinic literature referring to an imaginative retelling or interpretation of biblical events to make theological points.
- **Haggadah:** Jewish texts dealing with non-legal matters such as folklore, history, theology, and stories.
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share a similar structure and content and can be "seen together" (syn-optic).
- **Messianic Secret:** A motif in the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus attempts to conceal his identity as the Messiah.
- **Parousia:** The Second Coming of Christ.
- **Gospels:** The first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), which recount the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

5. FAQs on Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 15, Redaction Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About Redaction Criticism

- **What is redaction criticism and what does it aim to study?**
- Redaction criticism is a method of biblical study that focuses on the role of the redactors, or editors, of the Gospels. It seeks to understand the theological motivations of these editors as they collected, arranged, edited, and modified traditional material, composed new material, or created new forms within the early Christian traditions. It essentially tries to understand why a gospel writer chose to include certain stories, modify existing ones, or arrange them in a particular way.
- **How does redaction criticism differ from source criticism and form criticism?**
- Source criticism focuses on identifying the written sources that the Gospel writers used (e.g., Mark and Q in the two-document hypothesis), while form criticism attempts to trace the history of Gospel material back to the oral tradition that preceded the written Gospels, often analyzing the forms (e.g., parables, miracle stories) in which these traditions were transmitted. Redaction criticism builds on these by studying how the Gospel writers used and changed these sources and forms to express their own theological perspectives and address the needs of their audiences.
- **What are the steps involved in applying redaction criticism to a Gospel?**
- The process involves several steps: (1) Carefully compare the differences between a given Gospel and its parallels in other Gospels. (2) Attempt to identify the differences that result from the writer's editorial activity. (3) Study these differences to determine the author's theological motivation for introducing them. (4) Locate texts that express these motivations and interpret the entire Gospel in light of these texts and motivations. (5) Reconstruct the author's outlook, circumstances, group, and audience (Sitz im Leben).

- **What are some potential problems or fallacies associated with redaction criticism?**
- Several potential fallacies have been identified, including: (1) The "sand foundation fallacy," which involves building on questionable assumptions like the two-document theory. (2) The "explanation fallacy," which assumes any explanation is better than acknowledging ignorance. (3) The "dissertation fallacy," where the need for novelty leads to overcomplicated explanations. (4) The "argument from silence fallacy," which assumes a writer invented a detail simply because it appears only in one Gospel. (5) The "psychoanalytic fallacy," which infers the author's motivation in writing from their own experiences. (6) Intellectual snobbery, or a bias against certain groups.
- **How have the findings of redaction criticism been used in both liberal and conservative theological circles?**
- In liberal circles, redaction criticism has often led to skepticism about the historical reliability of the Gospels, with some scholars arguing that they primarily reveal the theology of the early church rather than providing accurate accounts of Jesus' life and teachings. Some scholars even reject the historical nature of key stories, such as the visit of the Magi. In conservative circles, redaction criticism is often approached more cautiously, but it has still led to recognition that the Gospel writers selected, arranged, and adapted their material to emphasize particular theological themes.
- **What is *Sitz im Leben*, and why is it important in redaction criticism?**
- *Sitz im Leben* is a German phrase that translates to "setting in life." In redaction criticism, it refers to the social, historical, and cultural context in which a particular text or tradition originated and developed. Identifying the *Sitz im Leben* of the various stages of the Gospel tradition (e.g., the ministry of Jesus, the oral tradition, the Gospel writer's context) is crucial for understanding the motivations and purposes behind the editorial choices made by the Gospel writers.

- **What are some of the key theological emphases identified by redaction criticism in the individual Gospels?**
- According to redaction criticism, Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the King Messiah fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, Mark highlights Jesus' actions and identity as the Messiah and Son of God, Luke focuses on historicity, eyewitness testimony, and social relationships (especially with Gentiles, women, and the poor), and John emphasizes Jesus' divine significance and person.
- **How might redaction criticism influence one's understanding and approach to the Gospels?**
- Redaction criticism can enrich our understanding of the Gospels by highlighting the unique theological perspectives and purposes of each Gospel writer. However, it also raises important questions about the historical reliability of the Gospels and the extent to which they reflect the actual words and deeds of Jesus. Approaching the Gospels with an awareness of redaction criticism can lead to a more nuanced and critical reading, but it is important to be mindful of the potential fallacies and limitations of the method.