In response to a question about the Messianic Secret in Mark, I have now shown how scholars (most significantly William Wrede) came to realize that not even the Gospel of Mark was a straightforward historical account of what actually happened in the life of Jesus. Some five years ago on the blog I talked about what happened next, in the scholarship on the New Testament. It’s a crucial element of the history of biblical scholarship. Here is what I said.

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Once it came to be realized that Mark’s Gospel – the earliest of our surviving accounts of Jesus – was driven not purely by historical interests in order to record biographical information with historical accuracy, but was (like the other Gospels) written in order to convey theological ideas in literary guise, the movement to use Mark to write a “Life of Jesus” more or less collapsed on itself, for a time and among most New Testament scholars. What arose from the ashes of this “Quest of the Historical Jesus” could not have been foreseen by its devotees – as often happens in times of disciplinary progress and change.

The big breakthrough came with the work of Karl Ludwig Schmidt (whose most important book was never translated into English, to my knowledge). Schmidt realized that the theologically loaded parts of Mark’s Gospel were not found in the core stories found throughout its account, but in the “framework” for these stories, that is, in the narrative transitions that the author himself provided for moving from one story to the next. (That’s where the “messianic secret” identified by Wrede is found – not in the stories themselves but in the aftermath). This raised the possibility that the authors of the Gospels – who were known by this time not to have been the disciples of Jesus himself – were incorporating stories into their Gospels that they inherited, and that they themselves were merely providing the transitions from one story to the next and making the overall structure of the Gospels so that the stories would cohere into a unified whole.

And that in turn meant that the Gospel writers were not inventing the stories they wrote on the one hand, and were not simply writing history as it happened on the other. Instead, they were *inheriting* the stories. And where were the stories before they were written down? They were ...

To see what happens next in the unraveling the secrets of the Kingdom, you will need to be among the chosen few — the members of the blog! Joining is simple and cheap, and every penny you pay goes to charity. So join the elite crew of insiders. Become a member!!

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