Wed. Feb. 23

Reading:
Harris, pp. 306-314 (review – assigned second week), pp. 348-383
Bible, “Essays” section, back of book, pp. 514-525 ESSAYS (can be instead of Harris)
Bible: The Gospel of Mark (sixteen not very long chapters)

Read the Harris and/or Bible Essays section fast, not worrying about taking in all of the information there; I will let you know what I “want you to know.” Then read the Gospel of Mark – twice: once fast, all the way through, without stopping, and then a second time perhaps more deliberately.

Writing: Answer in writing any five questions on the gospel of Mark, below: typed, please.

Harris, pp. 306-314 (review – we read this in connection with Daniel, second week of class), and pp.348-383 (new); and/or Bible “Essays” section at back of book, pp. 514-525 ESSAYS./

1. You should (in the next two weeks) know the meaning or significance of the following (see Harris, Table 5.2, p. 207; Table 8.2, p. 313, Table 10.2, p.-. 392-393):

   • 605-562 BCE -- Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonian Empire (Harris, Table 5.2, p. 207)
   • 598-597 BCE -- First captivity of Jerusalem -- some Jewish leaders exiled; Ezekiel prophesies in Babylon
   • 587 BCE -- Second conquest and punishment of Judah by Nebuchadnezzzer; Jerusalem Temple destroyed, large numbers deported to Babylon – The Exile begins. Ezekiel prophesies some more.
   • 539 BCE – Cyrus of Persia captures Babylon. Second Isaiah preaches (Isaiah 40.1-55.13; but just Isaiah 40.1 to 45.25, plus 54.7 to 55.13 will give you a lot of the flavor of Second Isaiah’s incomparable poetry of hope and restoration)
   • 538 BCE – Jewish remnant returns to Judah
   • 515 BCE -- Jerusalem temple rebuilt – Second Temple period begins (will end in 70 CE, after Jesus, with destruction of the temple by the Romans)
   • 350 – Alexander the Great of Greece conquers Persia, Egypt, Syria – everything; beginning of Hellenistic Period.
   • 323 – Alexander dies. The Ptolemys get Egypt; the Seleucids get Syria and take over Judah – now not a country but a region, Judea (see map 11 back of Bible). Jews start suffering under a succession of Seleucid kings – Antiochus 1, 2, etc.
   • 175-163 – Judea under the cruel reign of the worst Seleucid – Antiochus IV. Persecution and martyrdom of those who don’t give up Jewish faith and practice.
Desecration of Jerusalem Temple (Antiochus puts pigs’ meat on altar!) The first Great Tribulation. The Book of Daniel!

• 160’s BCE – Jews also fight back with some success under Maccabees (1 Maccabees)
• 63 BCE – Romans invade Palestine
• 40-4 BCE – Herod rules as Roman-appointed (half-) Jewish king of Judea
• 6-4 BCE – Birth of Jesus
• 26-36 CE – Pontius Pilate serves as procurator (governor) of Judea
• 27-29 CE – ministry of John the Baptist
• 27-30 (or 29-33) CE – ministry of Jesus
• 30-33 CE – crucifixion of Jesus; a major article of Christian faith is that this was followed by Jesus’s resurrection
• 50 CE – Paul writes letters to churches – earliest New Testament writings
• 66-70 CE – Gospel of Mark is written
• 66-73 CE – Jewish revolt against Rom; destruction of Jerusalem and Temple.

The second Great Tribulation

2. Harris, pp. 355-368: A lot of excellent information here about the very important influence of Hellenistic thought, culture, and religion on Judaism and Christianity. Please extract some of the most interesting for yourself. Harris tells us about Socrates that he “regarded human life as an ongoing quest for truth, a pilgrimage toward the unseen world of spirit and eternal ideals, the ultimate goal of the human soul trapped in an earthly body” (pp. 355-356). This seems a familiar idea to us, but think about it: have we encountered it much before in our readings so far?

3. Harris, pp. 368-383. Same as above: A lot of excellent information on first century Judaisms (with an “s”!) – which includes, eventually, Christianity. Be sure to read about Messiah expectations.

4. The Gospel of Mark – As I say above, read Mark twice – first straight through (it’s a special experience) and then go back.

   a. Find places in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus is unrecognized.

   b. Find places in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus is misunderstood even by those closest to him.

   c. Find places in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus is shown trying to keep his identity secret.

   d. Find places in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus is shown as pained by his disciples’ failure to understand his mission and his preaching.

   e. One crucial moment is Peter’s inability to accept the idea of a rejected and defeated Messiah in Ch. 8. Why might a Jew like Peter have trouble with this
idea of a Messiah? What if Peter were acquainted with Isaiah 9.6-7, or Ezekiel 37.24?

f. Who in the Gospel of Mark does recognize Jesus for who he is? (There may be more than one.)

g. What in the Gospel of Mark points to the idea that, as Harris suggests, Jesus’s Passion – his final suffering and death – is, for Mark, the most important part of his story? What fraction of the gospel is devoted to it? Does Jesus himself seem to think it is the most important part?

h. Do you happen to recall any moments in the Hebrew Bible where God is shown to actively prevent people from understanding something? One such moment is directly referred to in Mark 4.12. Check it out.

i. Find at least one place in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus seems to use a parable to conceal rather than disclose his meaning – in other words, to prevent people from understanding his message?

j. Find places in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus indicates that a time of great apocalyptic convulsion is near. (Is it possible to read some of the passages as we read certain passages in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others – as referring to military and political events of his own time rather than to something cosmic? Could he have been reading the trends with Rome? How soon after his predictions, did Rome totally crush the Jewish people and destroy the Jerusalem Temple?)

k. Find places in Mark that assume that readers will be acquainted with parts of the Hebrew Bible.

For Friday, Feb. 25:

Re-read Mark plus: Matthew 5.1 to 7.29; 10.1-42; 13. 1-52; 18.1 to 19.2; 24.1 to 25.46. (New handout under construction!)