

Synoptic Problem

fifteen from Galilee and a similar number from the Golan Heights. The synagogues are of three architectural types: (1) Broad House, with the bema, or platform, on the southern long wall such as at Khirbet Shema; (2) the Basilica type, as at Capernaum and Chorazin; (3) the Basilica with an apse at Beth Alpha.

5. Interior.

These later synagogues were elaborately decorated with symbols such as the lampstand (*m'ôrâ*), palm frond and citron. They were provided with a bema, or platform, for the reading of the Scriptures, and a niche for the display of the ark or chest (*'rôn*) for the biblical scrolls. In 1980 E. and C. Meyers discovered the fragment of such an ark niche from Nabratein. This pediment is decorated with reliefs of rampant lions, and a scallop shell with a hole for the chain of a perpetual lamp.

Many of the Byzantine synagogues were lavishly decorated with mosaics, including four mosaics of the zodiac at Hammath Tiberias, Beth Alpha, Na'aran and Husifa. The mosaic at Hammath Tiberias has a central panel with *Helios* (sun) on his chariot and figures reflecting the four seasons at the corners.

We also have three examples of lists of the twenty-four priestly courses (*mismârôt*), which hung in synagogues. Most synagogue inscriptions are of donors. The third-century A.D. synagogue at Dura Europos on the Euphrates River even had paintings on its walls depicting biblical narratives.

Because of the scant remains of synagogues from first-century A.D. Palestine, some scholars have argued that Luke-Acts is anachronistic when it refers to synagogue buildings. But this is to underestimate the fragmentary nature of the archeological evidence and to disregard not only the testimony of the New Testament but also of Josephus (*Life* 277, 280), who speaks of a *proseuchê* which was a large building at Tiberia (cf. also *Jos. J.W.* 2.14.4 § 285; *Ant.* 14.10.23 § 258; 19.6.3 § 300). Philo's report of the anti-Semitic mob's attacks on *proseuchas* in Alexandria in A.D. 38 (*Leg. Gai.* 132) clearly refers to synagogue buildings.

See also JUDAISM; TEMPLE; WORSHIP.

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SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

In reading the four Gospels it is apparent that three of them resemble one another and one does not. A brief time spent in any synopsis of the Gospels will indicate that Matthew, Mark and Luke share a number of striking similarities. The "Synoptic Problem" is the name that has been given to the problem of why the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke look so much alike. Why are they so similar in content, in wording and in the order of events found within them?

1. The Similarity of the Synoptic Gospels
2. The Existence of a Literary Relationship
3. Various Literary Explanations
4. The Griesbach Hypothesis
5. The Two-Document Hypothesis
6. Problems with the Two-Document Hypothesis
7. The Value of the Solution of the Synoptic Problem

1. The Similarity of the Synoptic Gospels.

1.1 Similarity in Wording.

The similarity of wording can easily be seen by comparing various parallel accounts found in these Gospels. This is best done by the use of a synopsis. Some helpful passages to compare are:

Matthew 19:13-15	Mark 10:13-16	Luke 18:15-17
Matthew 22:23-33	Mark 12:18-27	Luke 20:27-40
Matthew 24:4-8	Mark 13:5-8	Luke 21:8-11

1.2. Similarity in Order. Another area of similarity can be found when one compares the order of the various accounts (pericopes). Note:

Matthew 16:13—20:34 Mark 8:27—10:52 Luke 9:18-51/18:15-43
 Matthew 12:46—13:58 Mark 3:31—6:6a Luke 8:19-56

1.3. Similarity in Parenthetical Material. There also exists common parenthetical material. Note for example: “let the reader understand” in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14; “he then said to the paralytic” in Matthew 9:6/Mark 2:10/Luke 5:24; “For he had said . . .” in Mark 5:8/Luke 8:29.

1.4. Similarity in Biblical Quotations. At times we find the exact same form of an OT quotation (*see* Old Testament in the Gospels). This would not be unusual if that form was identical either with the Hebrew OT or the Greek translation of the OT known as the Septuagint, but when we find an identical quotation of the OT which is different from both the Hebrew OT and the Greek OT, this similarity requires some sort of explanation (cf. Mk 1:2 par. Mt 3:3 and Lk 3:4; Mk 7:7 par. Mt 15:9).

2. The Existence of a Literary Relationship.

There have been various ways in which people have sought to explain the similarities mentioned above. One attempt has been to explain their similarity as due to the inspiration of the Gospels. The similarity is due to the Holy Spirit* (*see* Holy Spirit) having guided Matthew, Mark and Luke. Such an explanation, however, does not really solve the problem, for those who posit this explanation usually maintain that the Gospel of John was also inspired. Yet John does not look like the Synoptics. If all four Gospels were written under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, this superintendence cannot at the same time explain why some Gospels look alike and why another does not.

A second attempt to explain this similarity involves the argument from history. Matthew, Mark and Luke look alike because they are accurate historical records of what Jesus said and did. Without denying that the Synoptic Gospels do provide an accurate account of what Jesus said and did, it must be pointed out that at times we find a different ordering of the events and a different wording. In these instances are we to assume that the sayings and incidents are not historical? An incident in Jesus' ministry could be recounted correctly in different ways and in association with various events. Furthermore, a saying of Jesus in his native tongue, which was Aramaic, could be translated into Greek in several different ways (*see* Languages of Palestine).

These two explanations do not explain adequately the kind of similarities we find in the Synoptic Gospels. Some other explanation must be sought. As early as 1796 J. G. von Herder sought to explain the Synoptic Problem by positing a common oral tradition used by Matthew, Mark and Luke. This explanation was developed more fully by J. K. L. Gieseler in 1818. According to this explanation the disciples* created this oral tradition which soon became fixed in form. Some time after it was translated into Greek, this common tradition was used by the Synoptic writers. Thus Matthew, Mark and Luke look alike because they all follow the exact same oral tradition.

There is little doubt that there was a period when the Gospel traditions circulated orally. Whether there ever was a period in which these traditions circulated only orally, how long that period lasted, the extent to which Matthew, Mark and Luke were influenced by the oral tradition, etc., have not been and may never be resolved. But can this explanation elucidate adequately the degree of similarity found in the Synoptic Gospels? This does not appear to be the case. At times the degree of similarity seems to require more than just a common oral tradition. More importantly, a common oral tradition is not able to explain the similar editorial comments which we find. Why do we find in the exact same location a word from the writer to his audience—“let the reader understand” (Mt 24:15/Mk 13:14)? Even more difficult for this explanation is the extensive agreement in the order of the material. Thus, although one does not want to minimize the influence of a common oral tradition upon the writers of the Gospels, it would appear that the similarities we encounter require the existence of some sort of a literary relationship.

3. Various Literary Explanations.

If a literary relationship exists between the Synoptic Gospels, then the next question that must be investigated is the nature of that literary relationship. One explanation, originating with F. Schleiermacher (1817), suggested that the disciples had taken notes (memorabilia) of Jesus' words and deeds. These eventually were collected and arranged topically. From these collected memorabilia the Synoptic Gospels arose. This “fragmentary hypothesis” never received much support, for like the oral hypothesis it was not able to explain the extensive agreements in order.

Another theory is that of a so-called Ur-Gospel (“primitive” or “original” Gospel). According to G. E. Lessing (1776) and J. G. Eichhorn (1796), there existed an early written Gospel in Aramaic. This was translated into Greek and went through several revisions. The

similarities we find in the Synoptic Gospels are due to the common use of a Greek translation of this "Ur-Gospel." The differences are explained by their use of different Greek recensions. The main problem with this argument is that as one sought to reconstruct what this Ur-Gospel looked like, it began to look more and more like an Ur-Markus, that is, an earlier non-canonical form of the Gospel of Mark. This in turn began to look more and more like the canonical Gospel of Mark.

A more likely literary explanation is to see some sort of interdependence between the Synoptic Gospels themselves. The three most common explanations involving interdependence are:

Matthew wrote first, Mark used Matthew, Luke used Mark (Augustine).

Matthew wrote first, Luke used Matthew, Mark used Matthew and Luke (J. J. Griesbach, 1783 and 1789; W. R. Farmer, 1964).

Mark wrote first, Matthew used Mark, Luke used Mark. Matthew and Luke also used another common source—"Q" (H. J. Holtzmann, 1863; B. H. Streeter, 1924).

Of these three theories the most viable are the latter two: the Griesbach hypothesis and the two-document hypothesis.

4. The Griesbach Hypothesis.

This hypothesis, which argues that Matthew was the first Gospel written, that Luke used Matthew and that Mark used both Matthew and Luke, was first proposed by H. Owen in 1764. It received its name due to its advocacy by J. J. Griesbach. It has been revived and received considerable impetus recently as the two-Gospel hypothesis through the work of W. R. Farmer, J. B. Orchard and H.-H. Stoldt. Its early popularity and demise were associated with the rise and fall of the Tübingen Hypothesis (i.e., Matthew, Thesis; Luke, Antithesis; Mark, Synthesis). The strength of the Griesbach Hypothesis is that it appears to explain several aspects of the Synoptic Problem.

4.1. The Strengths of the Griesbach Hypothesis.

4.1.1. *It Agrees with the Church Tradition.* The early church tradition is quite unanimous in claiming that Matthew was the first Gospel written (Irenaeus, Eusebius, Augustine). Clement of Alexandria stated that the Gospels with genealogies* were written first. Augustine furthermore called Mark an abridgment of Matthew. Whereas the priority of Mark was unknown in the early church, the priority of Matthew was assumed. It is clear that the Griesbach hypothesis fits this early tradition concerning the Synoptic Gospels better than the two-document hypothesis. It also fits

the order of the Gospels in the NT canon* better.

4.1.2. *It Can Explain All the Gospel Agreements.* In comparing the various agreements between the triple tradition (parallel passages in Matthew, Mark and Luke) we find that frequently we have Matthew-Mark agreements against Luke, Mark-Luke agreements against Matthew and even Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark. The Griesbach hypothesis can explain these quite simply: the Matthew-Mark agreements against Luke result when Luke deviates from his Matthean source but Mark does not; the Mark-Luke agreements against Matthew result when Luke deviates from his Matthean source and Mark follows Luke rather than Matthew; the Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark result when Luke follows Matthew and Mark deviates from both his sources. With regard to the latter the Griesbach hypothesis is strong where the two-document hypothesis is weak. It can easily explain the Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark, whereas the two-document hypothesis struggles with how Matthew and Luke can agree independently against their Markan source when they did not know each other, that is, when one did not use the other.

4.1.3. *It Explains the Markan Redundancies.* Within Mark we find at least 213 cases of redundancy such as: 1:32 ("When evening came, as the sun was setting"); 1:42 ("And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed"); 4:21 ("Is a lamp brought in order to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed?"); etc. The Griesbach hypothesis suggests that this can best be explained by understanding that Mark tended to act with respect to his sources in the same way as the early scribes and copyists of the NT. When they found two different readings in their sources, they tended to harmonize them by including both. Mark's redundancies are therefore due to his having conflated his two sources when he came across different readings. Thus Matthew 8:16, "When evening came," and Luke 4:40, "While the sun was setting," become in Mark 1:32, "When evening came, as the sun was setting"; Matthew 5:14, "They do not set under a bushel basket," and Luke 8:16, "Nor set it under a bed," become in Mark 4:21, "Is a lamp brought in order to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed?"

Other evidence for the Griesbach hypothesis, such as there being no need for the postulation of an additional hypothetical source such as "Q,"* could also be mentioned.

4.2. *Problems for the Griesbach Hypothesis.* A number of problems encountered by the Griesbach hypothesis have led many scholars to consider the two-document hypothesis a more viable option for explaining the Synoptic Problem. Two of these, the arguments in

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favor of the priority of Mark and the difficulty of claiming that Luke used Matthew, will be discussed at length below (see 5.1. and 5.2.1.). There are several additional weaknesses.

4.2.1. *The Griesbach Hypothesis Also Conflicts with the Church Tradition.* Whereas the church tradition is unanimous in stating that Matthew was written before Mark and Luke, that tradition in the same breath also argues that Matthew was written in Aramaic (or Hebrew). Yet it is clear that our present Matthew is not a simple translation from Aramaic (or Hebrew) into Greek. Thus the Matthew of church tradition does not fit the Greek Matthew of the Synoptic Problem. If therefore the tradition at this point is either incorrect or speaking of a predecessor (or source) of our Greek Matthew, this greatly weakens the value of the church tradition for solving the Synoptic Problem (see Matthew, Gospel of).

Other aspects of the church tradition also cause difficulty for the Griesbach hypothesis. These include Papias' statement that Mark had as his main source the "memoirs" of Peter and wrote his Gospel independently of Matthew, and the views of Origen, the Anti-Marcionite Prologues and Augustine that Luke was written last.

4.2.2. *Certain Gospel Agreements Are Best Explained by the Priority of Mark.* Whereas the Griesbach hypothesis can explain all the Gospel agreements, in numerous instances the particular explanation of why two Gospels agree against the other is not persuasive. This is particularly true with regard to Matthew-Mark agreements against Luke, and Mark-Luke agreements against Matthew. In the abstract the Griesbach hypothesis can explain such agreements easily, but when one seeks to explain why Mark and Luke agree against Matthew and why Mark and Matthew agree against Luke, the explanations are often quite unconvincing (see 5.1.6. below). In general the attempts on the basis of the Griesbach hypothesis to explain Luke's use of Matthew and Mark's use of Matthew and/or Luke are less convincing than the explanations of how Matthew and Luke used Mark according to the two-document hypothesis. Clearly the vast majority of redaction-critical investigation in the Synoptic Gospels has been based on the view that Matthew and Luke used Mark. Attempts to do redaction-critical work on the basis of a Matthean priority are meager and less convincing.

4.2.3. *The Markan Redundancies Can Be Explained by the Two-Document Hypothesis.* At first glance the argument that the 213 examples of Markan redundancy are due to his conflation of Matthew and Luke appears convincing, but on closer examination it is clear that out of these 213 examples only 17 are clear

cases of redundancy in which Matthew has only one half of the redundancy and Luke has the other. (In 39 instances Matthew and Luke have the same parallel redundancy and lack the other; in 37 instances they possess neither redundant parallel; in 60 instances Matthew has one or both parallels and Luke has neither; in 26 instances Luke has one or both parallels and Matthew has neither; in 11 instances Luke has both parallels and Matthew has one; in 17 instances Matthew has both parallels and Luke has one; and in 6 instances Matthew and Luke have both parallels.) Thus we are essentially speaking of only 17 possible examples of conflation and not 213.

The attempt of the Griesbach hypothesis to see the Gospel of Mark as being typified by conflation is furthermore compromised when it at the same time speaks of Mark as an abridgment of Matthew and Luke. These supposed tendencies are essentially contradictory. The harmony of Tatian called the *Diatesseron* (c. 150) is an early example of conflation at work. But when one compares the portions of the *Diatesseron* derived from the Synoptic Gospels, they are considerably longer than any of the Synoptic Gospels. Mark, on the other hand, is considerably shorter than either Matthew or Luke. It is therefore quite unlike this early example of conflation. The Markan redundancies are therefore not a convincing argument in favor of the Griesbach hypothesis. It may even be that they can be better explained by the two-document hypothesis (See 5.1.2. below).

5. The Two-Document Hypothesis.

The explanation which has come to dominate Synoptic studies during the last century and a half has been the two-document hypothesis. This theory argues that Mark was the first Gospel written and that it was used independently by Matthew and Luke. It also argues that along with Mark, Matthew and Luke used another common source which has been called "Q." Evidence for the priority of Mark and the existence of "Q" follow.

5.1. *The Priority of Mark.*

5.1.1. *Mark Is the Shortest Gospel.* Of the three Synoptic Gospels, Mark is the shortest in length: It contains 661 verses; Matthew contains 1,068; Luke contains 1,149. When their content is compared, 97.2 per cent of Mark is paralleled in Matthew and 88.4 per cent is paralleled in Luke. It is easier to understand Matthew and Luke using Mark, and choosing to add additional materials to it, than to think of Mark using Matthew, Luke or both, and deciding to omit so much material. Why would he have omitted the birth accounts (see Birth of Jesus), the Sermon on the Mount

Synoptic Problem

(see Sermon on the Mount), the Lord's Prayer (see Prayer), various resurrection* appearances, etc. It is easier to understand Matthew and Luke choosing to add this material to their Markan source than Mark choosing to omit so much material. The suggestion that Mark may have desired to produce a shorter, more abridged account stumbles over the fact that the common accounts in the Synoptic Gospels are generally longer in Mark. If Mark wanted to write an abbreviated account of Matthew and/or Luke, why would he choose to make the stories in his abridged account longer? These are contrary tendencies. When one seeks to abridge a work, one generally does so not only by eliminating certain materials but by abridging what one decides to keep.

5.1.2. Mark Has the Poorest Greek. There is a consensus that the Greek of Mark is poorer than that of either Matthew or Luke. It is easier to understand Matthew and Luke using Mark and improving on his Greek than to think of Mark copying the better Greek of Matthew and/or Luke and making it worse. There are numerous examples of peculiar Markan expressions.

(1) Mark contains various colloquialisms (Mk 10:20, "I have observed," aorist middle; 2:4, "bed" as *krabaton*) and grammatical problems (Mk 4:41, "hears" as a singular verb; 16:6, "see" as a singular verb; 5:9-10, "he begged" for the plural "we").

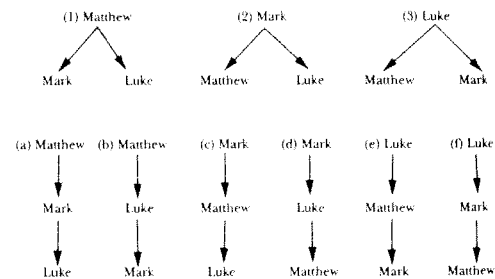
(2) Mark has Aramaic expressions (Mk 3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36; 15:22, 34) which are not found in Matthew or Luke. It is much easier to see Matthew and Luke omitting these Aramaic expressions and giving their Greek counterparts than to see Mark choosing to abridge Matthew and/or Luke but adding Aramaic expressions which his Greek readers did not understand.

(3) Mark is frequently redundant. On numerous occasions (there are 213 examples), Mark has a redundant expression such as "When evening came, as the sun was setting" (1:32) (cf. also Mk 1:42; 2:25-26; 4:21; 15:24). It is easier to understand why Matthew and/or Luke would seek to eliminate such redundancies than to understand why, in abridging Matthew and/or Luke, Mark would have added them.

5.1.3. Mark Has Harder Readings. At times we find in Mark a saying which creates a theological difficulty but do not find this difficulty in Matthew and/or Luke. In Mark, for example, we find apparent limitations of Jesus' power (cf. Mk 1:32-34; 3:9-10; 6:5-6 with par.). At other times we find theological difficulties in Mark but not in Matthew or Luke (cf. Mk 10:17-18; 3:4-5; 2:25-26). In Mark 10:17-18 we have Jesus saying, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." It is easy to see why Matthew would want to change this

to "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good." The changing (or explaining) of Mark's harder readings by Matthew and/or Luke is much easier to understand than Mark choosing to make the easier reading in Matthew and/or Luke more difficult.

5.1.4. The Lack of Matthew-Luke Verbal Agreements against Mark. If one observes the various kinds of agreements in the Synoptic Gospels, it is clear that, whereas we have numerous Matthew-Mark agreements against Luke, there is a paucity of Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark. Assuming the simplest kind of interdependence in which one Gospel writer used one other Gospel writer, we have the following possibilities.



All other possible combinations of interdependence require that either Matthew "knew" (in the sense of "used") Luke or that Luke "knew" Matthew. As we shall see, this is most unlikely (see 5.2.1. below).

Given the fact that accounts of the triple tradition seldom show Matthew and Luke agreeing against Mark in their wording, explanations (1) and (3) cannot explain this. Furthermore (1), (c) and (e) cannot account for the Mark-Luke agreements and (3), (b) and (d) cannot explain the Matthew-Mark agreements. Only explanations (2), (a) and (f) can explain the abundance of Matthew-Mark and Mark-Luke agreements and the lack of Matthew-Luke agreements. However, the arguments given earlier argue against (a) and (f).

5.1.5. The Lack of Matthew-Luke Agreements in Order against Mark. Similar to the preceding argument but involving the order of the materials is the observation that when Matthew differs from the order of the accounts found in Mark, Luke never agrees with Matthew. Likewise, when Luke differs from the order which we find in Mark, Matthew never agrees with Luke against Mark. This observation by K. Lachmann (1835) has sometimes been thought to be an absolute proof for the priority of Mark. This, however, is not a

proof of Markan priority, for with the Griesbach hypothesis in which Matthew was written first, Luke used Matthew, and Mark used both Matthew and Luke, we can explain such agreements in order. Lachmann, however, added to this observation the fact that, whereas Matthew's deviation from Mark and Luke's deviation from Mark are understandable, a Markan deviation from the order of Matthew and Luke is much less so. In light of this observation, there is no reason to refer to this as the "Lachmann Fallacy."

5.1.6. Certain Literary Agreements Are Best Explained by a Markan Priority. There exist in the Synoptic Gospels certain literary agreements which are best explained on the basis of Matthew and Luke having used Mark. For instance, in Matthew 9:1-2/Mark 2:1-5/Luke 5:17-20 Matthew has, as he does frequently elsewhere (cf. Mt 8:5-13; 9:18-26), abbreviated the Markan account and omitted the reason why Jesus saw the faith* of the paralytic and his friends. In Matthew 27:15-22/Mark 15:6-13/Luke 23:18-21, Luke has abbreviated the account and omitted the explanation of the Barabbas episode by not referring to the custom of releasing a prisoner at the time of the Passover. In Matthew 3:13-16/Mark 1:9-10/Luke 3:21-22 Matthew has sought to change the wording of Mark and has, by changing the verb *baptized* to the participle "having been baptized," mistakenly placed the word *immediately* with the verb "went up" (see Baptism). The result, although understandable, has Jesus immediately coming up out of the water rather than immediately seeing the heavens* opened. In Matthew 19:16-17/Mark 10:17-18/Luke 18:18-19 Matthew has sought to eliminate the difficulty created by Mark's "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." Instead he has "Why do you ask me about what is good?" However, his next verse indicates that his source spoke about God being good—not "good" in an abstract sense, for he adds, "One there is who is good."

These and other literary agreements are more understandable on the basis of Matthew and Luke having used Mark than on the basis of any other theory of interdependence.

5.1.7. The Argument from Redaction. Probably the most significant argument today in favor of the priority of Mark involves redactional studies. It is undeniable that the great majority of redactional investigations of the Synoptic Gospels proceed on the basis of the priority of Mark. It is easier, for example, to understand why Matthew added his emphasis on Jesus as the "Son of David" to the Markan account than to understand why Luke and Mark would have chosen to omit this reference (cf. Mt 12:23; 15:22; 21:9, 15). Similarly, it is easier to understand Matthew having added his

famous "this was to fulfill . . ." in 1:22; 2:15, 17; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 27:9 to his Markan source than to understand why Mark and Luke would have chosen to omit them. Five of the last six references reveal this clearly, for the parallels in Mark and Luke lack this reference. To assume that Mark and Luke used Matthew and chose to omit these references is most difficult to comprehend. On the other hand Matthew's having added them to his Markan source is easily understandable.

We also discover that certain Markan stylistic features, when found in Matthew, appear almost exclusively in the material which Matthew has in common with Mark. The famous Markan use of "immediately" occurs forty-one times within his Gospel. In Matthew it occurs eighteen times. Of these eighteen times, fourteen occur in the material he shares with Mark. The other four occur in his M* (Matthew's special material) and Q material. However, of the 18,293 words which are in Matthew, 10,901 have parallels in Mark. A total of 7,392 do not have a parallel. This means that there is one "immediately" for every 778 words in the material Matthew has in common with Mark, but there is only one "immediately" for every 1,848 words in the non-Markan material (M* and Q*). The more frequent appearance of the word *immediately* in the material Matthew has in common with Mark is more easily explained by his use of Mark, where this word is found in abundance, than by any other explanation.

Another Markan stylistic feature is his use of an editorial "for (*gar*)" clause to explain something to his reader (see Mk 1:16, 22; 5:28; 6:17-18 etc.). Within Mark we find thirty-four such clauses; within Matthew we find ten, but all ten appear in the material he shares with Mark. Not one is found in the remaining material. If Matthew used Mark, the presence of these editorial "for" clauses is understandable. But why would they be only in one area of the Matthean material, the material he shares with Mark, if Matthew did not use Mark?

5.1.8. Mark's Theology Is Less Developed. When one compares the common material in Matthew, Mark and Luke, it is obvious time and time again that the materials in Matthew and Luke are theologically more developed. Mark, for example, uses the term "Lord" (*kyrios*) for Jesus six times, but in Matthew we find it used not only in the same six instances, but in an additional twenty-four. Fifteen of these instances are found in material where Mark lacks this term. The same can be said of Luke, who uses this title even more frequently. It is easier to understand how Matthew and Luke would have added this title to their Markan source than to understand why Mark would have

chosen to eliminate it if he were using Matthew and/or Luke. The same can be said for the title "Christ."

5.1.9. *Conclusion.* The reason why most scholars maintain the priority of Mark is not based on any one argument listed above. Rather, the priority of Mark is based on the entire collection of arguments. The weight of any one argument may not be convincing, but together they are quite convincing, and the best available hypothesis for explaining the Synoptic Problem is that Matthew and Luke used Mark in the composition of their Gospels. Being a "hypothesis," absolute proof is by definition lacking, and the Synoptic Problem must always remain open to a better hypothesis if one should become available.

5.2. *The Existence of "Q."* Once the priority of Mark has been accepted, we are faced with another problem. This involves the common material found in Matthew and Luke which we do not find in Mark, the so-called Q material. Some examples of this are: Matthew 6:24/Luke 16:13; Matthew 7:7-11/Luke 11:9-13; Matthew 11:25-27/Luke 10:21-22; Matthew 23:37-39/Luke 13:34-35. How is this common material to be explained? We shall discuss below the suggestion that Matthew and Luke obtained this material from various oral traditions, but the simplest explanation is that either Matthew used Luke or that Luke used Matthew to obtain this material. There are a number of reasons, however, why it is unlikely that Luke used Matthew. (The theory that Matthew used Luke is held by few, and most of the arguments given below also demonstrate that Matthew did not use Luke.)

5.2.1. *Matthew and Luke Did Not Know Each Other.* This is evident from several lines of evidence.

(1) *Luke lacks the Matthean additions to the triple tradition.* When we find an account in the triple tradition and Matthew has something in the account not found in Mark, we never find that Matthean addition in Luke (cf. Mt 8:17; 12:5-7; 13:14-15 etc.). If Luke used Matthew, why do we never find any of these additions in Luke? The easiest explanation is that Luke did not use Matthew. (The same can be said about Lukan additions to the triple tradition. They are never found in Matthew.)

(2) *The "Q" material is found in a different context in Luke.* The Q material is arranged in Matthew into five blocks of teachings surrounded by six blocks of narrative. As a result we find: Narrative (1-4); Teaching (5-7); N (8-9); T (10); N (11-12); T (13); N (14-17); T (18); N (19-22); T (23-25); N (26-28). It should also be noted that each of these five teaching sections end similarly with "and when Jesus finished these sayings" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Luke, however, has lumped the Q material into two

sections: 6:20-8:3; 9:51-18:14. It is difficult to understand why, if Luke used Matthew, he would have wanted to destroy the framework of the Q material in Matthew for his arrangement.

(3) *At times the Q material is less developed in Luke.* If Luke had used Matthew, one would expect that the form of the material in Luke would generally be more theologically developed than the corresponding material in Matthew. We do not find this, however. At times the Q material in Luke is clearly less developed. (Cf. Lk 6:20, "poor"; 21, "hunger now"; 31, no reference to "Law and the prophets"; 11:2, "Father"; 14:26, "hate.")

(4) *The lack of Matthew-Luke agreements in order and wording against Mark.* If Luke used Matthew, it is difficult to understand why his order never agrees with Matthew against Mark and why there are so few verbal agreements in Matthew-Luke against Mark.

(5) *The lack of M material in Luke.* By definition the M material consists of the material in Matthew not found in either Mark or Luke. If Luke used Matthew it is difficult to explain why he did not include some of this material. Such an argument from silence is always questionable. Nevertheless, knowing some of the theological interests of Luke, it is difficult to understand why, if he used Matthew, he did not include such material as the coming of the wise men (Mt 2:1-12). To have Gentiles present at the birth of Jesus would have fit his universal emphasis quite well. Likewise, the exclusion of such stories as the flight to Egypt and the return to Nazareth (Mt 2:13-23); the story of the guards at the tomb (Mt 27:62-66) and their report (Mt 28:11-15); and the unique Matthean material concerning the resurrection (Mt 28:9-10, 16-20) is inexplicable.

On the basis of the above arguments it seems reasonable to conclude that Luke did not know Matthew (and Matthew did not know Luke). As a result, some other common source has been posited. The origin of "Q" as a symbol for this common material found only in Matthew and Luke is debated, but most probably it comes from the first letter of the German word *Quelle*, which means source.

5.2.2. *Was Q a Written Source?* If we assume that Matthew and Luke used a common source alongside Mark, was this source written or oral? The main arguments in favor of a written Q involve the exactness in wording of some of the Q parallels. The exactness in wording is at times quite impressive (cf. Mt 6:24 par. Lk 16:13 where twenty-seven of twenty-eight words are exactly the same; Mt 7:7-8 par. Lk 11:9-10 where all twenty-four words are exactly the same). Is this exactness better explained on the basis of a common

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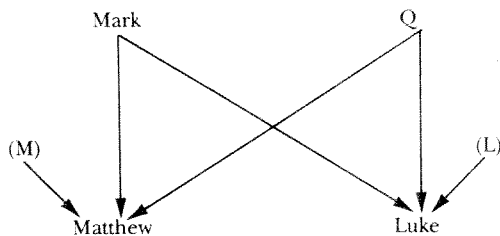
written source? On the other hand, at times some of the Q material is not very exact.

Another argument frequently put forward for a written Q involves an agreement in order. At times one can observe a certain degree of order between the Q material in Matthew and Luke, but these agreements in order are not sufficient to require a common written source. Some have also sought to find a common order between the Q material in Luke and the Q material in each of the five Q sections in Matthew, that is, the order of Q in Luke is compared to Matthew 5—7, then to Matthew 10, to Matthew 13 etc. The argument from order has been convincing to some scholars but not to most.

A third argument for Q being a written source is the presence of doublets (double accounts of the same incident) in Matthew and Luke. This supposedly demonstrates that they used two separate written sources—Mark and Q. At best, however, if such doublets exist, they prove the use of a second common source, but this could have been oral or fragmentary written sources. A further attempt to prove that Q was a written source has been the effort to demonstrate that there is a common vocabulary and style in the Q material which reveals that it comes from a common written source. This attempt, however, has not been convincing.

5.2.3. Summary. The Q hypothesis is not without its problems, but it possesses fewer difficulties than alternative hypotheses. As to its form, it is difficult to determine if the Q material came to Matthew and Luke as a single written source, as several written sources or from a common oral tradition. That Matthew and Luke did not know each other seems fairly certain. This, along with the argument for Markan priority, favors some sort of a two-document hypothesis in which Matthew and Luke used Mark and probably a written Q. A related version of this is the four-document hypothesis which assumes that the unique material found in Matthew (the M material) and Luke (the L material) came from two additional written sources.

The Two- (or Four-) Document Hypothesis



6. Problems with the Two-Document Hypothesis.

The major alternative to the two- (or four-) document hypothesis is the Griesbach hypothesis (see 4. above). This hypothesis explains well the major problem facing the two-document hypothesis—the existence of Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark. Along with various agreements in omission created by their abbreviation of Mark, and the agreements which came about by their improvement of Mark's grammar, there are several significant Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark (cf. Mk 1:7-8; 2:12; 3:24, 26-29; 5:27; 6:33; 8:35; 9:2-4, 18-19; 10:29; 14:65, 72 and the Matthew-Luke parallels).

Although the Griesbach hypothesis can explain these agreements better than the two-document hypothesis, we must not forget that the reverse is true concerning all the arguments for Markan priority and against Matthew and Luke knowing each other. These arguments are far more numerous and weighty. As to the Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark, several explanations can be offered.

6.1. Overlapping Traditions. The Q material and Mark must have overlapped in certain places. At times Matthew and Luke may have preferred the Q readings over Mark and thus created a Matthew-Luke agreement.

6.2. Textual Corruption. We know that the early scribes had a tendency to make parallel accounts in the Gospels conform to one another, and since Matthew was the best-known and most frequently used Synoptic Gospel, it may be that some early scribe copying Luke may have changed his Lukan text to conform to the reading in Matthew. In such instances, the result would be a Matthew-Luke agreement.

6.3. Overlapping Oral Tradition. It may also be possible that at times Matthew and Luke knew a form of the oral tradition which was more familiar to them than the wording in their Markan source and so chose, quite independently of each other, to word their accounts according to the oral tradition. Again, a Matthew-Luke agreement would have resulted.

Among the several other possible reasons for a Matthew-Luke agreement are: coincidental modifications of Mark's grammar; coincidental omissions of Markan material; the common use of a different Mark and coincidental modifications of difficult passages in Mark.

7. The Value of the Solution of the Synoptic Problem.

The solution of the Synoptic Problem proves to be of value in several ways.

7.1. Historical Criticism. In seeking the solution to this problem great impetus was provided by the desire

to find the oldest and, it was assumed, best historical source for investigating the life of Jesus. It was hoped that once the basic source of the Synoptic Gospels was discovered, scholars would possess an historical source uncluttered with the theology of the early church which would then be the basis for the quest for the historical Jesus (see Historical Jesus). Mark, it was thought, provided this source. Today we realize that Mark, like the other Gospels, is not an objective biography of the life of Jesus (see Gospel [Genre]). What biography would omit the first thirty years of a person's life? And what Gospel writer is "objective"? It is evident, therefore, that this quest for a completely objective biography of the life of Jesus was doomed from the start.

The solution of the Synoptic Problem, however, has provided certain tools which are useful for historical investigation. The criterion of multiple attestation is based on the premise that several witnesses are better than one, and if a teaching of Jesus is witnessed to in Mark, Q,* M,* L* and John, then we have five different sources which witness to its historicity (see Gospels [Historical Reliability]). Another useful tool is the criterion of divergent patterns from the redaction. Because of the application of the two-document hypothesis, Synoptic scholarship today is better acquainted with the literary style and theological emphases of the different Evangelists. It is quite apparent that if an Evangelist included something in his Gospel which seemed to conflict with his own emphasis, he witnessed to that tradition being very old and well-known.

7.2. Redactional Investigation of the Gospels. By observing how Matthew and Luke used Mark and Q, we are better able to understand their theological emphases. Thus we are better able to comprehend the meaning of their works. One only needs to compare the following examples with their parallels to see how they help reveal the theological emphases of the Gospel writer: Luke 5:17; 6:27-28; 11:13; Matthew 8:15; 13:35; 15:22.

7.3. Hermeneutical Insights. It is frequently helpful to observe how one Evangelist interpreted his source, for the Evangelists were closer in time, situation, language and thought-world to their contemporaries than we. As a result, we can at times find help in interpreting a difficult text by observing how they interpreted this text. For example, it is evident from Matthew 10:37-38 that Luke's command to "hate one's parents" (14:26) means that his disciples must love Jesus more. One can also gain insight on how particular teachings of Jesus can be applied by observing how the Evangelists seek to apply them to their situation. A good example of this

is the parable* of the lost sheep (Lk 15:3-7 par. Mt 18:10-14).

See also FORM CRITICISM; GOSPEL (GENRE); L; M; Q; REDACTION CRITICISM; SYNOPTICS AND JOHN; TRADITION CRITICISM.

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SYNOPTICS AND JOHN

The differences between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels have been remarked on through the centuries, certainly since the second century of our era. One solution to account for the differences was to assume that (1) John was the last Gospel (see Gospel [Genre]) to be written and (2) it was written to complement the others. Clement of Alexandria came near to this in his famous assertion: "Last of all John, perceiving that the bodily facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel" (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.14.7). The Muratorian Canon, following that tradition, observed, "Although various points are taught in the several books of the Gospels, yet it makes no difference to the faith of the believers, since all things in all of them are declared by one supreme Spirit." That sounds as though John's Gospel may

have been questioned in light of its differences from the Synoptics, and assurance was given that the Holy Spirit* was behind all four Gospels (*see* Canon).

In reality there is no hint in the Fourth Gospel that the Evangelist was either complementing or correcting the other three. What is indisputable is that the Synoptic Gospels are clearly linked with each other and can be set alongside each other for easy comparison, but the Fourth Gospel does not readily permit such treatment. It is our task to consider the nature of the differences and the possible relations between the first three Gospels and the Gospel of John.

1. Relations As to Content.
2. The Teaching of Jesus
3. Literary Relations

1. Relations As to Content.

1.1. Topography. The first three Gospels recount the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. His only ministry in Jerusalem was in the week leading to the Passover (*see* Feasts), at which time he was opposed by the Jewish rulers, arrested, tried and put to death by the Romans. In the Fourth Gospel the scene of Jesus' ministry is almost entirely set in Jerusalem and Judea; the only description of ministry in Galilee* is of three signs in John 2:1-11; 4:43-54; and chapter 6. Apart from chapter 4, which tells of the encounter of Jesus with Samaritans,* the rest of the Gospel is devoted to his work in Judea (*see* Archeology and Geography).

This feature is emphasized by the prominence given to the presence of Jesus at the Jewish festivals in the Temple.* We read of Jesus attending the festivals of Pentecost (Jn 5), Tabernacles (Jn 7-8), Dedication (Jn 10) and Passover (2:13; 12-19). These festivals in varied ways set forth the dealings of God with his people in the past, their faith* in God in the present, and their hope of the kingdom of God* for the future. Jesus is presented in these episodes as the fulfillment of all that these festivals represented of God's revelation and promised salvation.*

The frequent presence of Jesus in Jerusalem and the increasingly intense opposition to him from the Pharisees* and Jewish authorities described by John, shed light on the Synoptic references to the early hostility to Jesus of the scribes* and Pharisees, as well as his frequent mention of the destiny that awaited him in Jerusalem (*see* e.g., Mk 8:31 par.; Lk 13:33). The same applies to the weeping of Jesus over Jerusalem because the people did not know the season of its visitation (Lk 19:41-42), and his desire time after time to gather Jerusalem under his care ("How often did I wish to gather your children . . . but you were unwilling," Mt 23:37-38).

There are hints that a primary source of John's Gospel is of a person living in Judea during the ministry of Jesus and of the story being written from the viewpoint of one dwelling in Jerusalem. Note the reference to the disciple who was a friend of the High Priest (*see* Priest) and who was able to use his influence to bring Peter into the High Priest's court at the trial of Jesus (18:15-16; *see* Trial of Jesus). The account of the Triumphal Entry (*see* Triumphal Entry) of Jesus into Jerusalem is told from the viewpoint of one in the city (12:9-18) in contrast to the Synoptics, which describe the event from the viewpoint of the Galileans entering the city (Mk 11:1-11 par.). This probably explains the fuller information in John about the trial of Jesus than that of the Synoptics, particularly of the trial before Pilate (*see* Pontius Pilate).

1.2. Chronology.

1.2.1. Beginning of Jesus' Ministry. Whereas in the Synoptic Gospels the ministry of Jesus and the call of the first disciples is set after the imprisonment of John the Baptist* (Mk 1:14-20), in John's Gospel Jesus commences his ministry in Judea during the period of John's work, and his earliest disciples appear to be disciples of the Baptist (Jn 1:35-51). From John 2-3 it is evident that Jesus not only labored in Judea at the same time as John, but he is reported to have baptized more disciples than John himself. It is in this context that the most specific witness of John the Baptist to Jesus in the Gospels is given (1:29, 35; 3:27-30).

1.2.2. Length of Ministry of Jesus. The length of the ministry of Jesus according to the Synoptic Gospels is difficult to determine, but the mention of one solitary visit of Jesus to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover gives the impression that it could have been limited to a year. In the Gospel of John, by contrast, three Passovers are mentioned by the Evangelist (2:13; 6:4; 12:1), implying that the ministry of Jesus could have extended over two to three years (*see* Chronology).

1.2.3. Time of Cleansing of the Temple. The so-called cleansing of the Temple (*see* Temple Cleansing) in the Synoptic Gospels occurs in the only place where it could happen in their representation of the ministry of Jesus, namely on his visit to Jerusalem at the Passover season (Mk 11:15-18). In John, however, it is set at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, immediately following the record of the turning of the water* into wine* at Cana (2:13-22). This has led many to assume that Jesus cleansed the Temple twice. Others have championed the Synoptics over against John, or John over against the Synoptics.

It is now commonly believed that the Synoptic dating is correct, and that the Fourth Evangelist has

placed the event at the beginning of his account to emphasize its significance for understanding the ministry of Jesus. Chapter 2 is a kind of program chapter for the Gospel: Whoever understands the turning of the water into wine (cf. Is 25:6-9) and the cleansing of the Temple has the key to grasping the meaning of our Lord's words and work, above all his redeeming action for the kingdom of God and the new worship* thereby opened for humankind.

1.2.4. The Date of the Last Supper. The Synoptic Gospels indicate that the last meal of Jesus with his disciples was a Passover celebration (cf. Mk 14:12; Lk 22:15; see Last Supper). John states that the meal took place on the eve of the Passover (Jn 13:1; 18:28), and that Jesus died immediately prior to the Passover (19:31). How to deal with this clash of evidence has taxed the minds of scholars for generations. Many hold that the Synoptics are right, and that John changed the date to emphasize that Jesus died as God's Passover Lamb (cf. 1:29; 19:31-37). Such a suggestion is to be repudiated.

A Jewish tradition (*baraita*) preserved in the Talmud states that Jesus was stoned and hanged on the eve of the Passover because he practiced magic and enticed and led Israel astray (*Sanh.* 43a). It has been suggested that the Passover was observed on two different dates, one on the basis of a solar calendar, followed by the Essenes, the other a lunar calendar, observed by the Jewish authorities. If Jesus followed the former, he celebrated the Passover with his disciples on the Tuesday evening, whereas the official calendar, known to John in Jerusalem, set the observance on the Friday evening, and the days between Tuesday and Friday would have been taken up with the trial proceedings (Jaubert). The suggestion is disputed. Other solutions include the belief that the Synoptics record an anticipated Passover, a meal replete with Passover associations. Further investigation of this problem is required. The chief point made by all four Gospels is the fulfillment of the Passover in the death of Jesus (see Passion Narrative).

2. The Teaching of Jesus.

2.1. Johannine Style. The mode of the teaching of Jesus is recognizable in each of the Synoptic Gospels, despite the individual style of the Evangelists, notably his aphorisms (see Chreia; Form Criticism) and parables.* These are represented in John's Gospel, but much less frequently, and that for a simple reason: the Fourth Evangelist mediates the teaching of Jesus in his own language. The contrast of the collections of sayings in the Synoptics with the longer discourses in John is a matter of degree; the five Matthean

discourses are all compilations of sayings according to subject, and so are those in John. (An examination of the Discourses of chapters 13-17 will show that the same applies even to them.)

2.2. Thematic Contrast and Similarity. The supreme theme of the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels is summarized in Mark 1:15: It was God's good news that the time of waiting for the fulfillment of his promise was over; his kingdom was upon people and all must repent to receive it. John's Gospel contains one saying about the kingdom, 3:3, expanded for clarification in 3:5, together with an oblique reference in the trial before Pilate (18:36-37). Yet every line in this Gospel is informed by it. John's reproduction of the teaching of Jesus in his own language, however, has entailed a translation: his key term is one found in the Synoptics, namely "life"* or "eternal life," which is life in the kingdom of God (see Mk 10:17, 23). The purpose of John's Gospel, declared by the Evangelist, was precisely that its readers might receive and be established in the life of the kingdom of God (20:31).

3. Literary Relations.

3.1. Dependence of John. The early Christian belief that John knew the Synoptic Gospels and supplemented them gave place in modern times to a conviction that John used those Gospels in composing his own—certainly Mark, probably Luke, less certainly Matthew. It was urged that as the use of Mark by Matthew and Luke was grasped through their reproducing Mark's material in Mark's order and language, so the like is observable in John's treatment of the Synoptics (for a recent statement of this argument see Barrett 1978, 42-46). It is often admitted that John used the Synoptics differently from their use of each other. None of them became the basis of John's Gospel. They supplied but a fraction of his material, and he probably used them from memory (see Kümmel, 145). Some recent writers, however, advance beyond this position and claim that John frequently composed passages through adaptation of Synoptic material (see, e.g., Neiryneck, 95-106, who attempts to demonstrate that Jn 20:1-18 was constructed on the basis of Lk 24:1-12 and Mt 28:9-10).

3.2. Independence of John. The thesis that the Fourth Evangelist used the Synoptic Gospels in writing his Gospel was challenged by P. Gardner-Smith on two grounds: (1) the critics have overlooked the influence of the continued existence of oral tradition at the time when John was written; (2) they have concentrated too much on the similarities between John and the Synoptics and underestimated the differences between them. Features like John's lengthy description

of John the Baptist's ministry, Peter's confession, the trial of Jesus by Annas and not by Caiaphas, the trial by Pilate, the insufflation of the Spirit in the resurrection narrative etc., show the use of independent tradition(s), not adaptation of Synoptic traditions.

The effect of this work was to change the majority opinion on this subject. The contacts between John and the Synoptics came to be explained in terms of contacts between the sources of the Synoptic writers and those available to the Fourth Evangelist, rather than between the Gospels themselves. This was the thesis of C. H. Dodd in his monumental work *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, and it has been adopted by many recent commentators and writers on John, including R. Bultmann, R. E. Brown, B. Lindars, L. Morris, J. N. Sanders and B. N. Mastin, and R. Schnackenburg.

3.3. Mediating Views. In face of a revival among some scholars of the belief that the Fourth Evangelist was dependent on the Synoptists, a mediating view is being advanced by some writers. This was anticipated by Sanders and Mastin (1968). On examining evidence advanced for the use of Mark by John they remained unconvinced that Mark was a source for John but felt that John must have known Mark. They added, "But knowing Mark and using it as a source are two different things" (10). This conviction was shared by D. M. Smith in a review of current thought on this issue. He recognized the possibility that in due time, after the traditions of the Gospel had become familiar in John's church through preaching and controversy, the Synoptic Gospels became known, without being fully absorbed. John's concerns were different from those of the Synoptics, so he did not employ them in the manner that Matthew and Luke used Mark.

Nevertheless, even though the Fourth Evangelist did not use the Synoptics as his sources, neither did his Gospel take shape in isolation from them. Accordingly, we should not ignore the Synoptics in interpreting John. "This means . . . that the question of the mode of the relationship should remain open in principle" (Smith, 443-44). Therein lies an indication that our minds also should remain open in this matter.

See also GOSPELS (HISTORICAL RELIABILITY); JOHN, GOSPEL OF; SYNOPTIC PROBLEM.

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