

## THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

Ascertaining the literary dependence of the Synoptic Gospels constitutes what is commonly termed *the Synoptic Problem*. Site to compare Gospels: <http://sites.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis/>

### A. Similarities between the Synoptic Gospels

1. Common Material:	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Total Verses:	1,068	661	1,149
Triple Tradition (verses):	330	330	330
Double Tradition:	235		235

Note the similarity of the following pericopes:

Matt 19:13-15/Mark 10:13-16/Luke 18:15-17

Matt 24:15-18/Mark 13:14-16/Luke 21:20-22

Matt 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4 (Note the text of Isa 40:3 reads in the Septuagint: “Make straight the paths of our God,” and in the Hebrew “Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.”).

Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27 (This biblical quotation does not agree with the Hebrew text, which mentions *heart* and not *mind*, nor the Greek which never combines both *heart* and *mind*).<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Basic Agreement in Structure:

	Mark	Matthew	Luke
a. Introduction to Ministry:	1:1-13	3:1-4, 11	3:1-4, 13
b. Galilean Ministry:	1:14-19, 50	4:12-18, 35	4:14-19, 50
c. Journey to Jerusalem:	10:1-52	19:1-20, 34	9:51-19:41
d. Death and Resurrection:	chs. 11-16	chs. 21-28	chs. 19-24

3. Triple Tradition: An examination of “triple tradition,” reveals that while there is much material which is similar to all three Gospels, there is a good amount of material that show agreements between Matthew and Mark, and also Mark and Luke, but there is almost no material in the triple tradition that is common to Matthew and Luke (Matt 9:1-2; Mark 2:1-5; Luke 5:17-20). In other words, Matthew and Luke almost never agree against Mark. When they differ from Mark, they almost never deviate the same way. This strongly indicates that both Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source but did not know each other.

### 4. Double Tradition (Matthew and Luke):

Matthew and Luke contain approximately 235 verses which are not found in Mark. Some of this material is almost the same (see Matt 6:24/Luke 16:13 and Matt 7:7-8/Luke 11:9-10) but is found in different places in the narratives. At times, the material is somewhat similar, such as the Lord’s Prayer or the temptations.

## II. Differences between the Gospels.

1. The Infancy Narratives: Two different accounts of Jesus’ birth are found in Matthew (48 verses) and Luke (132 verses).

2. Mark is shorter than either Matthew or Luke, but when individual sections are compared, Mark’s accounts are usually the longest (see Matthew 8:28-34/Mark 5:1-20/Luke 8:26-39).

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 45-46.

3. In triple tradition, Mark's vocabulary and grammar is sometimes less polished than Matthew and Luke's (cf. Mark 1:12, 2:4, 4:41). Mark continually has his stories in the present tense.
4. The Aramaic expressions in Mark are not found in Matthew and Luke (Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:34).
5. Mark contains some "harder readings" (Mark 1:32-34a/Matt 8:16/Luke 4:40 and Mark 6:5-6/Matt 13:58).

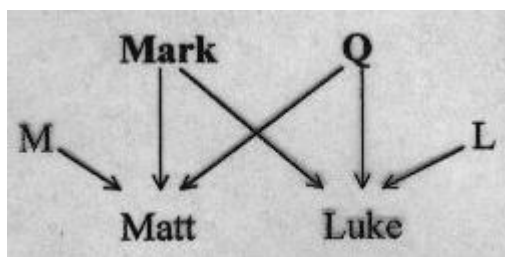
### III. Marcan Priority.

It is easier to explain:

1. Matthew and Luke adding material to their Gospels (the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, the birth narratives, etc.) than Mark omitting this material from Matthew and/or Luke. This is particularly true given the Marcan tendency to have longer individual sections.
2. Matthew and Luke improving Mark's grammar, style, and vocabulary than Mark choosing to "worsen" the grammar and style he found in Matthew and/or Luke;
3. Matthew and Luke eliminating some of the "harder" readings in Mark that cause theological difficulties and problems than Mark choosing to add them to Matthew and/or Luke;
4. Matthew and Luke omitting various Aramaic expressions in Mark than Mark adding them;

### Proposed Solution to the Synoptic Problem.

If Mark is first, and Matthew and Luke do not know each other, then the so-called Two-Source Theory seems plausible.<sup>2</sup> This postulates that Mark was written first. Matthew and Luke used Mark independently from each other, but they both made use of a second source which is no longer extant. This source is dubbed *Quelle* and abbreviated Q.




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<sup>2</sup> Chart is from Felix Just, "The Synoptic Problem," [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Synoptic\\_Problem.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Synoptic_Problem.htm) (accessed January 7, 2013).

## THE GOSPEL OF MARK

### Author.

The gospel was attributed to Mark by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Mark is the interpreter of Peter, and is usually identified with John Mark in the Acts of the Apostles (12:12, 25; 15:37, 29) and Mark in the Pauline writings (Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Phil 24). Peter also calls a certain Mark his son (1 Peter 5:13). Papias of Hierapolis (d. 163) received a tradition concerning Mark from the “elder” or “presbyter,” and wrote this about 130 AD. His words are recorded by Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339):

But now we must add to the words of his which we have already quoted the tradition which he gives in regard to Mark, the author of the Gospel. “This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.” These things are related by Papias concerning Mark (*Ecclesial History* 3.3914-16).

### Audience.

Mark wrote his Gospel for Greek speakers and hearers. His explanation of Jewish ritual prescriptions suggests that the audience is outside Palestine and is not Jewish (Mark 7:3-4; 14:12; 15:42). There are also numerous Latinisms, in particular his word for money (penny) uses the term from the Roman monetary system (Mark 12:42).<sup>3</sup> All of this, coupled with Mark's connection to Peter, leads to the conclusion that Mark was writing to a Roman community (12:43).

### Date.

The Gospel was written either shortly before or after 70 AD. The dating depends on the exegesis of Mark 13:2, 14. If the writing is a prophecy of the destruction, then the work precedes 70 AD. If it depicts the destruction, then the writing is after 70 AD.

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<sup>3</sup> Some Latinisms include: *modius* (4:21); *legio* (5:9, 15); *denarius* (6:37); *pugnis* (7:3); *sextarius* (7:4); *quadrans* (12:42); *flagellare* (15:15); *praetorium* (15:16) *centurio* (15:39, 44-45). See Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 201.

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

### Structure

Matthew is more than 50% longer than Mark due to the insertion of the infancy narrative and five long sermons. Matthew reproduces about 80% of Mark, and while generally following the Marcan outline, makes various stylistic changes.<sup>4</sup>

### Author

Since the second century the gospel has been attributed to Matthew, the disciple of the Lord (cf. Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). The title “According to Matthew” is found in the earliest manuscripts, and this gospel was the most highly regarded and quoted of the gospels by the church fathers. Matthew is also called Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), and was the son of Alphaeus (Luke 5:27). He was a tax collector, and may have been stationed on a main trade route near Capernaum where he would have collected tolls for Herod Antipas. After the resurrection there is no other mention of him in the New Testament.

According to Papias of Hierapolis around 130 (d.163), as recorded by Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339):

But concerning Matthew he [Papias] writes as follows: “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able” (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39).

Papias’ statement refers to a composition by Matthew in the “Hebrew dialect,” which is the Hebrew or possibly Aramaic language. Most scholars believe that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Greek due to the polished, Greek writing, and because he used Mark as a source which was undoubtedly written in Greek.

Great attention has been given to the word “oracles” in the Papias quote. The word *logia* would have been the usual word for “sayings.” It is possible that Matthew wrote a document in Hebrew which has not come down to us, or that Papias was simply mistaken.

### Date and Place

Determining the *terminus a quo*: Matthew knows of the destruction of the Temple which took place in 70 AD (Matt 22:7; 21:41; 23:28). Also, Matthew often speaks of *their* synagogues (4:23, 9:35, 10:17, 12:9, 13:54) which distinguishes them from Christian places of worship.<sup>5</sup> This strongly implies the break between Judaism and Christianity was complete, and would indicate a date closer to 80 AD.

Determining the *terminus ad quem*: Ignatius of Antioch wrote seven letters while being taken as a prisoner from the East to Rome in about 110 AD. Ignatius refers to the star which appeared at the time of the birth of Jesus, the answer of Jesus to John the Baptist when he was baptized, and several sayings of Jesus which are recorded only in Matthew’s Gospel (12:33, 15:13, 19:12). Thus, Ignatius (and most likely his audience) knew the Gospel, which means it was probably written around 80-90 AD.

Matthew may have written his gospel in Syria of Antioch. Note that he adds “Syria” in Matt 4:24 to Mark’s description of Jesus’ activity.

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<sup>4</sup> These include polishing Mark’s Greek, omitting or changing passages which were unfavorable to those worthy of respect and those scenes which make Jesus appear naïve or superstitious, and heightening the miraculous elements found in Mark. See Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 204-205.

<sup>5</sup> Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, 223.

## Audience

Matthew wrote his gospel for Jewish Christians.

1. He focuses on the fulfillment of the Old Testament, even quoting from it sixty-two times, which is more than any other Gospel writer.
2. Unlike Mark and other Gospel writers, Matthew does not explain Jewish culture (cf. Mark 7:3, John 19:40).
3. Matthew uses the phrase, “kingdom of heaven,” (the only author who uses this phrase) which shows Matthew’s hesitancy in using the name of God, something very appropriate for a Jewish writer and his audience.

Matthew’s audience was suffering persecutions from the Jewish communities, as well as dealing with its very painful break from its past life and traditions. Matthew wants to assure these Jewish Christians that they are the true Israel, while the Jewish community rejected God’s plan for it. Through the genealogy, Matthew places Jesus in the heart of Judaism and illustrates throughout the gospel that Jesus is its natural fulfillment. His many quotes from the OT which deal with the theme of fulfillment are meant to stress that these Jewish Christians who follow Jesus are the true Israel, the fulfillment of what was written, as God intended it to be.

## THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

### Author.

Since about 150 AD, the Gospel has been attributed to Luke, the companion of Paul.<sup>6</sup>

Three references to the name “Luke” appear in the NT, Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24, all from the Pauline corpus. These speak of Luke as a fellow worker and physician who was faithful to Paul in his imprisonment. Further, the Acts of the Apostles contains the so-called “we-passages” (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16) where the narration shifts from third person singular to first person plural. While there are many theories regarding the identification of the “we,” many scholars posit that Luke refers to himself and Paul. Thus, it appears that the author of the gospel and Acts was a companion of the Apostle Paul. “From this data, we can surmise that the tradition attributing authorship of the Third Gospel to Luke the traveling companion of Paul was circulating quite some time before 150 CE.”<sup>7</sup>

We know very little of Luke. He is called a physician and is a skilled Greek writer, able to employ different Greek styles. For example, in the prologue, he uses a classical Greek style, but in the infancy narrative, he uses language typical of the Septuagint. It is not clear whether he knew Aramaic or Hebrew, but he certainly knew the OT quite well. He may have been a Gentile convert to Judaism, and given the intimate portrayals of Mary and Jesus, he may have known the Blessed Mother.

### Audience.

Luke addresses his two volumes to “Theophilus,” a Greek name which means “lover of God.” It is impossible to know whether Theophilus is an individual or not, but Luke states that he is writing assure him of the worthiness of the Christian instruction he has received.

If Theophilus is a designation for the community to whom Luke writes, then he is speaking to a predominately Gentile Christian community. He avoids Semitic concepts and expressions. For example, Jesus is called *Lord* or *Master* instead of *Rabbi*, and Luke also omits Aramaic words such as Gethsemane, Golgatha, and *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani*. Also, note that in his genealogy, Luke traces the history of Jesus not to Abraham, the father of the Jews, but to Adam, the first parent of all humanity, implicitly including the Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation.

### Date.

The date of the writing of the gospel is usually placed around 80-90 AD.

Determining the *terminus a quo*: Luke used Mark as a source, and he seemed to know about the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. 21:24), thus rendering a date earlier than 70 AD unlikely. Also, his pessimism regarding the Jewish leaders points to the break between Judaism and Christianity (70 AD). However, the last recorded event of the Acts of the Apostles is 62 AD. If the two volumes were written together, then the Gospel could be before the destruction of the Temple.

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<sup>6</sup> A few commonly cited examples include: 1. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon in about 180 AD writes “Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him.” 2. The Muratorian Canon reports, “The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law [or “learned person”], composed it in his own name, according to [general, or Paul’s] belief.” 3. The title of Papyrus 75 indicates that Luke is the author of the gospel. Papyrus 75 (also called the Bodmer Papyrus) is a New Testament papyrus containing portions of the Gospel of Luke and John. It dates to about 170-225 AD.

<sup>7</sup> Schnelle, *History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, 240.

Determining the *terminus ad quem*: The gospel seems to pre-date 100 AD. Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110) seems to know of Luke, and Luke does not seem to know of the letters of Paul, which were gathered in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### Author.

The traditional author of the Gospel is the apostle John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James the Greater. The author of the Gospel says there is an eyewitness of the cross (19:35): “This testimony has been given by an eyewitness, and his testimony is true; he is telling what he knows to be true that you too may have faith.” John 21:20, 24 says the beloved disciple was the one who wrote these things: “This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true” (21:24). John the apostle is identified with the beloved disciple, i.e., the “one whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

Contemporary scholarship has questioned whether the apostle John is the author of the Gospel. There are three major reasons for this.<sup>8</sup> First, there are differences of Greek style throughout the Gospel. The Prologue and ch. 21 show a different style and vocabulary. Second, there are breaks and inconsistencies in the sequence of the narrative (John 5:1; 6:1; 14:31; 20:25). Third, there are repetitions in the discourses as well as passages that seem to be out place in the narrative.

Scholars have proposed solutions to these issues. The first is to postulate that material in John became accidentally displaced and by rearranging the text the Gospel could be restored to its consecutive order. Other scholars have postulated multiple sources wherein the evangelist composed none of the sources but received them. A third theory is that there was a basic body of the Gospel which underwent a complex editorial process involving several figures.

### The Beloved Disciple.

The beloved disciple of Jesus appears six times in the Gospel of John (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20, 24). John 19:35 and 21:24 state that the Gospel is based on the testimony of this disciple. Irenaeus is the first to state that the disciple wrote the Gospel, and the identification of the beloved disciple as John the evangelist and apostle received church acceptance. But who is the author, the so-called beloved disciples? If it is not the apostle John, then we can only conjecture.

### The “Two Johns.”

Eusebius quotes from Papias who seems to indicate there are two disciples named John. One is the Apostle John and the other is the Presbyter John.

He [Papias] says: ‘But I shall not hesitate also to put down for you along with my interpretations whatsoever things I have at any time learned carefully from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those that speak much, but in those that teach the truth; not in those that relate strange commandments, but in those that deliver the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and springing from the truth itself.

If, then, any one came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders— what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice.’

It is worthwhile observing here that the name John is twice enumerated by him. The first one he mentions in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the apostles,

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<sup>8</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ed. Francis J. Moloney; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 40-86; 189-215.



clearly meaning the number of the apostles, putting Aristion before him, and he distinctly calls him a presbyter.

This shows that the statement of those is true, who say that there were two persons in Asia that bore the same name, and that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which, even to the present day, is called John's. It is important to notice this. For it is probable that it was the second, if one is not willing to admit that it was the first that saw the Revelation, which is ascribed by name to John.

And Papias, of whom we are now speaking, confesses that he received the words of the apostles from those that followed them, but says that he was himself a hearer of Aristion and the presbyter John. At least he mentions them frequently by name and gives their traditions in his writings. These things, we hope, have not been uselessly adduced by us (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.3-7)

Eusebius seems to think the Presbyter John wrote the book of Revelation. Jerome accepts the view of Eusebius and thinks John the Presbyter wrote 2-3 John. Modern scholars have postulated that the Presbyter John wrote the fourth Gospel. This would indicate why there is some choppiness in the text (the presence of sources), as well as the account for the differences between the synoptic Gospels and the fourth Gospel.

Scholars are divided regarding the dating of the Gospel, and conjectures range from 80-120 AD.

ADDENDUM

Editio princeps

O'Callaghan

Spottorno

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