

- I. The Gospels are our essential source for the words and deeds of our savior, Jesus Christ.
- A. There are four canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
  - B. Other forms of ancient literature are given the terms Gospel, but they are different in significant ways, some of which are:
    1. They are all written much later than the canonical Gospels.
    2. The non-canonical works are often written in Coptic, rather than Greek. All of the canonical books in the New Testament are written in Greek.
    3. These non-canonical works usually exhibit a strong Gnostic or Docetic influence.
  - C. Although authorship of the four Gospels has been contested, church tradition has always supported Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as the authors. External and internal evidence strongly supports the traditional attribution. Furthermore, all of them have apostolic support for their account of the life and ministry of Jesus:
 

<b>Matthew:</b> apostle	<b>Mark:</b> Peter and Paul	<b>Luke:</b> Paul	<b>John:</b> apostle
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  - D. The Gospels are broken into two categories, which are established by themes, content, and structure:
    1. The first group is the Synoptic Gospels. This includes Matthew, Mark and Luke.
    2. The second category of the canonical Gospels is John.

- II. The Synoptic Gospels are united in essential purpose, as well as being linked thematically.
- A. The term “synoptic” comes from the Greek συνοψις, which means “to see together”.
  - B. The Synoptics all cover the same basic subject matter. They document many of the same events. Even some of the sayings of Jesus are shared between the Synoptics. The same wording and structure is even used in many cases.
    1. An example of passages in all three Synoptic Gospels:

**Matthew 19:13-15**

Then children were brought to Him that He might lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”

**Mark 10:13-16**

And they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant and said to them “Let the children come to Me and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall no enter it.” And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them.

**Luke 18:15-17**

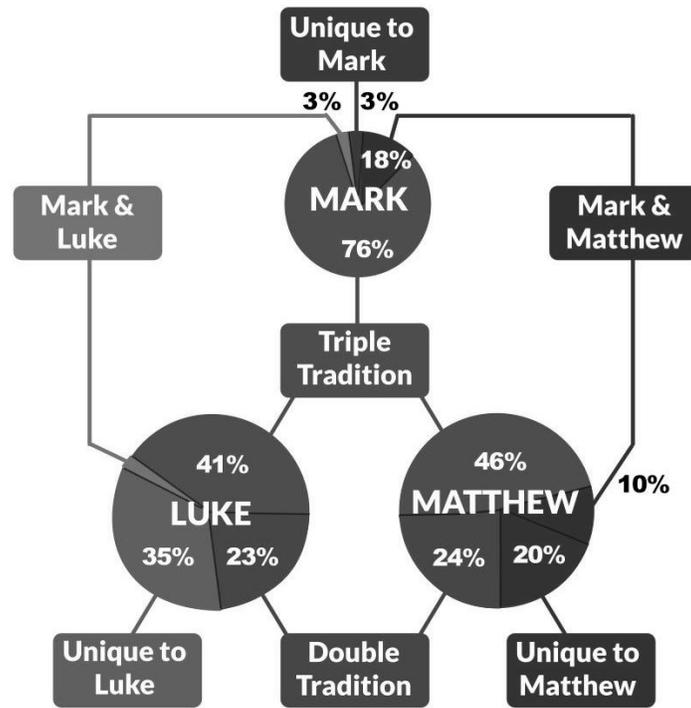
Now they were bringing even infants to Him that He might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him saying “Let the children come to Me and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it

2. A couple more examples are below. Note that these events are entirely absent in John.

<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>
4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13
8:2-3	1:40-42	5:12-13

- D. The agreement of the Synoptics runs deep. Several elements testify to their relationship.
1. They agree not just in wording, but in *Greek* wording. Remember, people generally spoke Aramaic.
  2. Not just the spoken words are in agreement. The recording of the actions also agrees.
  3. The similarities go past simple wording. The Synoptics also have a general agreement in order. Even more convincing, there are parenthetical references shared between the Gospels. See Matthew 9:6, Mark 2:10, Luke 5:24. Also of great importance is Matthew 24:15/Mark 13:14.
- E. There are common themes present throughout the Synoptic Gospels.
1. For example, the Kingdom of God is a consistent element of all three Gospels.
  2. This fits with the nature of the three Synoptics, which takes a more historical approach to their accounts. Their purpose is to present a witness to the life and work of Jesus Christ.
- F. While some material is shared between all three Synoptics, other parts of the life of Christ is shared between only two Gospels. Yet other portions are unique to a single Gospel.

1. Material that is present in all three of the Synoptic Gospels is known as the triple tradition.
2. Roughly a quarter of Luke and Matthew are shared only between those two Gospels. This is known as the double tradition.
3. Significant portions of both Matthew and Luke are unique to those books while very little is unique to Mark.



III. The Gospel of John presents a different perspective than the Synoptic Gospels as well as an account of Jesus' life and ministry that is absent from the other three Gospels. The purpose, themes and often the language are also different.

- A. There are however some important similarities. Among them are:
  1. Biographical in nature and written in Koine Greek. All four can also be dated to the first century.
  2. Some events are shared in all four Gospels. Among these are the work of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus and the Crucifixion.
- B. There are also a number of significant differences between John and the Synoptics.
  1. As noted, there is a large corpus of work that is present only in John. About 92% of John is unique to the Gospel of John. Conversely, there are many events and details in Synoptics that are omitted from John.
  2. John's Gospel has a "high Christology". There are significant passages that dwell on the divinity of Christ, His relationship to the Father and the fact that He is the Logos made flesh.
    - a. There are many examples. Consider the point at which each of the Gospels begins their narrative.
    - b. Due to the emphasis given to Christology, John is important to Trinitarian doctrine.
  3. The length of Jesus' ministry and the position of Jerusalem in the narrative are different.
    - a. The Synoptics portray roughly one year of Jesus' ministry while John has the ministry lasting a few years.
    - b. Only a single journey to Jerusalem documented in the Synoptics. John records several trips to Jerusalem.
  4. There are structural and stylistic differences between John and the Synoptics:
    - a. John conveys information through a primarily discursive format. He dialogues with people in order to communicate His point. Nicodemus, the woman at the well and the Farewell Discourse are examples of this. Contrast this style with the Sermon on the Mount (which is entirely absent from John).
    - b. In John, there are several dualistic statements. These are often uses of symbolism to make John's point known. For example, in John 2:25, He is referring to His body when He speaks of the temple.
    - c. Coupled with the use of symbolism, John also employs the device of the "misunderstood statement". Jesus told the Jews He would rebuild the temple in three days. Nicodemus misunderstood what it meant to be born again while the woman at the well misunderstood what Jesus meant by water.
    - d. John is also more reflective in his approach to his Gospel narrative. The synoptics are descriptive in nature. This is indicative of the John having been written later than the others. There is more understanding

of the importance of events after being able to reflect on them over the passage of time. John 2:17, 12:16 and 20:9 are all examples of this.

5. In addition to the Christological emphasis in John, there are other thematic differences from the Synoptics. One example of this is the focus of the Synoptics on the Kingdom of God. Likewise, this term is largely absent from John. Instead, John emphasizes the concept of eternal life.

	<u>Eternal Life</u>	<u>Kingdom of God</u>	<u>Total</u>
Matthew	7	55	62
Mark	4	20	24
Luke	5	46	51
John	36	5	41
Acts	8	8	16
Paul's letters	37	14	51
John's letters	13	0	13
Revelation	23	9	32

6. It is because of the depth and scope of John's theological development in his Gospel, Epistles and Revelation that he, alone of the Evangelists, is also called "the Theologian". The Synoptics are equally important to John, but they are different and recognizing that difference helps unlock the riches contained in each book.

IV. The similarities between the three synoptic Gospels demand investigation into how the three books came to be. This issue, regarding the dating, sources and interdependency of the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), is referred to as the Synoptic Problem.

A. The similarities go past simple wording. The Synoptics also have a general agreement in order. Even more convincing, there are parenthetical references that nearly preclude the possibility of their independent development.

B. Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars dissected the Bible along scholastic and literary lines. This project, known as Source Criticism, was done to the Old Testament (Documentary Hypothesis/JEDP) and the New Testament.

1. The result is a mixed bag. We can assess Scripture along critical lines and glean important facts from it, but it becomes important not to get lost in the weeds and lose perspective on what the Gospels are telling us.

2. Source Criticism gave rise to the Synoptic Problem.

C. The so-called "problem" arises out of the recognition that there is a significant interrelationship in both content and wording of the Synoptic Gospels.

1. Matthew and Luke share 76% of Mark's Gospel. A further 18% is shared with Matthew.

2. Matthew and Luke, while sharing significant portions with Mark, also have 23-25% uniquely in common.

3. Matthew and Luke both have substantial portions unique to their Gospels (20%/35% respectively) while only 3% of Mark is unique.

4. The content shared by all three is known as the "Triple Tradition" while the content shared by Matthew and Luke is known as the "Double Tradition".

D. Several questions flow from this examination of the Synoptic Gospels. Some are:

1. Which Gospel was written first?

2. Why does Mark, the shortest of the Gospels, share so much with Matthew and Luke?

3. Why do Matthew and Luke share significant portions that are absent from Mark?

4. How does the priority of Gospel authorship effect our understanding of the dates around which they were written?

V. There are three primary answers to the Synoptic Problem:

A. The most commonly accepted view is associated with Markan Priority.

1. It acknowledges Mark as having been written first.

2. Mark is then recognized as one of two primary sources for both Matthew and Luke.

3. A second, hypothetical and lost document, usually called "Q" is theorized as being a source for the common material shared by Matthew and Luke.

B. Some scholars accept the "Two-Gospel" view.

1. This view recognizes Matthean Priority, affirming the teaching of the Church Fathers.
  2. Luke used Matthew as a source and then Mark redacted both into a shorter condensation.
- C. The least common view accepted by scholars is the Independence View. This asserts that there was no literary dependence between the three Synoptic Gospels.
1. It is the oldest and most consistently accepted view, though it is now rarely claimed.
  2. This is often the most widely held view in churches.

VI. For the purposes of this class, we are going to focus on the first view, which the bulk of the evidence supports as the likeliest (indeed, largely negates the other options as possibilities) option among the three. In Robert Stein’s excellent book “An Introduction To The Synoptic Problem” several factors are put forward in support of Markan priority (the position that Mark was written first).

A. The brevity of Mark argues in favor of its priority among the Synoptics. If Mark utilized Matthew and Luke, why was so much significant material omitted from his account? It is much more likely that Matthew and Luke built on Mark, adding detail to his narrative.

Note the word count in the three Synoptic Gospels:

	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>
verses	1,068	661	1,149
words	18,293	11,025	19,376

B. The writing style in Mark offers significant evidence for its priority among the Synoptics. There are three significant categories for this:

1. Mark uses rough colloquialisms and bad grammar.
2. There are several Aramaic expressions in Mark.
3. Mark has several redundant statements that are eliminated in Matthew and Luke.

C. In Mark’s Gospel, there are several harder readings that are smoothed out in Matthew and Luke.

D. The lack of agreement in Matthew and Luke that conflicts with Mark.

E. The lack of agreement in Matthew and Luke in terms of order:

1. When all three Synoptics share a pericopae, Matthew and Luke agree in the order of the pericopae’s placement.
2. When Matthew and Luke depart from Mark’s arrangement of pericopae, they never agree in placement.

F. There is strong evidence that Matthew and Luke redacted Mark.

1. One example of this is Matthew’s theme demonstrating Jesus is the culmination of the Old Testament. He uses the term “Son of David” several times while Mark and Luke use it sparingly. Furthermore, Matthew’s fulfillment formulae are entirely missing from Mark and Luke. If Matthew was written first, it is difficult to explain why the other two Synoptic authors would omit this material.
2. Another example of redaction is the presence of the historical present tense in Mark (151 times) and Matthew (78 times) while it is almost never used in Luke (9 times). Luke edited the documents in front of him and used the more literarily appropriate past tense.

G. Mark has a somewhat more primitive theology. This is notably manifest in the use of the term Lord in Matthew and Luke in place of Rabbi in Mark. The term for respected teacher has been replaced by one that indicated divinity.

VII. The solution to the problem lies in the recognition that there is middle ground between the three views.

A. These are accounts based on eyewitness accounts.

B. Different centers of tradition within the early church coalesced around the Apostles and were the centers of the Gospel traditions that spread around the Roman Empire. Cross-pollination is certainly possible in this context.

C. Whichever Gospel came first, the fundamental issues of their veracity and life and work of Jesus Christ is unchanged.