The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic = true, Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar wording. These works are recorded by eye-witnesses who saw the events and thus had very similar accounts. The true synoptic gospels profess Jesus as a teacher and ‘A’ way to heaven.

Mark is written approximately 40 years after Jesus’s death. Matthew and Luke some 20 years later. And the similarities and the timelines show an eyewitness accounting.

They stand in contrast to John, whose content is comparatively distinct. John is obviously and historically written by someone who was not there. Jesus cuts off the ear of a Roman in John. There are massive miracles not accounted for in other gospels. And in John we see Jesus presented as a God and as ‘THE’ way to heaven.

There was no law or even conception of plagiarism or copyright, and it was the fashion to use the name of another person you liked as the author as a way to show tribute to the other person. There are hundreds of people using Solomon’s name as a tribute to books.

John was written 100 years after Jesus’s death and clearly not an eyewitness account. John the author of John, was not the apostle john but was a different person pretending to be John as a tribute. So historians said that Mark, Matthew and Luke were the true synoptic gospels.

It is clear that John, Acts, Revelations were all written to help Constantine promote the Christian religion. And as Constantine said “I am an Emperor, I cannot pray to a Man, I can pray to a GOD”. Constantine also wanted to have Christianity more male to counter the goddess religion in Rome. So the works of Mary Magdalene and her relationship to Jesus had to be covered up. Reducing the teachings of Jesus and sensationalizing the story of his God abilities was used to promote Christianity as a religion, but this watered down the social impact of the teachings.

In the original Mark there is no account of Jesus’s immaculate conception, and also no account of his rising on Easter Sunday. Interesting concepts to not write about, unless they did not happen as John portrays them. In original Matthew he writes that on Easter Jesus appears only to Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James. They account of it as if a spirit was there. Luke then tells that later Jesus walked with the apostles, but they could not recognize Jesus. Luke tells a story of a gradual almost group hypnotic recognition that it is Jesus. Only in made up JOHN do we see more.

The church has added and modified the ends of these Gospels to fit their idea of the ending.

The term synoptic (Latin: synopticus; Ancient Greek: συνοπτικός synoptikos) comes via Latin from the Greek σύνοψις synopsis, i.e. "(a) seeing all together, synopsis"[6][7] the sense of the word in English, the one specifically applied to these three Gospels, of “giving an account of the events from the same point of view or under the same general aspect” is a modern one.[8]

The calming of the storm is similarly recounted in each of the three synoptic gospels, but not in John.

This strong parallelism among the three gospels in content, arrangement, and specific language is widely attributed to literary interdependence.[9] The question of the precise nature of their literary relationship—the "synoptic problem"—has been a topic of lively debate for centuries and has been described as "the most fascinating literary enigma of all time".[10] The longstanding majority view favors Marcan priority, in which both Matthew and Luke have made direct use of the Gospel of Mark as a source, and further holds that Matthew and Luke also drew from an additional hypothetical document, called Q.[11]
Almost all of Mark’s content is found in Matthew, and much of Mark is similarly found in Luke. Additionally, Matthew and Luke have a large amount of material in common that is not found in Mark.

**Common features**

Broadly speaking, the synoptic gospels are similar to John: all are composed in Koine Greek, have a similar length, and were completed within a century of Jesus’ death. And they differ from non-canonical sources, such as the Gospel of Thomas, in that they belong to the ancient genre of biography, collecting not only Jesus’ teachings, but recounting in an orderly way his origins, his ministry and miracles, and his passion and resurrection.

In content and in wording, though, the synoptics diverge widely from John but have a great deal in common with each other. Though each gospel includes some unique material, the majority of Mark and roughly half of Matthew and Luke coincide in content, in much the same sequence, often nearly verbatim. This common material is termed the *triple tradition*.

**The triple tradition**

The triple tradition, the material included by all three synoptic gospels, includes many stories and teachings:

- John the Baptist
- Baptism and temptation of Jesus
First disciples of Jesus
Hometown rejection of Jesus
Healing of Peter's mother-in-law, demoniacs, aleper, and a paralytic
Call of the tax collector
New Wine into Old Wineskins
Man with withered Hand
Commissioning the twelve Apostles
The Beelzebul controversy
Teachings on the parable of the strong man, eternal sin, His true relatives, the parable of the sower, the lamp under a bushel, and the parable of the mustard seed
Calming the storm
The Gerasene demoniac
The daughter of Jairus and the bleeding woman
Feeding the 5000
Confession of Peter
Transfiguration
The demoniac boy
The little children
The rich young man
Jesus predicts his death
Blind near Jericho
Palm Sunday
Casting out the money changers
Render unto Caesar
Woes of the Pharisees
Second Coming Prophecy
The Last Supper, passion, crucifixion, and entombment
The empty tomb and resurrected Jesus
Great Commission

Furthermore, the triple tradition's pericopaee (passages) tend to be arranged in much the same order in all three gospels. This stands in contrast to the material found in only two of the gospels, which is much more variable in order.[7][8]

The classification of text as belonging to the triple tradition (or for that matter, double tradition) is not always definitive, depending rather on the degree of similarity demanded. For example, Matthew and Mark report the cursing of the fig tree[14:21:18–22][11:13–24], clearly a single incident, despite some substantial differences of wording and content. Searching Luke, however, we find only the parable of the barren fig tree[13:6–9] in a different point of the narrative. Some would say that Luke has extensively adapted an element of the triple tradition, while others would regard it as a distinct pericope.
Christ cleansing a leper by Jean-Marie Melchior Doze, 1864.

An illustrative example of the three texts in parallel is the healing of the leper:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mt 8:2–3</th>
<th>Mk 1:40–42</th>
<th>Lk 5:12–13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Καὶ ἱδοῦ, λεπρός προσέλθὼν προσεκύνει αὐτῷ λέγων: Κύριε, ἐὰν θέλῃς δύνασαι με καθαρίσαι. καὶ ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα ἥψατο αὐτοῦ λέγων: Θέλω, καθαρίσθητι καὶ εὐθέας. ἐκαθαρίσθη αὐτῷ ἡ λέπρα.</td>
<td>Καὶ ἔρχεται πρὸς αὐτὸν λεπρός παρακάλειν αὐτὸν καὶ γονυπετῶν καὶ λέγων αὐτῷ ὅτι Ἐὰν θέλῃς δύνασαι με καθαρίσαι. καὶ σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα ἥψατο καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ: Θέλω, καθαρίσθητι καὶ εὐθέας. ἐκαθαρίσθη αὐτῷ ἡ λέπρα.</td>
<td>Καὶ ἱδοῦ, ἀνὴρ πλήρης λέπρας· ἰδὼν δὲ τὸν Ἰησοῦν πεσὼν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον ἔδειχθη αὐτῷ λέγων: Κύριε, ἐὰν θέλῃς δύνασαι με καθαρίσαι. καὶ ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα ἥψατο καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Ἐὰν θέλῃς δύνασαι με καθαρίσαι. καὶ σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα ἥψατο καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Θέλω, καθαρίσθητι καὶ εὐθέας. ἐκαθαρίσθη αὐτῷ ἡ λέπρα.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And behold, a leper came and worships him, saying: And, calling out to him, there comes to him a leper and kneeling and saying to him: And behold, a man full of leprosy. But, upon seeing Jesus, he fell upon his face and requested him, saying:
Lord, if you wish, I can be cleansed.
And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying:
I wish it; be cleansed.
And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

If you wish, I can be cleansed.
And, moved with compassion, he stretched out his hand and touched him and says to him:
I wish it; be cleansed.
And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

Lord, if you wish, I can be cleansed.
And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying:
I wish it; be cleansed.
And immediately the leprosy left him.

More than half the wording in this passage is identical. Just as interesting, though, is that each gospel includes words absent in the other two and omits something included by the other two.

**Relation to Mark**

It has been observed that the triple tradition itself constitutes a complete gospel quite similar to the shortest gospel, Mark.\(^\text{[11]}\)

Mark, unlike Matthew and Luke, adds relatively little to the triple tradition. Pericopae unique to Mark are scarce, notably two healings involving saliva\([Mk 7:33–36; 8:22–26]\) and the naked runaway\([Mk 14:51–52]\). Mark's additions within the triple tradition tend to be explanatory elaborations (e.g., "the stone was rolled back, for it was very large\([Mk 16:4]\)" or Aramaisms (e.g., "Talitha kum!\([Mk 5:41]\)"). The pericopae Mark shares with only Luke are also quite few: the Capernaum exorcism\([Mk 1:23–28][Lk 4:33–37]\) and departure from Capernaum\([Mk 6:5–8][Lk 4:41–44]\), the strange exorcist\([Mk 9:38–41][Lk 9:39–50]\), and the widow's mites\([Mk 12:41–44][Lk 21:1–4]\). A greater number, but still not many, are shared with only Matthew, most notably the so-called "Great Omission"\(^\text{[10]}\) from Luke of \(Mk 6:45–8:26\).

Most scholars take these observations as a strong clue to the literary relationship among the synoptics and Mark's special place in that relationship.\(^\text{[13]}\) The hypothesis favored by most experts is Marcan priority, that Mark was composed first and that Matthew and Luke each used Mark and incorporated most of it, with adaptations, into their own gospels. A leading alternative hypothesis is Marcan posteriority, that Mark was formed primarily by extracting what Matthew and Luke shared in common.\(^\text{[12]}\)
The double tradition

The preaching of John the Baptist in Matthew and Luke, with differences rendered in black. Here the two texts agree verbatim, with an isolated exception, for a span of over sixty words. Mark has no parallel.

An extensive set of material—some two hundred verses or roughly half the length of the triple tradition—are the pericopae shared between Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark. This is termed the double tradition. Parables and other sayings predominate in the double tradition, but it also includes narrative elements:

- Preaching of John the Baptist
- Temptation of Jesus (which Mark summarizes in two verses)
- The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) or Plain (Luke)
- The Centurion's servant
- Messengers from John the Baptist
- Woes to the unrepentant cities
- Jesus thanks His Father
- Return of the unclean spirit
- Parables of the leaven, the lost sheep, the great banquet, the talents, and the faithful servant
- Discourse against the scribes and Pharisees
- Lament over Jerusalem

Unlike triple-tradition material, double-tradition material is very differently arranged in the two gospels. Matthew's lengthy Sermon on the Mount, for example, is paralleled by Luke's shorter Sermon on the Plain, with the remainder of its content scattered throughout Luke. This is consistent with the general pattern of Matthew collecting sayings into large blocks, while Luke does the opposite and intersperses them with narrative.

Besides the double-tradition proper, Matthew and Luke often agree against Mark within the triple tradition to varying extents, sometimes including several additional verses, sometimes differing by a single word. These are termed the major and minor agreements (the distinction is imprecise). One example is in the passion narrative, where Mark has simply, "Prophesy!" while Matthew and Luke both add, "Who is it that struck you?"
The double-tradition's origin, with its major and minor agreements, is a key facet of the synoptic problem. The simplest hypothesis is that Luke relied on Matthew's work or vice versa. But many experts, on various grounds, maintain that neither Matthew nor Luke used the other's work. If this is the case, they must have drawn from some common source, distinct from Mark, that provided the double-tradition material and overlapped with Mark's content where major agreements occur. This hypothetical document is termed Q, for the German Quelle, meaning "source".

Special Matthew and Special Luke

Matthew and Luke contain a large amount of material found in no other gospel. These materials are sometimes called Special Matthew or M and Special Luke or L.

Both Special Matthew and Special Luke include distinct opening infancy narratives and distinct post-resurrection conclusions (with Luke continuing the story in his second book Acts). In between, Special Matthew includes mostly parables, while Special Luke includes both parables and healings. Special Luke is notable for containing a greater concentration of Semitisms than any other gospel material.

Luke gives some indication of how he composed his gospel in his prologue:

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

The synoptic problem

The "synoptic problem" is the question of the specific literary relationship among the three synoptic gospels—that is, the question as to the source upon which gospel depended when it was written.

The texts of the three synoptic gospels often agree very closely in wording and order, both in quotations and in narration. Most scholars ascribe this to documentary dependence, direct or indirect, meaning the close agreements among synoptic gospels are due to one gospel's drawing from the text of another, or from some written source that gospel also drew from.

Controversies

The synoptic problem hinges on several interrelated points of controversy:

- **Priority**: Which gospel was written first? (Clearly, where one text draws from another, the source must have been composed first.)
- **Successive dependence**: Did each of the synoptic gospels draw from each of its predecessors? (If not, clearly the frequent agreements between the two independent gospels against the third must originate elsewhere.)
- **Lost written sources**: Did any of the gospels draw from some earlier document that has not been preserved (e.g., the hypothetical "Q", or an earlier edition of another gospel)?
- **Oral sources**: To what extent did each evangelist draw from personal knowledge, eyewitness accounts, liturgy, or other oral traditions to produce an original written account?
- **Translation**: Jesus and others quoted in the gospels spoke primarily in Aramaic, but the gospels themselves are each written in Greek. Who performed the translation, and at what point?
- **Redaction**: How and why did those who put the gospels in their final form expand, abridge, alter, or rearrange their sources?
Furthermore, some theories try to explain the relation of the synoptic gospels to John; to non-canonical gospels such as Thomas, Peter, and Egerton; to the Didache; and to lost documents such as the Hebrew logia mentioned by Papias, the Jewish–Christian gospels, and the Gospel of Marcion.

**History**

A page of Griesbach’s *Synopsis Evangeliorum*, in which the texts of the synoptic gospels are arranged in columns.

Ancient sources are virtually unanimous in ascribing the synoptic gospels to, respectively, the apostle Matthew, Peter’s interpreter Mark, and Paul’s companion Luke, hence their canonical names. A remark by Augustine at the turn of the fifth century presents the gospels as composed in their canonical order (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), with each evangelist thoughtfully building upon and supplementing the work of his predecessors—the Augustinian hypothesis (Matthew–Mark).

This view (when any model of dependence was considered at all) was seldom questioned until the late eighteenth century, when Johann Jakob Griesbach published a synopsis of the gospels. Instead of harmonizing them, he displayed them side by side, making both similarities and divergences apparent. Griesbach, noticing the special place of Mark in the synopsis, hypothesized Marcan posteriority and advanced (as Henry Owen had a few years earlier) the two-gospel hypothesis (Matthew–Mark).

In the nineteenth century, the tools of literary criticism were applied to the synoptic problem in earnest, especially in German scholarship. Early work revolved around a hypothetical protogospel (Ur-Gospel), possibly in Aramaic, underlying the synoptics. From this line of inquiry, however, a consensus emerged that Mark itself was the principal source for the other two gospels—Marcan priority.

In a theory first proposed by Weisse in 1838, the double tradition was explained by Matthew and Luke independently using two sources—thus, the two-source (Mark-Q) theory—which were
Mark and another hypothetical source consisting mostly of sayings. This additional source was at first seen as the *logia* (sayings) spoken of by Papias and thus called "Λ", but later it became more generally known as "Q", from the German *Quelle*, meaning *source*. This two-source theory eventually won wide acceptance and was seldom questioned until the late twentieth century; most scholars simply took this new orthodoxy for granted and directed their efforts toward Q itself, and this is still largely the case.

The theory is also well known in a more elaborate form set forth by Streeter in 1924, which additionally hypothesized written sources "M" and "L" for Special Matthew and Special Luke, respectively—hence, the influential *four-document hypothesis*. This exemplifies the prevailing scholarship of the time, in which the canonical gospels were seen as late products, from well into the second century, composed by unsophisticated cut-and-paste redactors out of a progression of written sources, derived in turn from oral traditions and folklore that had evolved in various communities. More recently, however, as this view has gradually fallen into disfavor, so too has the centrality of documentary interdependence and hypothetical documentary sources as an explanation for all aspects of the synoptic problem.

In recent decades, weaknesses of the two-source theory have been more widely recognized, and debate has reignited. Many have independently argued that Luke did make some use of Matthew after all—the *three-source hypothesis*. British scholars went further and dispensed with Q entirely, ascribing the double tradition to Luke's direct use of Matthew—the *Farrer hypothesis* (Mark–Matthew), now a leading challenger. Meanwhile, the Augustinian hypothesis has also made a comeback, especially in American scholarship. The *Jerusalem school hypothesis* has also attracted fresh advocates, as has the *Independence hypothesis*, which denies documentary relationships altogether.

On this collapse of consensus, Wenham observed: "I found myself in the Synoptic Problem Seminar of the Society for New Testament Studies, whose members were in disagreement over every aspect of the subject. When this international group disbanded in 1982 they had sadly to confess that after twelve years' work they had not reached a common mind on a single issue."[28]

### Theories

Nearly every conceivable theory has been advanced as a solution to the synoptic problem. The most notable theories are listed here (for details of each, including variants, see the respective articles):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Diagram</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marcan</td>
<td>Two-source (Mark-Q)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>Most widely accepted theory, a Greek</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Farrer (Mark-Matthew)**


**Three-source (Mark-Q/Matthew)**

A hybrid of Two-source and Farrer. Q may be limited to sayings, may be in Aramaic, may be also a source for Mark.

**Q+/Papias Hypothesis (Mark-Q/Matthew)**

Each document drew from each of its predecessors, including Logoi (Q+) and Papias’ Exposition.

Mark primarily has collected what Matthew and Luke share in common (Marcan posteriority).

The oldest known view, still advocated by some, with composition in canonical order.

Mark's special place is neither priority nor posteriority, but as the intermediate between the other two gospels.
A Greek anthology (A), translated literally from a Hebrew original, was used by each gospel. Luke also drew from an earlier lost gospel, a reconstruction (R) of the life of Jesus reconciling the anthology with yet another narrative work. Matthew has not used Luke directly.

Each gospel drew from a different combination of hypothetical earlier documents.

The gospels each independently derive from a common proto-gospel (Ur-Gospel), possibly in Hebrew or Aramaic.
Independence

Each gospel is an independent and original composition based upon oral history.

See also

- Aramaic primacy
- Authorship of the Gospels
- Biblical criticism
- Gospel harmony
- List of key episodes in the Canonical Gospels
- Source criticism

Notes and references

Notes

1. Both Greek words, synoptikos and synopsis, derive from σύν συν (prep.), meaning "together, with", and etymologically related words pertaining to sight, vision, appearance, i.e. ὀπτικός optikos (adj.; cf. English optic), meaning "of or for sight", and ὀψις opsis (n.), meaning "appearance, sight, vision, view".))[1]

References

30. Though eponymous and some haphazard structural names are prevalent in the literature, a systematic structural nomenclature is advocated by Carlson and Smith, and these names are also provided.

The Synoptic Gospels

Some Similarities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Luke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Birth of Jesus (Nativity)</td>
<td>Jesus was born in Bethlehem and his mother was Mary. His dad was called Joseph.</td>
<td>Doesn't mention the Birth of Jesus at all.</td>
<td>Jesus was born in Bethlehem and his mother was Mary. His dad was called Joseph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Ancestors</td>
<td>Provided a list of Jesus ancestors, going back to Abraham.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Provides a list of Jesus ancestors going back through Abraham to Adam; the first man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism of Jesus</td>
<td>Jesus baptised by John and the spirit of God comes down on him in the form of a dove. God says 'you are my beloved son and I am well pleased'.</td>
<td>Jesus baptised by John and the spirit of God comes down on him in the form of a dove. God says 'you are my beloved son and I am well pleased'.</td>
<td>Jesus baptised by John and the spirit of God comes down on him in the form of a dove. God says 'you are my beloved son and I am well pleased'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Temptations</td>
<td>Jesus spends a long time in the wilderness and is tempted by the devil. He resists Satan's offers.</td>
<td>Jesus spends a long time in the wilderness and is tempted by the devil. He resists Satan's offers.</td>
<td>Jesus spends a long time in the wilderness and is tempted by the devil. He resists Satan's offers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracles</td>
<td>Jesus performs many miracles, including Healing a leper and a centurion's servant, Calming a storm, resurrecting Lazarus' daughter and casting demons of someone who can't speak.</td>
<td>Jesus performs many miracles, including Healing a leper, Calming a storm and resurrecting Lazarus' daughter.</td>
<td>Jesus performs many miracles, including Healing a leper, Calming a storm and resurrecting Lazarus' daughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking on Water</td>
<td>Jesus walks across the water to his disciples in a boat. They are amazed and won't believe it. Simon Peter gets out of the boat and walks on water too.</td>
<td>Jesus walks across the water to his disciples in a boat.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crucifixion</td>
<td>Jesus is crucified. His last words are 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'.</td>
<td>Jesus is crucified. His last words are 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'.</td>
<td>Jesus is crucified. His last words are 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurrection</td>
<td>When the disciples return to the tomb there is an angel who tells them that Jesus is raised from the dead. In the original Mark's gospel it ends when they enter an empty tomb. A man tells them Jesus is gone.</td>
<td>When the disciples return to the tomb they find it empty. They then meet two men outside in shiny clothes who tell them Jesus is raised.</td>
<td>When the disciples return to the tomb they find it empty. They then meet two men outside in shiny clothes who tell them Jesus is raised.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>