

Getting the Big Picture of the Bible:

Do we recognize these?

The Gospels

Pastor Michael Wallace
March 10, 2019



Mark

Matthew

John

Luke

- Epistles vs. Gospels & Internal vs. External Chronology (thanks, Carl!)

Outline of today's class

- Tracing the evolution of *evangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον), 'gospel'
- How to understand the genre of the gospels
- Case study on the "Synoptic problem"
- Homework: Read through the Gospel of Mark—2-3 chapters/day

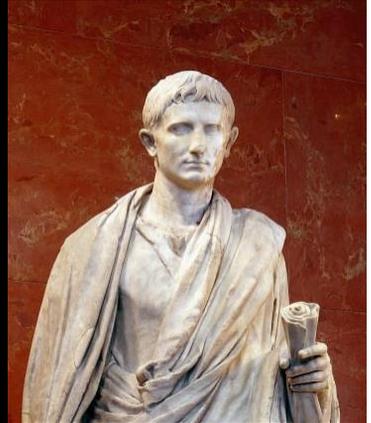


Εὐαγγέλιον (stage 1—Pre-Christian)

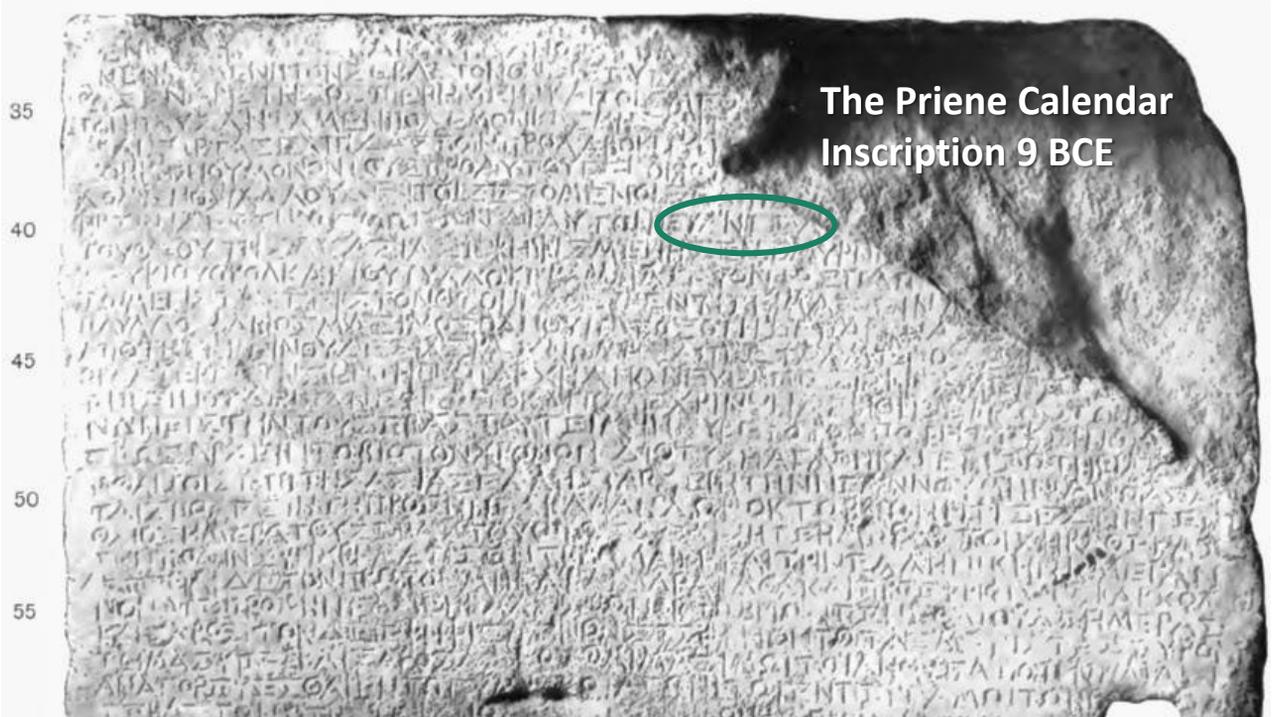
“David said ‘...when the one who told me, ‘See, Saul is dead,’ thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him” (2 Sam 4:10 LXX)

“Around the time of Jesus this Greek word was often used to refer to the announcement of ‘good tidings,’ especially that a new emperor had been born or ascended to the throne.”

An inscription from around 9 BCE, declared that the birth of the emperor Augustus “marked for the world the beginning of good tidings through his coming”



(Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 3)



Εύαγγέλιον (stage 2a—start of Jesus' ministry)

- Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. (Matt 4:23)

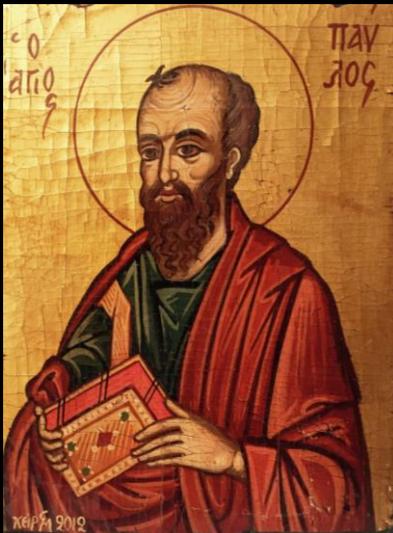


Εύαγγέλιον (stage 2b—post-resurrection)

- [Following the resurrection, Jesus said to the eleven] and said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15)



Εύαγγέλιον (stage 3—kerygma/ mission/ Pauline)



As the Apostles and disciples heeded Jesus' command to go to all the nations, they needed to give the whole story of what God was doing in and through Jesus.

This was especially true for the Gentiles, who may have not been acquainted with the Hebrew Bible.

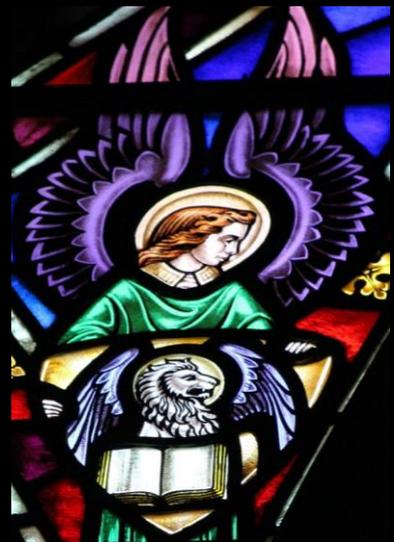
“consistently throughout the NT Epistles the ‘gospel’ refers to *the oral proclamation about Jesus the Christ...* who he was; what he accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection; the promise of his future return to establish God’s reign; and the concomitant call to repent and have faith. (Pennington, 5)

Εύαγγέλιον (stage 4—Oral → Written)

- Oral traditions abounded—the message of Jesus was well known
- Time, death, and loss of memory necessitated a written rendering of what was once simply oral
- Given the importance of these stories, and that they were the lifeblood of these communities, any written account would have to be accepted as trustworthy from the early church. It resonated with their memories.
- However, in Galatians 1:8-9, the apostle Paul “pronounced a double anathema on anyone (even an angel) who tried to supplement the one true gospel with another. What would Paul have made of the suggestion that there are, or should be, four gospels?” (Watson, 2)

Εύαγγέλιον (stage 4—Oral → Written)

- The beginning of the **good news** of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)
- What is this good news?
- A systematic recapitulation of the stories of Jesus’ life, particularly from baptism through resurrection, including: healing stories, sermons, parables, etc.



Εὐαγγέλιον (stage 4—Oral → Written)

Regarding the Evangelists' Names, originally these documents were unsigned and didn't have clear attributions. In the post-Apostolic age, they weren't named at first, but just called the "gospel of our Lord". For example, the Didache has:

- "Do not pray like the hypocrites, but, as the Lord commanded *in his gospel*, pray like this: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed by thy name..."
- "Your prayers and alms and all your acts, perform just as you have them *in the gospel of our Lord*."

Responding to this, Watson writes, "The 'gospel' here is clearly a written text rather than an oral tradition, and that written text is equally clearly Matthew. Or rather, it is the text we call 'Matthew' but which the Didachist knows as 'The Gospel of Our Lord,' the authoritative text to which 'The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles' must defer. If the Lord commanded something, then is it unimportant to know the name of the scribe who recorded it" (Watson, 13-14)

Εὐαγγέλιον (stage 4—Oral → Written)

"What makes the names necessary is the construction of the canonical boundary. A line is drawn around certain text that definitively separates them from other similar texts. To draw the line at all, the texts it encloses must be identifiable. That is why the first full set of evangelists' names—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—appears at precisely the moment when it is first claimed that the church must acknowledge just four gospels. The key figure here is Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. Around 180 CE, Irenaeus wrote:

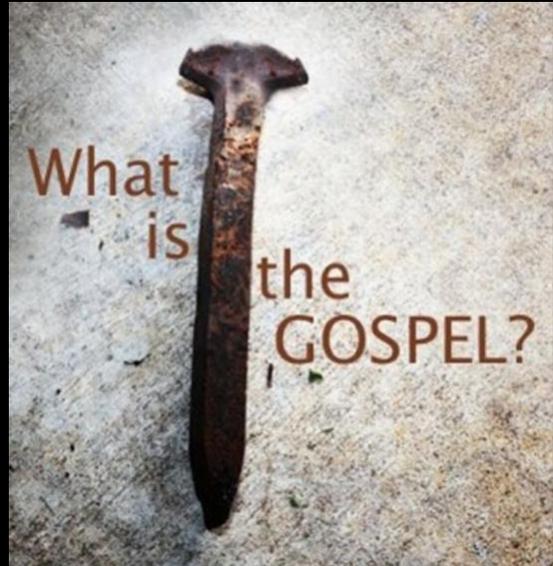
- Matthew, among the Hebrews and in their own language, produced a written account of the gospel, while Peter and Paul were in Rome evangelizing and founding the church. After their departure Mark also, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed down to us in written form what was preached by Peter. And Luke, the followed of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by him. Then John the disciple of the Lord, who reclined upon his breast, published a gospel while living in Ephesus in Asia.

With four names evangelists securely installed, Irenaeus can claim that "it is not possible for the gospels to be either more or fewer in number than they are," and that Christ the divine Word has bestowed on his church a fourfold gospel, a *euaggelion tetramorphon*. (Watson, 15)

- Matthew and John—Apostolic witnesses
- Mark and Luke—Post-Apostolic witnesses

Εύαγγέλιον (stage 5—reductionist, evangelical)

- Believing that Jesus died, your sins can be forgiven and you can be saved.
- Does this reductionist, modern understanding capture the whole of what Εύαγγέλιον means?

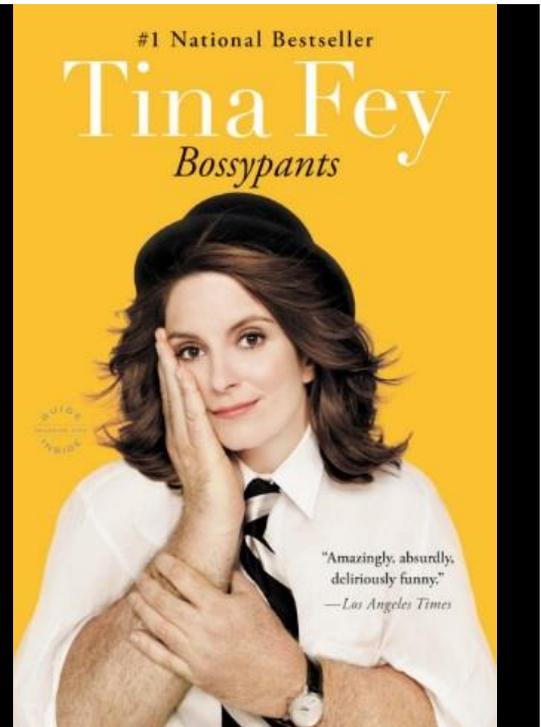


Εύαγγέλιον Summary

| Stage 1 Pre-Christian | Stage 2 During Jesus' life | Stage 3 Paul's usage | Stage 4 Patristic Usage | Stage 5 Modern Evangelical Usage |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Any type of good news or announcements referring to the birth of important politicians | The breaking in of the Kingdom of God | The <u>oral</u> story about Jesus (plus the breaking in of the Kingdom of God) | Primarily the four <u>written</u> accounts of the life of Jesus (plus the oral story and the breaking in of the Kingdom of God) | Believing that Jesus died, your sins can be forgiven and you can be saved. |

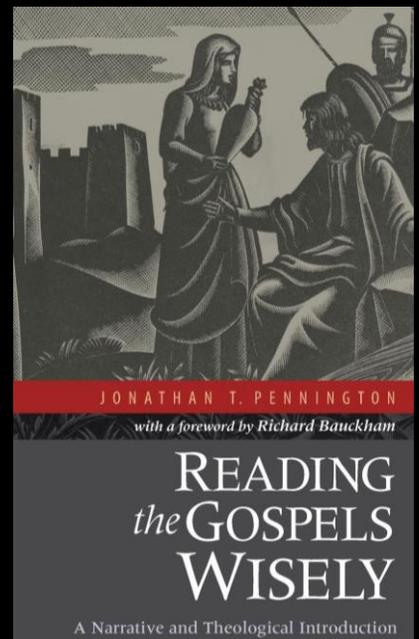
Reading the Gospels

As a genre, the Gospels are hard to classify. We may want to think of them as biographies, but that's not quite correct. When you think of a biography, what might you expect?



Genre

- Since the Gospels don't necessarily share these same elements, we must understand them differently.
- The Gospels are most like biographies, but ancient ones (called *bioi*) and not modern ones. With this distinction in hand, we can allow for greater flexibility in chronology and understand structure around topics and themes.
- "Ancient historians did not fool themselves as modern ones often have by proclaiming their disinterested objectivity to present things simply 'as they happened' ... Ancient biographers and historians valued interested, involved witnesses and consciously wrote for polemical, apologetic, and hortatory reasons." (Pennington, 33)



Genre

- “ancient biographies, such as the Gospels, very consciously present their character *as one to be emulated*... [the Gospels] are written so that people will desire to follow the model of the main character. Any interpretation of the Gospels that neglects this aspect is missing a major function of the genre...
- “we should come to the Gospel narratives as we do to a sermon; they are to be treated not as mere conveyors of (historical or doctrinal) information but as instruments of transformation...
- “Augustine famously claimed that unless our reading results in greater love for God and neighbor we have not truly understood the Scriptures...
- “Hengel remarks, “From the beginning the proclamation of Jesus Christ and narratives about him were inseparably associated. One could not ‘preach’ Jesus as the crucified Messiah and the Son of God who has been raised...without telling his story.” (Pennington, 34)

Genre

“Our canonical Gospels are the

- *theological,*
- *historical, and*
- *aretological (virtue-forming)*

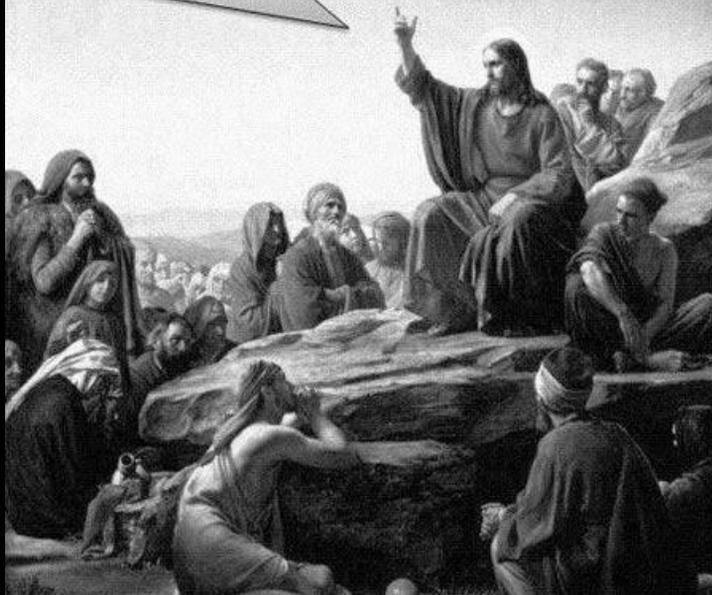
biographical narratives that retell the story and proclaim the significance of Jesus Christ, who through the power of the Spirit is the Restorer of God’s reign.”
(Pennington, 35)



Case study in the Synoptic Gospels

- Fee and Stuart suggest that we can read the gospels *vertically* (each individually) or *horizontally* (comparing them all). Each method teaches us something new about how to read and understand the Gospels.
- Upon starting to read horizontally (across the four), one recognizes that the first three are *very* similar, but have some major differences. Because they look “with the same eye,” they are called the Synoptic Gospels. John diverges most from the other three and is not included in this grouping.
- John is the fourth gospel because of its difference from the other three. While it is true that all four gospels are distinctive and tell the same story in different ways, the distance separating John from the others is considerable. Over again this text, Matthew, Mark, and Luke for a coherent group of “synoptic” gospels. The fourfold gospel has a three-plus-one structure... (Watson, 86)

Okay everyone, now listen carefully.
I don't want to end up with 4 different versions of this!

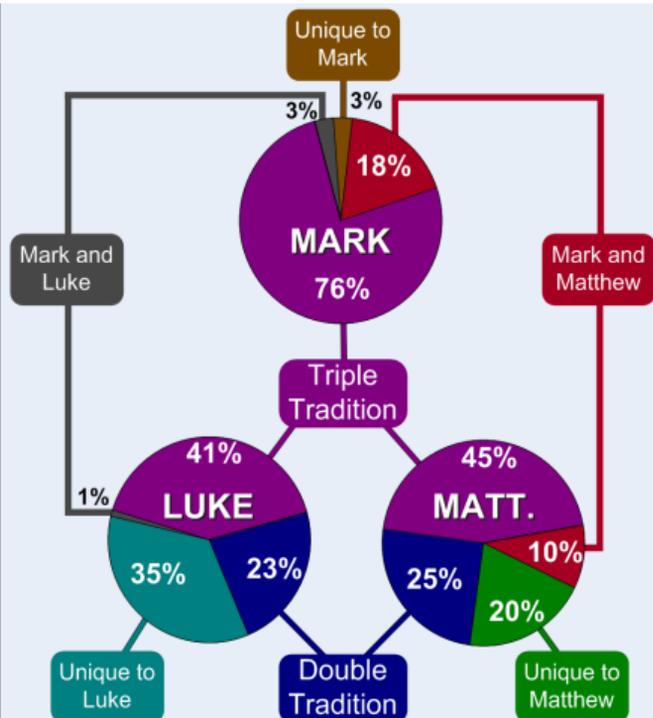


**"MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE, SEE ME
AFTER CLASS."**

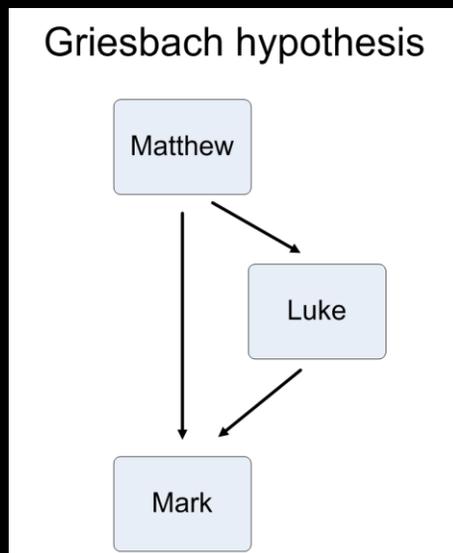


**"YOUR BOOK REPORTS ARE SURPRISINGLY
SIMILAR."**

Relationship between the Synoptic Gospels



Griesbach hypothesis



This older theory, that was accepted for generations, proposes

- Matthean priority (that Matthew was written first)
- Luke came second
- Markan Posteriority (Mark was written last) and summarized or abridged the previous two

Case Study #1: A Girl Restored to Life

| Matt 9:25b | Mark 5:41 | Luke 8:54 |
|--|---|---|
| [Jesus] went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. | [Jesus] took her by the hand and said to her, " Talitha cum, " which means, "Little girl, get up!" | But [Jesus] took her by the hand and called out, "Child, get up!" |

Consider: In parallel healing stories, only Mk uses the exact words of Jesus in Aramaic. Which is more likely (1) Mt & Lk omitted them OR (2) Mark added them?

Conclusion: An earlier composition may more likely contain the exact Aramaic because they could be understood by the audience. Later compositions would have to translate these phrases and further might shy away from the Aramaic, so as not to not confuse the exact words with magic. (Markan priority)

Case Study #2: Feeding the Five Thousand

| Matt 14:19 | Mark 6:39 | Luke 9:14 |
|--|---|--|
| [Jesus] ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. | [Jesus] ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. | [Jesus] said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." |

Consider: Why is it that Mk alone includes this specific detail that the others do not? Which is more likely (1) Mt & Lk omitted it OR (2) Mark added it?

Conclusion: The later gospel writers could have seen this detail as superfluous or they may not have clearly seen an intertextual connection with Psalm 23. (Markan priority)

Case Study #3: Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida

| Matt | Mark 8:23-25 | Luke |
|------|--|------|
| X | When [Jesus] had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again ; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. | X |

Consider: Why might this healing story be unique to Mark? If Markan priority, why would Matt and Luke omit it?

Conclusion: Matt and Luke wanted to omit any passage that would suggest Jesus didn't have the power to heal completely. (Markan priority)

Case Study #4: Naked fugitive

| Matt | Mark 14:51-52 | Luke |
|------|--|------|
| X | [Following the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, there was] a certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. [The authorities] caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked. | X |

Consider: Why might this story be unique to Mark? If Markan priority, why would Matt and Luke omit it?

Conclusion: This is a very strange detail to include and, as it contributes little to the narrative, was omitted by the subsequent gospel-writers. (Markan priority)

Case Study #5: Major material missing in Mark

| Matt | Mark | Luke |
|--|------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infancy Narratives • The Lord's Prayer • Sermon on the Mount • Resurrection Appearances | X | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infancy Narratives • The Lord's Prayer • Sermon on the Plain • Resurrection Appearances |

Davies and Dale Allison ask the question, "Can one seriously envision someone rewriting Matthew and Luke so as to omit the miraculous birth of Jesus, the sermon on the mount, and the resurrection appearances, while on the other hand, adding the tale of the naked young man, a healing miracle in which Jesus has trouble healing, and the remark that Jesus' family thought him mad?"

Case study in the Synoptic Gospels

- With almost all modern scholars, we can now affirm Markan Priority—meaning that Mark was written first, but what about Matthew and Luke?
- If they both used Mark, why are they so different?
- Did they completely write independently of one another?
- Did one write with knowledge of two?
- Does this even matter?



Case Study #6: John's Preaching of Repentance

Matt 3:7-10

...γεννήματα ἔχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς; ποιήσατε οὖν **καρπὸν** ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας καὶ μὴ **δόξητε** λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ. λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγεῖραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ. ἦδη δὲ [] ἡ ἀξίνη πρὸς τὴν ρίζαν τῶν δένδρων κεῖται· πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται.

Luke 3:7-9

...γεννήματα ἔχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς; ποιήσατε οὖν **καρποὺς** ἀξίους τῆς μετανοίας καὶ μὴ **ἄρησθε** λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ. λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγεῖραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ. ἦδη δὲ **καὶ** ἡ ἀξίνη πρὸς τὴν ρίζαν τῶν δένδρων κεῖται· πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται.

This parallel passage is almost exactly the same between Matthew and Luke, but is not present in Mark at all. How did this happen?

Case Study #6: John's Preaching of Repentance

Matt 3:7-10

... "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance, and don't **think** you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

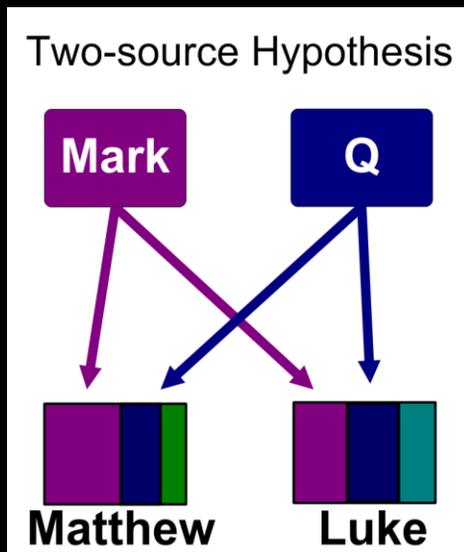
Luke 3:7-9

... "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance, and don't **begin** to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Consider: What do we make of this parallel that is NOT present in Mark?

Conclusion: What is the nature of the relationship between these two gospels? This parallel signifies that either (1) one of these writers knew the other and drew upon his work OR (2) working independently, they share another common source.

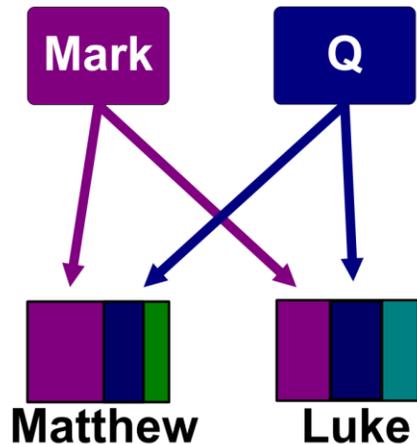
The two-source hypothesis



- In the early 1800s, Friedrich Schleiermacher designated Q as a "hypothetical document on which Matthew and Luke drew" (Blomberg, 102)
- 'Q' comes from the German word *Quelle*, meaning source.

The two-source hypothesis

Two-source Hypothesis



- This hypothesis predominates; however, this theoretical document has ZERO ancient attestation (neither brief extra-biblical quotations in the early church Fathers or papyrological examples)
- How can we base biblical studies on a fictitious, theoretical document that cannot be substantiated?
- Yet, we cannot make a strong argument from absence of evidence! It's always possible that in another century archaeologists find the document.

Case Study #7: The Parable of the Mustard Seed

| Matt 13.31-32 | Mark 4.30-32 | Luke 13.18-19 |
|---|---|--|
| <p>He put another parable before them, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a person, having taken it, sowed in his field; which, though it is the smallest of all the seeds, when it has grown is the greatest of the vegetables, and it becomes a tree, so that the birds of heaven come and nest in its branches.'</p> | <p>And he was saying, 'How shall we liken the kingdom of God, or in what parable shall we put it? Like a grain of mustard seed, which when it is sown upon the earth is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth and when it is sown, it grows and becomes the greatest of all the vegetables, and it produces great branches, so that the birds of heaven are able to nest under its shade.'</p> | <p>Therefore he was saying: 'What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I liken it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a person, having taken it, put in his own garden and it grew and it became a tree, and the birds of heaven nested in its branches.'</p> |

Case Study #7: The Parable of the Mustard Seed

| Matt 13.31-32 | Mark 4.30-32 | Luke 13.18-19 |
|---|---|--|
| <u>a person, having taken it... becomes a tree... in its branches</u> | X produces great branches under its shade | <u>a person, having taken it... became a tree... in its branches</u> |

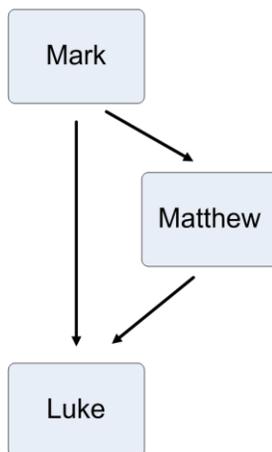
Consider: What do we make of Matt and Luke agreeing on specific wording over and against Mark?

Conclusion: Again, what is the nature of the relationship between Matt and Luke? If they're both using Mark as a base text, but modifying it in the same way, that points to more dependence, rather than independence.

This is just one of "many passages where the text of Matthew and Luke agree in making small changes to that of Mark (what is called the double tradition). This would follow naturally if Luke was using Matthew and Mark, but is hard to explain if he is using Mark and Q." ([Farrer Hypo](#))

The Farrer Hypothesis

Farrer hypothesis



- Initially proposed by Austin Farrer in 1955, and strengthened by later British scholars, including Michael Goulder ("On Putting Q to the Test"), Mark Goodacre (*The Case Against Q*) and Francis Watson (*Gospel Writing*), this hypothesis is gaining more attention in recent years.
- It dispenses with Q completely and emphasizes the interdependence of the gospels.

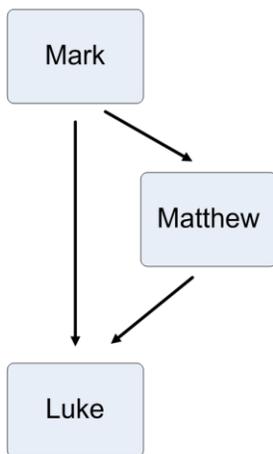
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The Farrer Hypothesis

Farrer hypothesis



"[Matthew] wants to provide a more comprehensive account than his predecessor. He may perhaps have expected his text to be used alongside Mark's, a second gospel to complement the first. More likely he expects to *replace* Mark. His is not an independent work with himself as sole author. Matthew is not only an author; he is also an editor who takes upon himself the task of preparing an enlarged and improved second edition of the earlier gospel text. So the questions arise: Do we have here two gospels, or two editions of a single gospel? Does Luke then add a third edition? Are the evangelists more like individual authors or anonymous editors?" (Watson, 6)

Takeaways from today

- The word 'gospel' is used in many different contexts, but we can never forget its most basic meaning of 'good news'. Reducing the whole scope of meaning down to salvation by Jesus' death is an unfortunate oversimplification
- The genre of the four canonical gospels is most like ancient biographies, events are grouped by topics, not told chronologically. The gospel-writers also intend that their audience enter on a path of discipleship through their retelling of Jesus' story.
- There is a complex relationship between the Synoptic gospels. Mark was written first, but scholars are particularly divided on how Matt and Luke are related.
- It's possible that we should view the synoptic-gospel writers as editors!
- Homework: Read through the Gospel of Mark—2-3 chapters/day



How many gospels?

If the New Testament contains four gospels, that does not mean that only four gospels were written. It means that four gospels were selected from a wider range of gospel literature to serve as the basis for the church's preaching, teaching, and worship. The four-gospel collection is the work not just of individual evangelists but of the church. (Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel*, 5)

As far as the evidence shows, the NT canon (as we have it) was fully accepted and listed by Athanasius in his Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter (367 CE).

“identified noncanonical gospels do not appear to exercise a public liturgical role as analogous written sources alongside Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John... Important exceptions are the *Infancy Gospel of James* and the *Epistle of the Apostles*, which in some settings did exercise a relatively wide-spread liturgical role; but even these texts were not copies alongside the four gospels in ancient codices.” (Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 13)

“Apocryphal” Gospels

There are other so-called written “gospels” from antiquity, but most are expansionary and epiphenomenal. This means that the “apocryphal gospels” are secondary to the four canonical gospels, likely being written after the fact, and they play little or no role in the original, earlier compositions. Rather than retellings of the canonical gospel arc (baptism-resurrection), extant apocryphal gospels focus in a particular time to “fill in the gaps.” (Infancy Gospels, Gospel of Peter w/ focus on death and resurrection)

At some point around the beginning of the third century, Christians [in Rhossus, a coastal town in Roman Cilicia, between Turkey and Syria] petitioned Bishop Serapion of nearby Antioch for permission to use the noncanonical *Gospel of Peter* in their public worship. (A passion-and-resurrection narrative from this text was discovered in 1886; other early evidence seems to confirm that it was a full-length gospel of similar scope to Matthew in which “Peter” speaks in the first person singular.) Serapion, bishop of one of the major sees of the eastern Mediterranean and a determined opponent of heresy, had not read this text. Yet he was persuaded by the petitioners’ arguments and duly gave them permission to use it. (Watson, 4-5)