

CRS201

INTRODUCTION TO THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS



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Course Code: CRS 201

Series Title: Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels

Series Number: 1

SERIES 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Part 1.1 Identifying the Synoptic Gospels

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1.1.2 The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

1.1.3 Reasons they are called Synoptic

Part 1.2 Historical Background and Compilation

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke have long been recognised as central to the study of the New Testament. They are called the Synoptic Gospels because they share a common perspective, presenting the life and ministry of Jesus in ways that are strikingly similar yet uniquely distinctive. For anyone beginning the study of the Synoptic Gospels, it is important to grasp their identity, background, literary features, and theological significance. This Series sets the foundation for the rest of the course by introducing you to these essential aspects.

The aim of this Series is to familiarise you with the Synoptic Gospels, to explain why they are grouped together, and to provide you with the historical, literary, and theological grounding necessary for deeper study.

We shall commence this Series by identifying the Synoptic Gospels and examining the reasons they are described as “Synoptic”. Next, we will explore their historical background and compilation, considering the role of early Christian communities and oral traditions. Following that, we will move on to their literary characteristics, looking at narrative style, parables, and distinctive features compared to the Gospel of John. Finally, we will wrap up by reflecting on their theological significance, including Christological emphases, the central theme of the Kingdom of God, and the ethical dimensions of discipleship. This progression will equip you with a strong foundation for engaging with the Synoptic Gospels throughout the course.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 1.1 define the term Synoptic and identify the Gospels that are described as Synoptic,

SLO 1.2 explain the reasons why Matthew, Mark, and Luke are grouped together as the Synoptic Gospels,

SLO 1.3 analyse the historical background and compilation of the Synoptic Gospels, including the role of oral traditions and early Christian communities,

SLO 1.4 describe the literary characteristics of the Synoptic Gospels, focusing on narrative style, parables, and distinctive features compared to the Gospel of John, and

SLO 1.5 evaluate the theological significance of the Synoptic Gospels, particularly their Christological emphases, the central theme of the Kingdom of God, and ethical dimensions of discipleship.

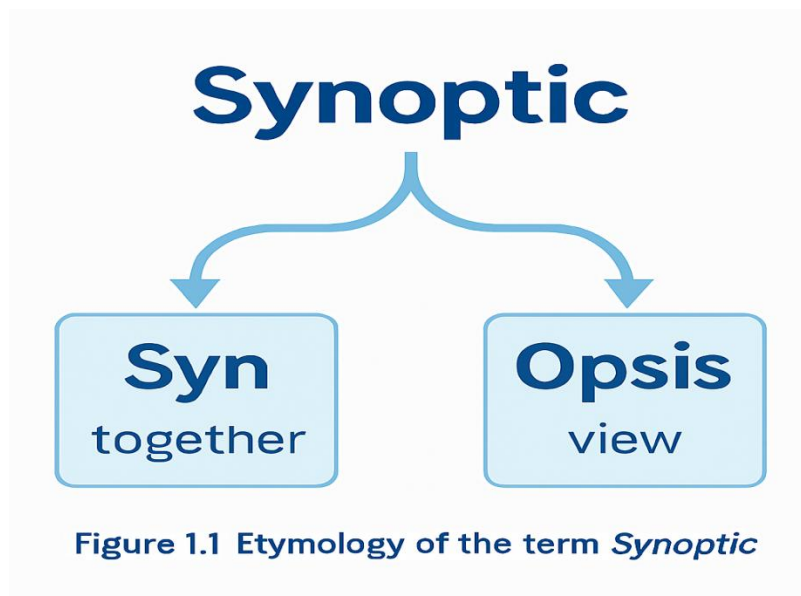
1.1 Identifying the Synoptic Gospels

1.1.1 Definition of “Synoptic”

The term Synoptic comes from two Greek words, *syn* meaning “together” and *opsis* meaning “view”. It refers to the way the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke can be studied side by side, showing a common perspective on the life and ministry of Jesus. These Gospels often present similar accounts, sometimes even in the same sequence, which allows scholars to compare them closely.

Fill in the blank: The word Synoptic comes from two Greek words, *syn* meaning “together” and _____ meaning “view”.





1.1.2 The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

The Synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are grouped together because they share a similar structure, content, and viewpoint. Each Gospel, however, has its own distinctive emphasis. Matthew highlights Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, Mark presents Jesus as the suffering servant, and Luke emphasises Jesus' compassion and concern for the marginalised.

Fill in the blank: The Gospel of _____ presents Jesus as the suffering servant.



Plate 1.1 The Synoptic Gospels

Plate 1.1: The Synoptic Gospels

1.1.3 Reasons They Are Called Synoptic

The Synoptic Gospels are called "Synoptic" because they can be viewed together, showing parallel accounts of Jesus' ministry. They often contain similar wording, sequence of events, and shared material.



Scholars note that about 90 percent of Mark's content appears in Matthew, and more than half of Mark is found in Luke. This overlap makes comparative study possible and highlights their shared perspective.

Fill in the blank: About _____ percent of Mark's content appears in Matthew.

Box 1.1 Reasons the Gospels Are Called Synoptic

- They share similar wording and sequence of events
- They contain overlapping material
- They present a common perspective on Jesus' ministry

Box 1.1: Reasons the Gospels are called Synoptic

Pilot questions 1.1

What does the term Synoptic mean?

Which three Gospels are described as Synoptic?

How does Matthew emphasise Jesus in his Gospel?

What percentage of Mark's content appears in Matthew?

Why are the Synoptic Gospels studied side by side?

1.2 Historical Background and Compilation

1.2.1 Early Christian communities and gospel traditions

The early Christian communities were groups of believers who gathered after the resurrection of Jesus to share teachings, worship, and fellowship. These communities preserved the sayings and deeds of Jesus through oral traditions before they were written down. Oral traditions were vital because they allowed the message to spread quickly among diverse groups, even before literacy was widespread.

Fill in the blank: The early Christian communities preserved the sayings and deeds of Jesus through _____ traditions before they were written down.





Plate 1.2 Early Christian communities sharing gospel traditions

Plate 1.2: Early Christian communities sharing gospel traditions

1.2.2 Oral transmission and written accounts

Oral transmission refers to the passing down of teachings and stories by word of mouth. In the first century, this was the primary way the message of Jesus was communicated. Over time, these oral accounts were collected and written down to preserve accuracy and provide a stable reference for teaching. Written accounts eventually formed the basis of the Synoptic Gospels.

Fill in the blank: Oral transmission refers to the passing down of teachings and stories by _____.



**Figure 1.2
From oral traditions to
written Gospels**

Figure 1.2: From oral traditions to written Gospels



1.2.3 Relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and other New Testament writings

The Synoptic Gospels are closely related to other New Testament writings. For example, the Gospel of John presents a different perspective, focusing more on theological reflection than on narrative parallels. The letters of Paul also provide insights into the beliefs and practices of early Christians, complementing the accounts found in the Synoptic Gospels. Together, these writings form a fuller picture of the early church and its faith.

Fill in the blank: The Gospel of _____ presents a different perspective, focusing more on theological reflection than narrative parallels.

Box 1.2 Relationship between Synoptic Gospels and other New Testament writings

- Synoptic Gospels: narrative accounts with parallel structures
- Gospel of John: theological reflection and unique perspective
- Pauline letters: insights into early Christian beliefs and practices

Figure 1.2 From oral traditions to written Gospels

Box 1.2: Relationship between Synoptic Gospels and other New Testament writings

Pilot questions 1.2

How did early Christian communities preserve the teachings of Jesus?

What does oral transmission mean?

Why were written accounts necessary for the Synoptic Gospels?

Which Gospel presents a more theological reflection compared to the Synoptics?

How do Pauline letters complement the Synoptic Gospels?

1.3 Literary Characteristics of the Synoptic Gospels

1.3.1 Narrative style and structure

The Synoptic Gospels share a common narrative style, which means they tell the story of Jesus' life and ministry in a structured sequence. They begin with accounts of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus, move through his teachings and miracles, and culminate in the passion narrative. This structure provides a chronological flow that helps readers follow the ministry of Jesus step by step.

Fill in the blank: The Synoptic Gospels culminate in the _____ narrative, which recounts the suffering and death of Jesus.



Diagram showing the narrative flow of the Synoptic Gospels: baptism, ministry, teachings, miracles, passion.

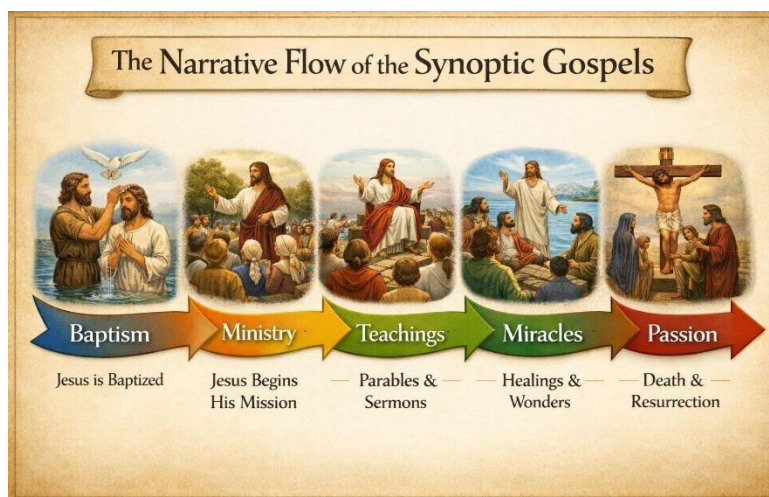


Figure 1.3: Narrative structure of the Synoptic Gospels

1.3.2 Use of parables and teachings of Jesus

A distinctive feature of the Synoptic Gospels is their use of parables, which are short stories with moral or spiritual lessons. Jesus often used parables to teach about the Kingdom of God, making complex truths accessible to ordinary listeners. These parables are woven into the narrative, reinforcing key themes and values.

Fill in the blank: Parables are short stories with _____ or spiritual lessons.



Figure 1.3 Narrative structure of the Synoptic Gospels

Plate 1.3: Jesus teaching in parables

1.3.3 Distinctive features compared to the Gospel of John



While the Synoptic Gospels share similarities, they differ significantly from the Gospel of John. John's Gospel places greater emphasis on theological reflection, using long discourses rather than parables. It also highlights unique events such as the raising of Lazarus, which are not found in the Synoptics. This contrast helps learners appreciate the diversity of perspectives within the New Testament.

Fill in the blank: The Gospel of _____ places greater emphasis on theological reflection and long discourses.

Box 1.3 Distinctive Features of John Compared to the Synoptics

- Emphasis on theological reflection
- Use of long discourses instead of parables
- Inclusion of unique events such as the raising of Lazarus

Figure 1.3 Narrative features of John Compared to the Synoptics

Box 1.3: Distinctive features of John compared to the Synoptics

Pilot questions 1.3

What is meant by the narrative style of the Synoptic Gospels?

Which key event forms the climax of the Synoptic narrative?

What are parables, and why did Jesus use them?

How does the Gospel of John differ from the Synoptic Gospels in its style?

Name one unique event found in John but not in the Synoptics.

1.4 Theological Significance of the Synoptic Gospels

1.4.1 Christological emphases

The Synoptic Gospels highlight different aspects of Christology, which refers to the study of the nature and role of Jesus Christ. Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, Mark portrays him as the suffering servant, and Luke emphasises his compassion and concern for the marginalised. These emphases provide a rich and multifaceted understanding of who Jesus is.

Fill in the blank: Mark portrays Jesus as the _____ servant.





Plate 1.4 Christological emphases in the Synoptic Gospels

Plate 1.4: Christological emphases in the Synoptic Gospels

1.4.2 Kingdom of God as a central theme

The Kingdom of God is a central theme in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus' teachings and parables often revolve around this concept, which signifies God's reign over creation and the invitation for humanity to live under divine authority. The Kingdom is portrayed as both a present reality and a future hope, shaping the ethical and spiritual life of believers.

Fill in the blank: The Kingdom of God is portrayed as both a present reality and a _____ hope.



Plate 1.4 The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels

Figure 1.4: The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels

1.4.3 Ethical and discipleship dimensions

The Synoptic Gospels emphasise the ethical demands of following Jesus. Discipleship involves commitment, humility, and service to others. Ethical teachings such as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the call to love one's neighbour in Luke highlight the moral responsibilities of believers. These dimensions show that faith is not only about belief but also about practice in daily life.



Fill in the blank: The Sermon on the _____ in Matthew highlights the moral responsibilities of believers.

Box 1.4 Ethical and discipleship dimension in the Synoptic Gospels

- Commitment to following Jesus
- Humility and service to others
- Love for one's neighbour
- Moral responsibilities in daily life

Box 1.4: Ethical and discipleship dimensions in the Synoptic Gospels

Pilot questions 1.4

How does Matthew present Jesus in his Gospel?

What is the central theme of Jesus' teachings in the Synoptic Gospels?

How is the Kingdom of God portrayed in the Synoptics?

What ethical teaching in Matthew highlights moral responsibilities?

What qualities are emphasised in discipleship according to the Synoptic Gospels?

Series Summary

This Series has introduced you to the foundations of the Synoptic Gospels, setting the stage for deeper study in the rest of the course. Its purpose was to help you recognise why Matthew, Mark, and Luke are grouped together, to trace their historical background, to explore their literary features, and to reflect on their theological significance. By engaging with these themes, you have gained the essential framework needed to approach the Synoptic Gospels with confidence.

We began by identifying the Synoptic Gospels and explaining the reasons they are described as "Synoptic". We then examined their historical background and compilation, considering the role of oral traditions and early Christian communities. Following that, we explored their literary characteristics, including narrative style, parables, and distinctive features compared to John. Finally, we reflected on their theological emphases, such as Christology, the Kingdom of God, and discipleship. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to define the term Synoptic and identify the relevant



Gospels, explain why they are grouped together, analyse their historical background, describe their literary characteristics, and evaluate their theological significance.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Christology: The study of the nature, role, and identity of Jesus Christ, focusing on how the Gospels present him.

Discipleship: The commitment to follow Jesus, marked by humility, service to others, and living out his teachings in daily life.

Early Christian communities: Groups of believers in the first century who gathered to share teachings, worship, and fellowship, preserving the sayings and deeds of Jesus.

Kingdom of God: A central theme in the Synoptic Gospels, referring to God's reign over creation, experienced both as a present reality and as a future hope.

Narrative style: The structured way in which the Synoptic Gospels tell the story of Jesus' life, ministry, and passion in a chronological flow.

Oral transmission: The passing down of teachings and stories by word of mouth before they were written down in the Gospels.

Parables: Short stories told by Jesus with moral or spiritual lessons, often used to explain the Kingdom of God.

Passion narrative: The section of the Gospels that recounts the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Synoptic: The term Synoptic comes from two Greek words, syn meaning "together" and opsia meaning "view", used to describe the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke because they can be studied side by side.

Synoptic Gospels: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share similar content, structure, and perspective on Jesus' ministry.



CONCEPT CHECK QUESTIONS [SERIES 1]

Objective Questions (Multiple Choice)

The term Synoptic comes from Greek words meaning: (Linked to SLO 1.1)

“Together” and “view.”

“Separate” and “vision.”

“Holy” and “book.”

“Life” and “story.”

Which Gospel presents Jesus as the suffering servant? (Linked to SLO 1.4)

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

The Synoptic Gospels culminate in which key narrative? (Linked to SLO 1.3)

Birth narrative

Sermon on the Mount

Passion narrative

Resurrection appearances

The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels is portrayed as: (Linked to SLO 1.5)

Only a present reality

Only a future hope

Both a present reality and a future hope

A symbolic idea without practical meaning

Short-Answer Questions

Define the term Synoptic. (Linked to SLO 1.1)

State one reason why Matthew, Mark, and Luke are grouped together as the Synoptic Gospels. (Linked to SLO 1.2)

Explain what is meant by oral transmission in the context of the Synoptic Gospels. (Linked to SLO 1.3)



Identify one distinctive feature of the Gospel of John compared to the Synoptics. (Linked to SLO 1.3)

Mention one ethical demand of discipleship highlighted in the Synoptic Gospels. (Linked to SLO 1.5)

Long-Answer Questions

Analyse the historical background of the Synoptic Gospels, focusing on the role of early Christian communities and oral traditions. (Linked to SLO 1.3)

Basic response: Describe how oral traditions preserved Jesus' teachings before being written down.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may evaluate how these traditions shaped the reliability and diversity of the written Gospels.

Describe the literary characteristics of the Synoptic Gospels, with particular attention to narrative style and the use of parables. (Linked to SLO 1.4)

Basic response: Outline the chronological narrative and explain the role of parables in teaching.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may compare these features with John's Gospel to highlight differences in style and emphasis.

Evaluate the theological significance of the Synoptic Gospels, focusing on Christology, the Kingdom of God, and discipleship. (Linked to SLO 1.5)

Basic response: Summarise how each Gospel presents Jesus and the centrality of the Kingdom of God.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may assess how these emphases continue to shape Christian faith and practice today.

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

- a) "Together" and "view"
- b) Mark
- c) Passion narrative
- d) Both a present reality and a future hope

Short-Answer Questions

Synoptic means "viewing together", referring to the way Matthew, Mark, and Luke can be studied side by side.

They are grouped together because they share similar content, structure, and perspective.

Oral transmission refers to passing down teachings and stories by word of mouth before they were written.

John uses long discourses and includes unique events such as the raising of Lazarus.

One ethical demand is humility and service to others.



Long-Answer Questions

Basic response: Oral traditions preserved Jesus' teachings in early Christian communities before being written down.

Value-added response: These traditions shaped the reliability of the Gospels and allowed diverse perspectives to emerge.

Basic response: The Synoptics follow a chronological narrative and use parables to teach moral and spiritual lessons.

Value-added response: Compared to John, they rely more on short stories, while John uses extended theological discourses.

Basic response: The Synoptics emphasise Jesus as fulfilment of prophecy, suffering servant, and compassionate teacher, with the Kingdom of God as central.

Value-added response: These emphases continue to guide Christian discipleship, shaping ethical living and theological reflection today.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 1]

Part 1.1 Identifying the Synoptic Gospels

opsis

Mark

They are called Synoptic because they can be viewed together, showing parallel accounts of Jesus' ministry.

About 90 percent

They are studied side by side because they share similar wording, sequence of events, and overlapping material.

Part 1.2 Historical Background and Compilation

Oral traditions

Oral transmission refers to passing down teachings and stories by word of mouth.

Written accounts were necessary to preserve accuracy and provide a stable reference for teaching.

John

Pauline letters complement the Synoptic Gospels by providing insights into early Christian beliefs and practices.

Part 1.3 Literary Characteristics of the Synoptic Gospels

The narrative style refers to the structured way the Synoptics tell the story of Jesus' life and ministry.

Passion narrative

Parables are short stories with moral or spiritual lessons.



John differs by using long discourses and theological reflection instead of parables.

The raising of Lazarus

Part 1.4 Theological Significance of the Synoptic Gospels

Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

The Kingdom of God

Both a present reality and a future hope

Sermon on the Mount

Commitment, humility, service to others, and love for one's neighbor

REFERENCES AND ATTRIBUTIONS [SERIES 1]

This section compiles all references and illustration attributions used or suggested in Series 1: Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels. Entries are presented in APA style for clarity and consistency.

General References

Brown, R. E. (1997). *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dunn, J. D. G. (2003). *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Sanders, E. P. (1991). *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin Books.

Wright, N. T. (2012). *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*. London: SPCK.

Illustration Placeholders and Attributions

Figure 1.1: Etymology of the term Synoptic

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the Greek roots of the word Synoptic, with syn = together and ops = view."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels etymology diagram OER."

Plate 1.1: The Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate an image of three scrolls labelled Matthew, Mark, and Luke to represent the Synoptic Gospels."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels Matthew Mark Luke scrolls OER."

Box 1.1: Reasons the Gospels are called Synoptic

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing reasons the Gospels are called Synoptic."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels reasons overlap parallel accounts OER."

Plate 1.2: Early Christian communities sharing gospel traditions



Suggested AI prompt: "Generate an image of an early Christian community gathered for worship and teaching."

Suggested OER search string: "early Christian communities gospel traditions OER."

Figure 1.2: From oral traditions to written Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the transition from oral transmission to written accounts in early Christianity."

Suggested OER search string: "oral transmission written accounts Synoptic Gospels diagram OER."

Box 1.2: Relationship between Synoptic Gospels and other New Testament writings

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing the relationship between Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John, and Pauline letters."

Suggested OER search string: "relationship Synoptic Gospels New Testament writings OER."

Figure 1.3: Narrative structure of the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the narrative flow of the Synoptic Gospels: baptism, ministry, teachings, miracles, passion."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels narrative structure diagram OER."

Plate 1.3: Jesus teaching in parables

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate an image of Jesus teaching a crowd using parables."

Suggested OER search string: "Jesus parables teaching Synoptic Gospels OER."

Box 1.3: Distinctive features of John compared to the Synoptics

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing distinctive features of John compared to the Synoptic Gospels."

Suggested OER search string: "Gospel of John distinctive features compared Synoptic Gospels OER."

Plate 1.4: Christological emphases in the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate an image showing symbolic representations of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, and Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "Christological emphases Synoptic Gospels Matthew Mark Luke OER."

Figure 1.4: The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the dual aspect of the Kingdom of God: present reality and future hope."

Suggested OER search string: "Kingdom of God Synoptic Gospels diagram OER."

Box 1.4: Ethical and discipleship dimensions in the Synoptic Gospels



Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing ethical and discipleship dimensions in the Synoptic Gospels."

Suggested OER search string: "ethical discipleship dimensions Synoptic Gospels OER."

Course Code: CRS 201

Series Title: Compilation and Literary Strands of the Synoptic Gospels

Series Number: 2

SERIES 2: COMPILATION AND LITERARY STRANDS OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Part 2.1 Compilation of the Synoptic Gospels

2.1.1 Sources behind the Synoptic Gospels

2.1.2 Oral traditions and written collections

2.1.3 The role of evangelists in shaping the texts

Part 2.2 Literary Structures in the Synoptic Gospels

2.2.1 Narrative frameworks and sequencing of events

2.2.2 Use of inclusio, chiasm, and other literary devices

2.2.3 The passion narrative as a structural climax

Part 2.3 Stylistic Features of the Synoptic Gospels

2.3.1 Language and vocabulary choices

2.3.2 Repetition, parallelism, and variation

2.3.3 Distinctive stylistic traits of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Part 2.4 Literary Parallels and Differences among the Synoptic Gospels

2.4.1 Shared material and triple tradition

2.4.2 Double tradition and unique material

2.4.3 Comparative analysis of literary emphases

INTRODUCTION



In the last Series, we explored the foundations of the Synoptic Gospels, identifying Matthew, Mark, and Luke, tracing their historical background, examining their literary characteristics, and reflecting on their theological significance. Building on that foundation, this Series will take you deeper into how these Gospels were compiled and the literary features that shape their presentation of Jesus' life and ministry. Understanding these aspects is crucial because they reveal the processes and structures that give the Synoptic Gospels their distinctive form and coherence.

The aim of this Series is to equip you with knowledge of the compilation process and to help you analyse the literary structures, stylistic features, and parallels that define the Synoptic Gospels. By the end of this Series, you will be able to evaluate how these elements contribute to the richness and diversity of the Gospel accounts.

We shall commence this Series by examining the compilation of the Synoptic Gospels, focusing on the sources, oral traditions, and the role of the evangelists. Next, we will explore their literary structures, considering narrative frameworks, devices such as inclusio and chiasm, and the passion narrative as a climax. Following that, we will move on to stylistic features, including language choices, repetition, and distinctive traits of each Gospel. Finally, we will wrap up by analysing literary parallels and differences among the Synoptic Gospels, looking at shared material, double tradition, and unique emphases. This progression will provide you with a clear and comprehensive understanding of how the Synoptic Gospels were compiled and shaped as literary works.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 2.1 explain the sources and traditions that contributed to the compilation of the Synoptic Gospels,

SLO 2.2 analyse the role of oral traditions and written collections in shaping the Synoptic texts,

SLO 2.3 describe the contribution of the evangelists in compiling and arranging the Gospel narratives,

SLO 2.4 examine the literary structures of the Synoptic Gospels, including narrative frameworks and devices such as inclusio and chiasm,

SLO 2.5 identify the passion narrative as the structural climax within the Synoptic Gospels,

SLO 2.6 evaluate the stylistic features of the Synoptic Gospels, focusing on language, repetition, and distinctive traits of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and

SLO 2.7 compare the literary parallels and differences among the Synoptic Gospels, including shared material, double tradition, and unique emphases.

2.1 Compilation of the Synoptic Gospels

2.1.1 Sources behind the Synoptic Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels were not written in isolation. Scholars suggest that they drew upon common sources, which are written or oral materials used by the evangelists to compose their accounts. One widely discussed source is Mark, which is believed to have been used by both Matthew and Luke. Another is the hypothetical Q source, a collection of sayings of Jesus that may have influenced Matthew and Luke. These sources help explain the similarities and differences among the Synoptic Gospels.



Fill in the blank: The hypothetical source believed to contain sayings of Jesus is called the _____ source.

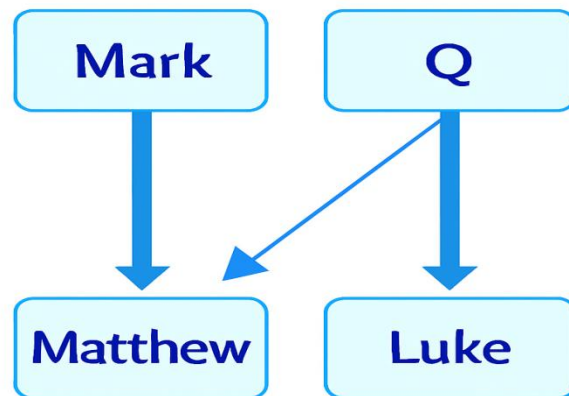


Figure 2.1 Sources behind the Synoptic Gospels

Figure 2.1: Sources behind the Synoptic Gospels

2.1.2 Oral traditions and written collections

Before the Gospels were written, the teachings of Jesus were preserved through oral traditions, which are stories and sayings passed down by word of mouth. These traditions were vital in the early Christian communities, ensuring that the message of Jesus could be shared widely even among those who were not literate. Over time, some of these oral traditions were gathered into written collections, which served as building blocks for the Synoptic Gospels.

Fill in the blank: The teachings of Jesus were first preserved through _____ traditions before being written down.

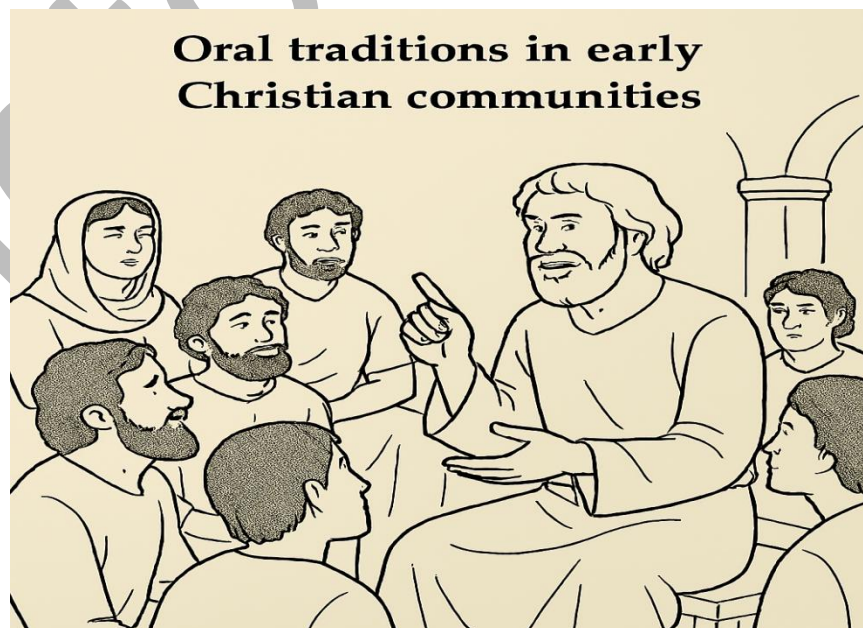
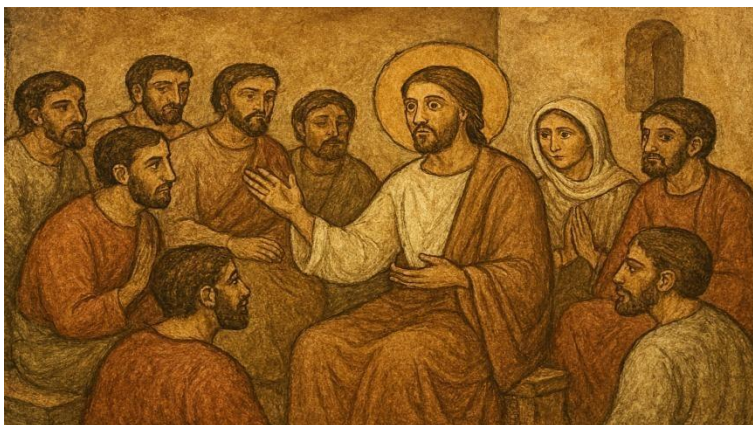


Plate 2.1: Oral traditions in early Christian communities

2.1.3 The role of evangelists in shaping the texts

The evangelists—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—were not simply recorders of traditions. They acted as editors and theologians, shaping the material to suit the needs of their communities. Each evangelist selected, arranged, and emphasized particular aspects of Jesus' life and teaching. For example, Matthew highlighted Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecy, Mark emphasized urgency and suffering, and Luke stressed compassion and inclusivity. Their role was crucial in transforming sources and traditions into coherent Gospel narratives.

Fill in the blank: Luke's Gospel stresses _____ and inclusivity in its portrayal of Jesus.



Box 2.1: Roles of the evangelists in shaping the Synoptic Gospels

Pilot questions 2.1

What is the hypothetical source believed to contain sayings of Jesus?

How were the teachings of Jesus preserved before being written down?

What role did written collections play in the compilation of the Synoptic Gospels?

How did Matthew emphasise Jesus in his Gospel?

What distinctive emphasis is found in Luke's Gospel?

2.2 Literary Structures in the Synoptic Gospels

2.2.1 Narrative frameworks and sequencing of events

The Synoptic Gospels follow a narrative framework, which means they present the life and ministry of Jesus in a structured sequence. This framework typically begins with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus, continues with his teachings and miracles, and culminates in the passion narrative. The sequencing of events provides coherence and allows readers to trace the progression of Jesus' mission.

Fill in the blank: The Synoptic Gospels typically begin with the ministry of _____ the Baptist.



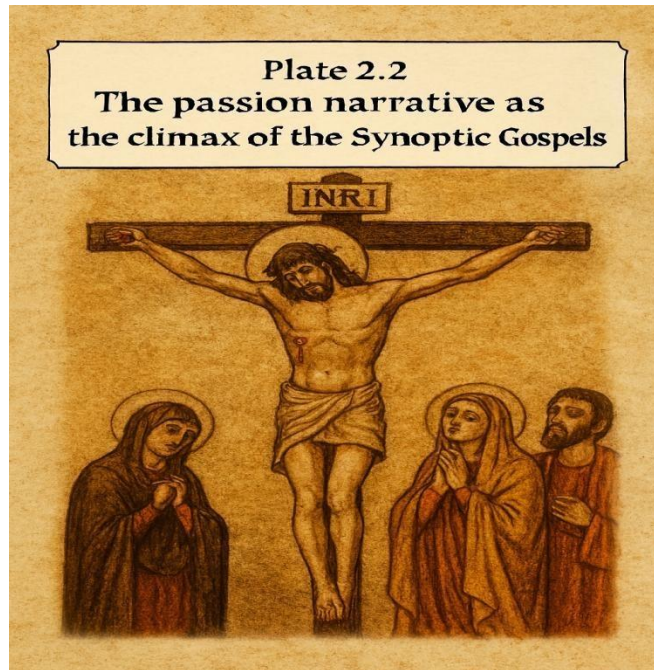


Figure 2.2: Narrative frameworks in the Synoptic Gospels

2.2.2 Use of inclusio, chiasm, and other literary devices

The Synoptic Gospels employ various literary devices, which are techniques used to structure and emphasise key themes. One such device is inclusio, where a passage begins and ends with similar words or ideas, creating a frame. Another is chiasm, a pattern in which ideas are presented and then repeated in reverse order, forming a mirror-like structure. These devices help highlight important theological points and guide the reader's interpretation.

Fill in the blank: A literary device that frames a passage by beginning and ending with similar ideas is called _____.



Box 2.2:
Examples of Literary
Devices in the Synop-
tic Gospels

Inclusio: framing a passage with similar words or ideas

Chiasm: presenting ideas and repeating them in reverse order

Parallelism: repeating similar structures for emphasis

Box 2.2: Examples of literary devices in the Synoptic Gospels

2.2.3 The passion narrative as a structural climax

The passion narrative refers to the section of the Gospels that recounts the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It serves as the structural climax of the Synoptic Gospels, bringing together themes of prophecy, discipleship, and salvation. By devoting significant space to the passion narrative, the evangelists emphasise its central importance in the Christian faith.

Fill in the blank: The passion narrative recounts the suffering, death, and _____ of Jesus.



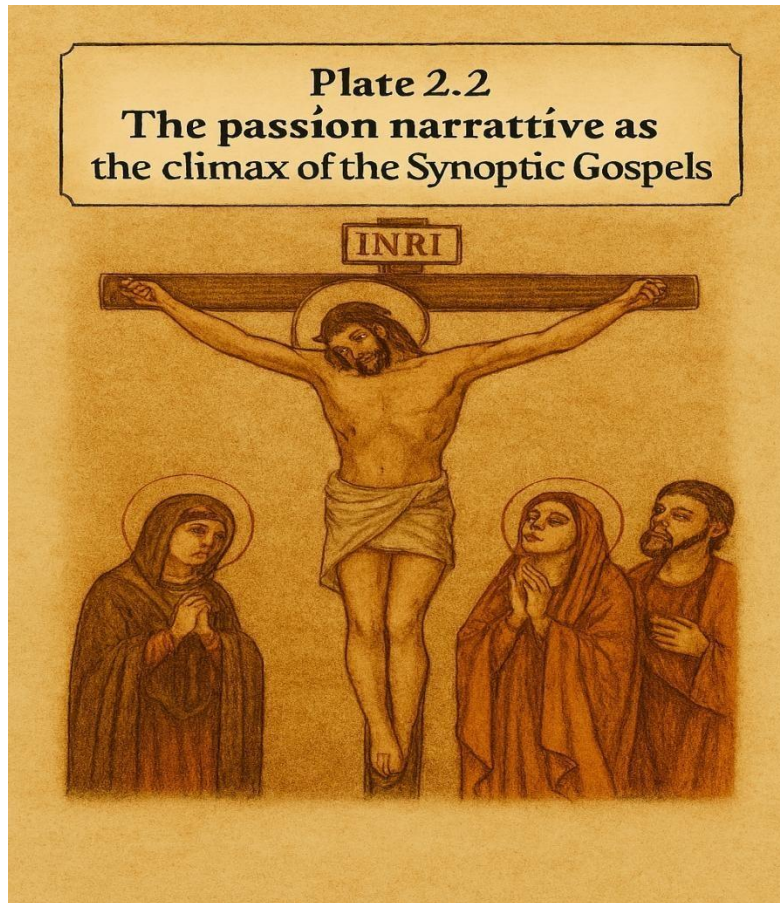


Plate 2.2: The passion narrative as the climax of the Synoptic Gospels

Sample AI prompt: "Generate an image depicting the passion narrative as the climax of the Gospel story."

Search string: "passion narrative climax Synoptic Gospels OER"

Pilot questions 2.2

What is meant by the narrative framework of the Synoptic Gospels?

Which event typically begins the Synoptic narrative?

What is inclusio, and how does it function in the Gospels?

What is chiasm, and why is it significant?

Why is the passion narrative considered the structural climax of the Synoptic Gospels?

2.3 Stylistic Features of the Synoptic Gospels

2.3.1 Language and vocabulary choices



The Synoptic Gospels employ distinctive language and vocabulary, which refers to the choice of words and expressions used by the evangelists. Mark often uses simple and direct language, reflecting urgency and immediacy. Matthew, by contrast, incorporates more formal vocabulary, drawing connections to Jewish traditions and Scripture. Luke uses polished Greek, showing attention to detail and inclusivity in his storytelling. These differences highlight the unique audiences and purposes of each Gospel.

Fill in the blank: Mark's Gospel often uses _____ and direct language to convey urgency.

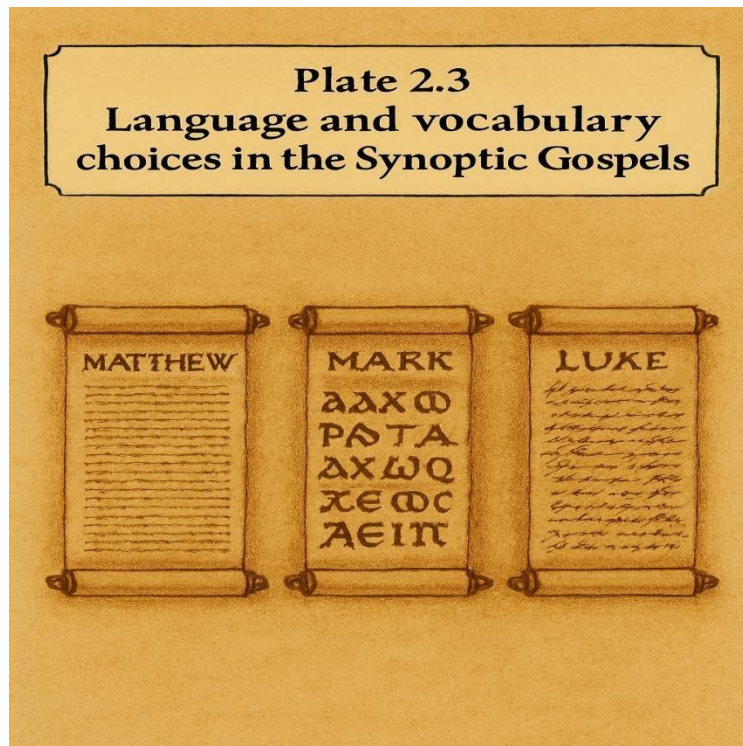


Plate 2.3: Language and vocabulary choices in the Synoptic Gospels

2.3.2 Repetition, parallelism, and variation

The Synoptic Gospels make frequent use of repetition, which means repeating words or phrases for emphasis. They also employ parallelism, where similar structures are used to reinforce ideas, and variation, where slight differences in wording highlight unique emphases. For example, the parable of the sower appears in all three Synoptics, but each version varies slightly to reflect the evangelist's theological focus.

Fill in the blank: The parable of the _____ appears in all three Synoptic Gospels, with slight variations.



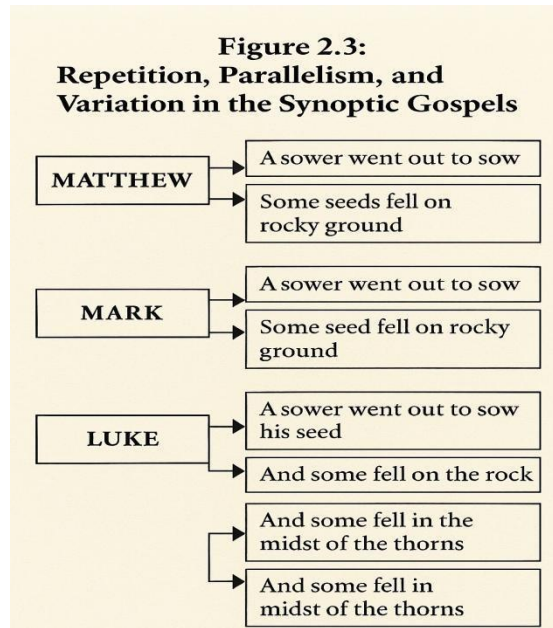


Figure 2.3: Repetition, parallelism, and variation in the Synoptic Gospels

2.3.3 Distinctive stylistic traits of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Each Synoptic Gospel has distinctive stylistic traits, meaning unique features in the way they present their material. Matthew often structures his Gospel around large teaching blocks, such as the Sermon on the Mount. Mark uses vivid detail and frequent transitions, creating a fast-paced narrative. Luke emphasises inclusivity, with stories highlighting women, the poor, and outsiders. These stylistic traits reflect the theological priorities of each evangelist.

Fill in the blank: Matthew often structures his Gospel around large _____ blocks, such as the Sermon on the Mount.

**Box 2.3:
Distinctive Stylistic
Traits of the Synoptic
Gospels**

Matthew: teaching blocks and fulfillment of prophecy

Mark: vivid detail and fast-paced transitions

Luke: inclusivity and polished Greek style

Box 2.3: Distinctive stylistic traits of the Synoptic Gospels

Pilot questions 2.3



How does Mark's use of language differ from Matthew and Luke?

What is parallelism, and how is it used in the Synoptic Gospels?

Which parable appears in all three Synoptic Gospels with slight variations?

How does Matthew structure his Gospel?

What distinctive emphasis does Luke highlight in his Gospel?

2.4 Literary Parallels and Differences among the Synoptic Gospels

2.4.1 Shared material and triple tradition

The Synoptic Gospels contain triple tradition, which refers to material found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This includes stories such as the healing of the paralytic and the feeding of the five thousand. The presence of triple tradition demonstrates the close relationship among the Synoptics and suggests that they relied on common sources or shared traditions.

Fill in the blank: The feeding of the _____ is an example of triple tradition found in all three Synoptic Gospels.

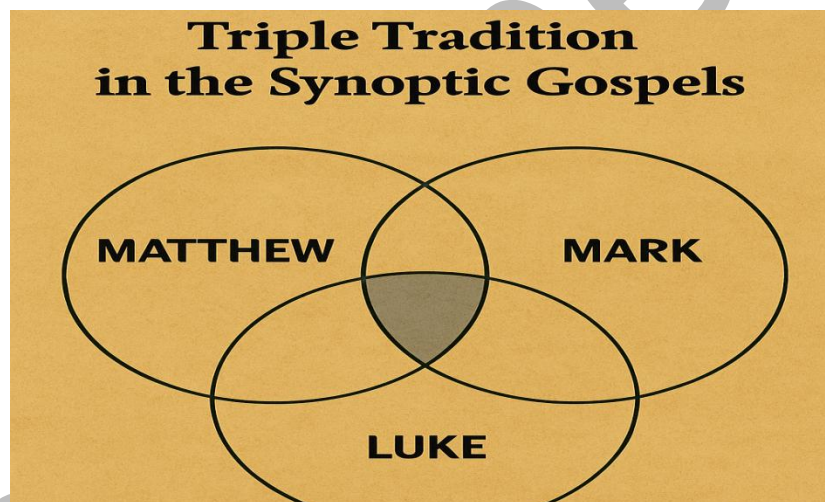


Figure 2.4: Triple tradition in the Synoptic Gospels

2.4.2 Double tradition and unique material

The double tradition refers to material found in Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark. Examples include the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer. In addition, each Gospel contains unique material, meaning passages found only in one Gospel. For instance, Matthew includes the visit of the Magi, while Luke records the parable of the Good Samaritan. These differences highlight the distinctive theological emphases of each evangelist.

Fill in the blank: The parable of the _____ is unique to Luke's Gospel.



Plate 2.4 Double tradition in Matthew and Luke	
MATTHEW Beatitudes • Blessed are the poor in spirit • Blessed are the merciful • Blessed are the peacemakers	LUKE <i>The Lord's Prayer</i> • Father, hallowed be your name • Your kingdom come • Give us each day our daily bread • And forgive us our sins

Plate 2.4: Double tradition in Matthew and Luke

2.4.3 Comparative analysis of literary emphases

A comparative analysis of the Synoptic Gospels shows how each evangelist emphasizes different aspects of Jesus' ministry. Matthew often stresses fulfilment of prophecy, Mark highlights urgency and suffering, and Luke focuses on compassion and inclusivity. These emphases shape the theological outlook of each Gospel and provide a fuller picture when studied together.

Fill in the blank: Matthew often stresses the _____ of prophecy in his Gospel.

Box 2.4: Literary Emphases in the Synoptic Gospels
Matthew: fulfilment of prophecy Mark: urgency and suffering Luke: compassion and inclusivity

Box 2.4: Literary emphases in the Synoptic Gospels

Pilot questions 2.4

What is meant by triple tradition in the Synoptic Gospels?



Give one example of triple tradition.

What is double tradition, and which Gospels contain it?

Name one passage unique to Matthew and one unique to Luke.

How does Mark's Gospel differ in emphasis compared to Matthew and Luke?

SERIES SUMMARY

This Series has guided you through the compilation and literary strands of the Synoptic Gospels, helping you to see how these texts were shaped and structured. Its purpose was to deepen your understanding of the sources, traditions, and stylistic features that underpin Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and to highlight how their similarities and differences enrich the study of the Gospels.

We began by examining the compilation of the Synoptic Gospels, focusing on sources such as Mark and the hypothetical Q, as well as oral traditions and the role of the evangelists. Then we explored their literary structures, including narrative frameworks, devices like inclusio and chiasm, and the passion narrative as the climax. Following that, we considered stylistic features such as language choices, repetition, and distinctive traits of each Gospel. Finally, we analyzed literary parallels and differences, looking at triple tradition, double tradition, and unique material. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to explain the sources and traditions behind the Synoptics, analyze their structures, evaluate their stylistic features, and compare their literary emphases with confidence.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Chiasm: A literary device in which ideas are presented and then repeated in reverse order, creating a mirror-like structure.

Double tradition: Material found in both Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark, such as the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer.

Evangelists: The authors of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—who shaped traditions and sources into coherent narratives for their communities.

Inclusio: A framing device where a passage begins and ends with similar words or ideas, highlighting the theme enclosed.

Language and vocabulary: The choice of words and expressions used in the Synoptic Gospels reflecting the style and audience of each evangelist.

Narrative framework: The structured sequence of events in the Synoptic Gospels, typically beginning with John the Baptist and culminating in the passion narrative.

Oral traditions: Teachings and stories about Jesus were passed down by word of mouth before being written into Gospel accounts.

Parallelism: A stylistic feature where similar structures or phrases are repeated to reinforce meaning.

Passion narrative: The section of the Gospels recounting the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, serving as the structural climax.



Q source: A hypothetical written collection of Jesus' sayings believed to have influenced Matthew and Luke.

Repetition: The deliberate reuse of words or phrases in the Synoptic Gospels to emphasize key ideas.

Sources: Written or oral materials used by the evangelists in compiling the Synoptic Gospels, including Mark and the hypothetical Q.

Stylistic traits: Distinctive features in the way each Gospel presents its material, such as Matthew's teaching blocks, Mark's fast-paced narrative, and Luke's inclusivity.

Triple tradition: Material found in all three Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—such as the feeding of the five thousand.

Unique material: Passages found only in one Gospel, for example, the visit of the Magi in Matthew or the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke.

Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective Questions (Multiple Choice)

Which Gospel is widely believed to be a source for both Matthew and Luke? (Linked to SLO 2.1)

John

Mark

Luke

Q

The hypothetical source containing sayings of Jesus is referred to as: (Linked to SLO 2.1)

M source

Q source

L source

Triple tradition

Which literary device frames a passage by beginning and ending with similar ideas? (Linked to SLO 2.4)

Chiasm

Inclusio

Parallelism

Repetition

The passion narrative is considered the structural climax of the Synoptic Gospels because it: (Linked to SLO 2.5)



Introduces John the Baptist

Highlights Jesus' miracles

Recounts Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection

Focuses on parables

Short-Answer Questions

Define oral traditions in the context of the Synoptic Gospels. (Linked to SLO 2.2)

Explain the role of the evangelists in shaping the Synoptic texts. (Linked to SLO 2.3)

What is meant by narrative framework in the Synoptic Gospels? (Linked to SLO 2.4)

Give one example of double tradition. (Linked to SLO 2.7)

Identify one stylistic trait unique to Luke's Gospel. (Linked to SLO 2.6)

Long-Answer Questions

Analyse the contribution of oral traditions and written collections to the compilation of the Synoptic Gospels. (Linked to SLO 2.2)

Basic response: Describe how oral traditions preserved Jesus' teachings and how written collections supported Gospel formation.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may evaluate the reliability of oral traditions and discuss how written collections reflect theological priorities.

Examine the literary structures of the Synoptic Gospels, focusing on narrative frameworks and devices such as inclusio and chiasm. (Linked to SLO 2.4)

Basic response: Outline the sequence of events and explain inclusio and chiasm as structuring devices.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may assess how these devices highlight theological themes and guide interpretation.

Evaluate the stylistic features of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, noting their distinctive traits. (Linked to SLO 2.6)

Basic response: Summarise Matthew's teaching blocks, Mark's urgency, and Luke's inclusivity.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may compare how these stylistic traits reflect the intended audiences and theological emphases.

Compare the literary parallels and differences among the Synoptic Gospels, including triple tradition, double tradition, and unique material. (Linked to SLO 2.7)

Basic response: Identify examples of triple tradition, double tradition, and unique material.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may evaluate how these differences enrich theological diversity and shape Gospel interpretation.



Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective Questions

- b) Mark
- b) Q source
- b) Inclusio
- c) Recounts Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection

Short-Answer Questions

Oral traditions are teachings and stories about Jesus passed down by word of mouth before being written.

The evangelists acted as editors and theologians, shaping traditions to meet the needs of their communities.

Narrative framework refers to the structured sequence of events in the Synoptic Gospels, from baptism to passion.

The Beatitudes or the Lord's Prayer.

Luke emphasises inclusivity, highlighting women, the poor, and outsiders.

Long-Answer Questions

Basic response: Oral traditions preserved Jesus' teachings, while written collections provided stability for Gospel formation.

Value-added response: Oral traditions ensured widespread transmission but varied in detail; written collections reveal theological priorities of communities.

Basic response: The Synoptics follow a sequence from baptism to passion, using inclusio and chiasm to structure passages.

Value-added response: These devices highlight theological themes, such as fulfilment of prophecy or discipleship, guiding interpretation.

Basic response: Matthew uses teaching blocks, Mark employs urgency and vivid detail, Luke stresses inclusivity and polished Greek.

Value-added response: These stylistic traits reflect different audiences—Matthew's Jewish readers, Mark's persecuted community, and Luke's diverse Gentile audience.

Basic response: Triple tradition includes the feeding of the five thousand, double tradition includes the Beatitudes, and unique material includes the Magi in Matthew or the Good Samaritan in Luke.

Value-added response: These differences enrich theological diversity, showing how each Gospel contributes distinct perspectives to the Christian message.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 2]

Part 2.1 Compilation of the Synoptic Gospels

Q source



Oral traditions

Written collections served as building blocks for the Synoptic Gospels

Matthew emphasised Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecy

Compassion and inclusivity

Part 2.2 Literary Structures in the Synoptic Gospels

A structured sequence of events presenting Jesus' life and ministry

John the Baptist

Inclusio

Chiasm

Because it recounts the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Part 2.3 Stylistic Features of the Synoptic Gospels

Mark uses simple and direct language, while Matthew is more formal and Luke polished

Parallelism is the repetition of similar structures to reinforce meaning

The parable of the sower

Large teaching blocks

Inclusivity

Part 2.4 Literary Parallels and Differences among the Synoptic Gospels

Material found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

The feeding of the five thousand

Material found in Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark

The visit of the Magi in Matthew; the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke

Mark highlights urgency and suffering

References and Attributions [Series 2]

This section compiles all references and illustration attributions used or suggested in Series 2: Compilation and Literary Strands of the Synoptic Gospels. Entries are presented in APA style for clarity and consistency.

General References

Brown, R. E. (1997). *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dunn, J. D. G. (2003). *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Sanders, E. P. (1991). *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin Books.



Wright, N. T. (2012). *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*. London: SPCK.

Illustration Placeholders and Attributions

Figure 2.1: Sources behind the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the relationship between Mark, Q, Matthew, and Luke as sources."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels sources Mark Q Matthew Luke diagram OER."

Plate 2.1: Oral traditions in early Christian communities

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate an image of early Christians sharing oral traditions in a communal setting."

Suggested OER search string: "oral traditions early Christian communities Synoptic Gospels OER."

Box 2.1: Roles of the evangelists in shaping the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing the roles of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in shaping the Synoptic Gospels."

Suggested OER search string: "roles evangelists Matthew Mark Luke Synoptic Gospels OER."

Figure 2.2: Narrative frameworks in the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the narrative sequence of the Synoptic Gospels: baptism, ministry, teachings, miracles, passion."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels narrative framework diagram OER."

Box 2.2: Examples of literary devices in the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing examples of literary devices in the Synoptic Gospels such as inclusio, chiasm, and parallelism."

Suggested OER search string: "literary devices inclusio chiasm Synoptic Gospels OER."

Plate 2.2: The passion narrative as the climax of the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate an image depicting the passion narrative as the climax of the Gospel story."

Suggested OER search string: "passion narrative climax Synoptic Gospels OER."

Plate 2.3: Language and vocabulary choices in the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: "Generate an image showing scrolls with different writing styles representing Matthew, Mark, and Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels language vocabulary Matthew Mark Luke OER."

Figure 2.3: Repetition, parallelism, and variation in the Synoptic Gospels



Suggested AI prompt: “Generate a diagram comparing the parable of the sower across Matthew, Mark, and Luke.”

Suggested OER search string: “parable of the sower comparison Synoptic Gospels OER.”

Box 2.3: Distinctive stylistic traits of the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: “Generate a text box listing distinctive stylistic traits of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.”

Suggested OER search string: “stylistic traits Matthew Mark Luke Synoptic Gospels OER.”

Figure 2.4: Triple tradition in the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: “Generate a diagram showing overlap of triple tradition across Matthew, Mark, and Luke.”

Suggested OER search string: “triple tradition Synoptic Gospels diagram OER.”

Plate 2.4: Double tradition in Matthew and Luke

Suggested AI prompt: “Generate an image illustrating the Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer as examples of double tradition.”

Suggested OER search string: “double tradition Matthew Luke Beatitudes Lord’s Prayer OER.”

Box 2.4: Literary emphases in the Synoptic Gospels

Suggested AI prompt: “Generate a text box listing literary emphases in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.”

Suggested OER search string: “literary emphases Matthew Mark Luke Synoptic Gospels OER

Course Code: CRS 201

Series Title: The Synoptic Problem and Its Theories

Series Number: 3

SERIES 3: THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM AND ITS THEORIES

Part 3.1 Defining the Synoptic Problem

3.1.1 Meaning of the Synoptic Problem

3.1.2 Why the Synoptic Problem matters for Gospel study

3.1.3 Key questions raised by the Synoptic Problem

Part 3.2 Early Approaches to the Synoptic Problem

3.2.1 The Augustinian hypothesis



3.2.2 The Griesbach hypothesis (Two-Gospel theory)

3.2.3 Strengths and weaknesses of early approaches

Part 3.3 The Two-Source Hypothesis

3.3.1 Markan priority explained

3.3.2 The role of the Q source

3.3.3 Criticisms and defences of the Two-Source Hypothesis

Part 3.4 Alternative Modern Theories

3.4.1 The Farrer hypothesis (Mark without Q)

3.4.2 The Jerusalem school hypothesis

3.4.3 Other contemporary perspectives

Part 3.5 Evaluating the Synoptic Problem Today

3.5.1 Comparative strengths of major theories

3.5.2 Implications for Gospel interpretation

3.5.3 Current scholarly trends and debates

INTRODUCTION

The Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, exhibit striking similarities in content, wording, and structure, alongside notable differences in order and emphasis. These observations have given rise to what scholars call the Synoptic Problem, a central issue in New Testament studies concerned with explaining the literary relationships among these three Gospels.

This series aims to introduce you to the Synoptic Problem and the major theories proposed to explain it. Understanding these theories is essential because they shape how scholars interpret the origins, development, and theological intentions of the Gospels. By examining different solutions to the Synoptic Problem, you will gain insight into how the evangelists used sources, shaped traditions, and communicated their messages to early Christian communities.

We shall begin by defining the Synoptic Problem and explaining why it matters for Gospel study. Next, we will examine early approaches such as the Augustinian and Griesbach hypotheses. We will then explore the Two-Source Hypothesis, focusing on Markan priority and the role of the Q source. Following that, we will consider alternative modern theories, including the Farrer and Jerusalem school hypotheses. Finally, we will evaluate current scholarly debates and assess the implications of these theories for Gospel interpretation today. This progression will equip you with a critical framework for engaging with the Synoptic Gospels at an advanced level.



Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 3.1: define the Synoptic Problem and explain why it is significant for Gospel study,

SLO 3.2: Describe the key questions raised by the Synoptic Problem.

SLO 3.3: summarize early approaches to the Synoptic Problem, including the Augustinian and Griesbach hypotheses,

SLO 3.4: analyze the Two-Source Hypothesis, focusing on Markan priority and the role of the Q source.

SLO 3.5: evaluate criticisms and defences of the Two-Source Hypothesis,

SLO 3.6: explain alternative modern theories such as the Farrer hypothesis and the Jerusalem school hypothesis, and

SLO 3.7: Assess the comparative strengths of major theories and discuss their implications for Gospel interpretation today.

3.1 Defining the Synoptic Problem

3.1.1 Meaning of the Synoptic Problem

The Synoptic Problem refers to the question of how Matthew, Mark, and Luke are related to one another in terms of content, wording, and structure. These three Gospels share large sections of material, sometimes with identical wording, yet they also contain differences in order and emphasis. The problem lies in explaining why they are so similar and yet distinct.

Fill in the blank: The Synoptic Problem refers to the question of how _____, Mark, and Luke are related.

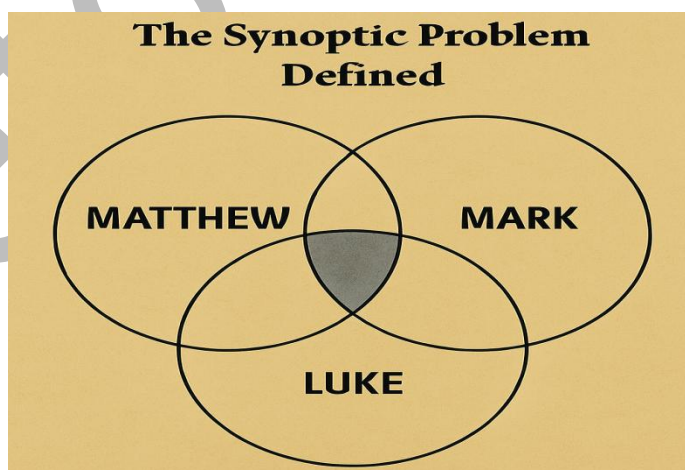


Figure 3.1: The Synoptic Problem defined

3.1.2 Why the Synoptic Problem matters for Gospel study



The Synoptic Problem matters because it affects how we interpret the Gospels and understand their historical reliability. If one Gospel was used as a source for another, this influences how we view the originality of its material. It also shapes our understanding of the evangelists' theological intentions. Studying the Synoptic Problem helps us appreciate the complexity of Gospel formation and the diversity of perspectives within the New Testament.

Fill in the blank: The Synoptic Problem matters because it influences how we interpret the _____ of the Gospels.

Box 3.1: Reasons the Synoptic Problem Matters

- It affects interpretation of Gospel content
- It influences views of historical reliability
- It highlights theological intentions of the evangelists

Box 3.1: Reasons the Synoptic Problem matters

3.1.3 Key questions raised by the Synoptic Problem

The Synoptic Problem raises several key questions, such as: Which Gospel was written first? Did the evangelists use common sources? How do we explain the similarities and differences in wording and order? These questions have led to various theories, including the Augustinian hypothesis, the Griesbach hypothesis, and the Two-Source Hypothesis. Each theory attempts to provide a solution to the problem of Gospel interdependence.

Fill in the blank: One key question raised by the Synoptic Problem is which _____ was written first.



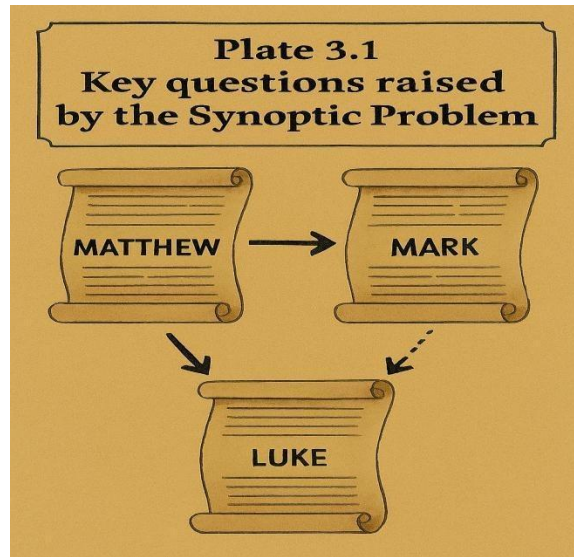


Plate 3.1: Key questions raised by the Synoptic Problem

Pilot questions 3.1

What does the Synoptic Problem refer to?

Why does the Synoptic Problem matter for Gospel study?

Name one reason why the Synoptic Problem is important.

What is one key question raised by the Synoptic Problem?

Which three Gospels are directly involved in the Synoptic Problem?

3.2 Early Approaches to the Synoptic Problem

3.2.1 The Augustinian hypothesis

The Augustinian hypothesis is one of the earliest attempts to explain the Synoptic Problem. It suggests that Matthew was written first, followed by Mark, who abbreviated Matthew, and then Luke, who used both Matthew and Mark. This view was widely accepted in the early church and reflects the traditional belief in Matthew's priority.

Fill in the blank: The Augustinian hypothesis suggests that _____ was written first among the Synoptic Gospels.



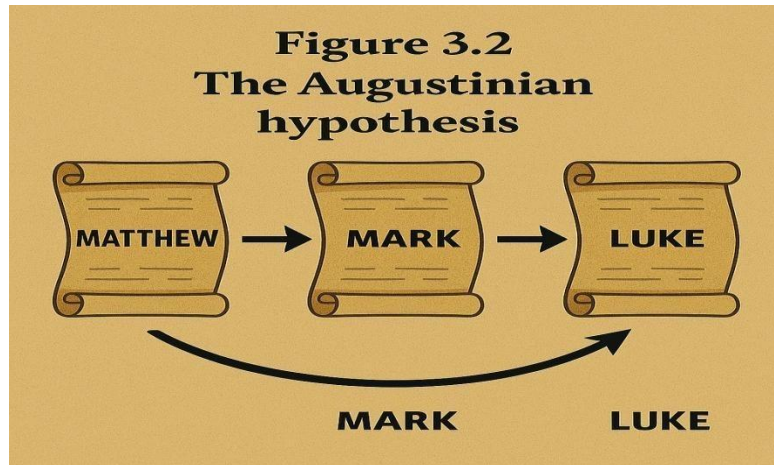


Figure 3.2: The Augustinian hypothesis

3.2.2 The Griesbach hypothesis (Two-Gospel theory)

The Griesbach hypothesis, also known as the Two-Gospel theory, was proposed in the late eighteenth century. It argues that Matthew was written first, Luke second, and Mark last. According to this view, Mark used both Matthew and Luke as sources, condensing their material into a shorter Gospel. This theory challenges the idea of Markan priority and instead places Matthew at the beginning of the sequence.

Fill in the blank: The Griesbach hypothesis claims that _____ used both Matthew and Luke as sources.

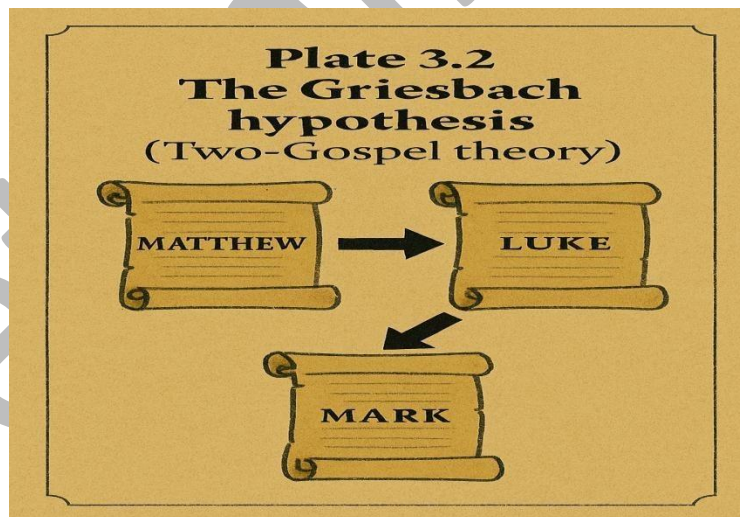


Plate 3.2: The Griesbach hypothesis (Two-Gospel theory)

3.2.3 Strengths and weaknesses of early approaches

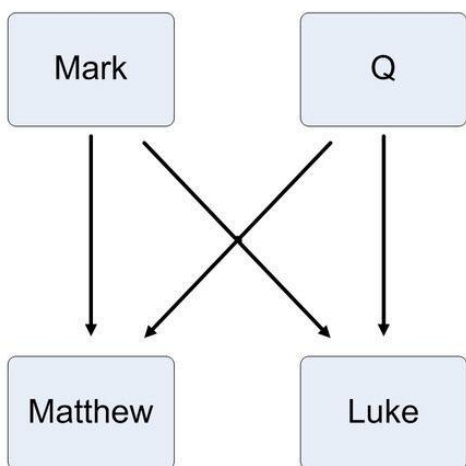
Both the Augustinian and Griesbach hypotheses have strengths and weaknesses. The Augustinian hypothesis aligns with early church tradition and explains Matthew's prominence, but it struggles to account for Mark's distinctive style and content. The Griesbach hypothesis highlights the possibility of Mark's dependence on Matthew and Luke, yet it faces challenges in explaining why Mark would omit or



alter significant material. These limitations led scholars to seek alternative solutions, paving the way for modern theories such as the Two-Source Hypothesis.

Fill in the blank: A weakness of the Griesbach hypothesis is that it struggles to explain why _____ would omit significant material.

Two Source Hypothesis



Box 3.2: Strengths and weaknesses of early approaches

Augustinian hypothesis: Strength – aligns with tradition; Weakness – struggles with Mark's distinctive style

Griesbach hypothesis: Strength – considers Mark's dependence on Matthew and Luke; Weakness – difficult to explain omissions

Pilot questions 3.2

What does the Augustinian hypothesis suggest about the order of Gospel writing?

Which Gospel is considered first in the Griesbach hypothesis?

What is another name for the Griesbach hypothesis?

Name one strength of the Augustinian hypothesis.

What is a key weakness of the Griesbach hypothesis?

3.3 The Two-Source Hypothesis

3.3.1 Markan priority explained

The Two-Source Hypothesis is the most widely accepted solution to the Synoptic Problem. It begins with the principle of Markan priority, which means that Mark was written first and served as a source for both Matthew and Luke. Scholars argue that Mark's simpler style, shorter length, and rougher Greek suggest it was the earliest Gospel. Matthew and Luke are thought to have expanded and refined Mark's material, adding their own theological emphases.



Fill in the blank: The Two-Source Hypothesis begins with the principle of _____ priority.

Box 3.5

Criticisms and Defences of the Two-Source Hypothesis

Criticisms of the Two-Source Hypothesis

- The Q source has never been physically discovered
- Q is a hypothetical document reconstructed by scholars
- Some similarities between Matthew and Luke may be explained by direct borrowing
- The theory does not explain every difference in wording and order

Defences of the Two-Source Hypothesis

- It explains material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark
- Strong evidence supports Mark as the earliest Gospel
- Independent use of sources explains variations between the Gospels
- It remains the most widely accepted scholarly explanation

Figure 3.3: Markan priority in the Two-Source Hypothesis

3.3.2 The role of the Q source

In addition to Mark, the hypothesis proposes a second source known as Q (from the German Quelle, meaning "source"). Q is a hypothetical written collection of Jesus' sayings that Matthew and Luke are believed to have used independently. This explains why Matthew and Luke share material not found in Mark, such as the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer. Although no physical copy of Q has ever been discovered, its existence is inferred from the shared content between Matthew and Luke.

Fill in the blank: The hypothetical source containing sayings of Jesus used by Matthew and Luke is called _____



Two-source Hypothesis

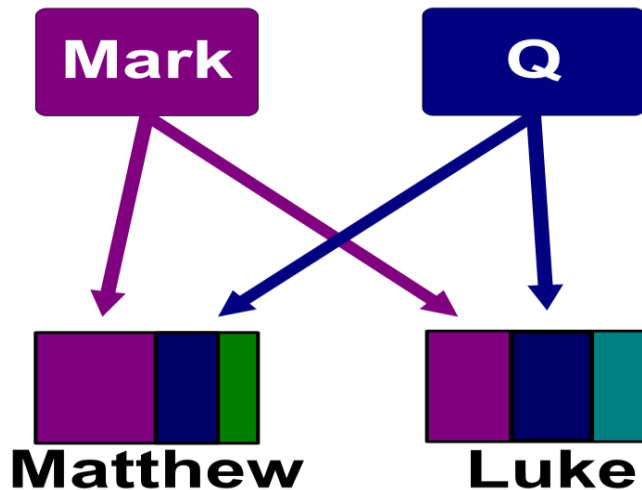


Plate 3.3: The role of Q in the Two-Source Hypothesis

3.3.3 Criticisms and defences of the Two-Source Hypothesis

The Two-Source Hypothesis has both criticisms and defences. Critics argue that Q is purely hypothetical and question why no manuscript evidence has been found. Others suggest that Luke may have used Matthew directly, eliminating the need for Q. Defenders of the hypothesis point out that the similarities between Matthew and Luke are too extensive to be explained without a common source. They also argue that the independence of Matthew and Luke is supported by differences in how they present shared material.

Fill in the blank: A major criticism of the Two-Source Hypothesis is that no _____ evidence of Q has been found.

Box 3.3: Criticisms and defences of the Two-Source Hypothesis

Criticism: Q is hypothetical and lacks manuscript evidence

Criticism: Luke may have used Matthew directly

Defence: Shared material between Matthew and Luke suggests a common source

Defence: Differences in presentation support the independence of Matthew and Luke

Pilot questions 3.3

What does Markan priority mean in the context of the Two-Source Hypothesis?

What is the Q source, and why is it important?

Name one example of material found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark.



What is a major criticism of the Two-Source Hypothesis?

How do defenders of the hypothesis explain the differences in Matthew and Luke's presentation of shared material?

3.4 Alternative Modern Theories

3.4.1 The Farrer hypothesis

The Farrer hypothesis is a modern solution to the Synoptic Problem that rejects the need for Q. It argues that Mark was written first, Matthew used Mark, and Luke used both Mark and Matthew. This theory eliminates the hypothetical Q source by suggesting that Luke had direct access to Matthew's Gospel. Supporters of the Farrer hypothesis believe it provides a simpler explanation of the literary relationships among the Synoptics.

Fill in the blank: The Farrer hypothesis rejects the need for the _____ source.

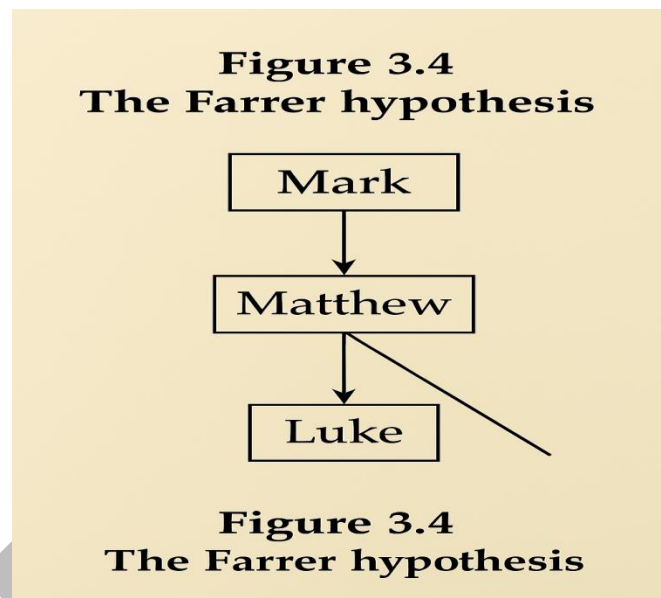


Figure 3.4: The Farrer hypothesis

3.4.2 The Jerusalem school hypothesis

The Jerusalem school hypothesis proposes that the Synoptic Gospels were influenced by early Hebrew traditions, which were later translated into Greek. According to this view, Matthew and Luke drew upon these Hebrew sources, while Mark condensed and adapted them. This hypothesis highlights the role of Semitic language traditions in shaping the Synoptic accounts and suggests that the Gospels may preserve echoes of original Hebrew or Aramaic sayings of Jesus.



Fill in the blank: The Jerusalem school hypothesis emphasizes the role of early _____ traditions

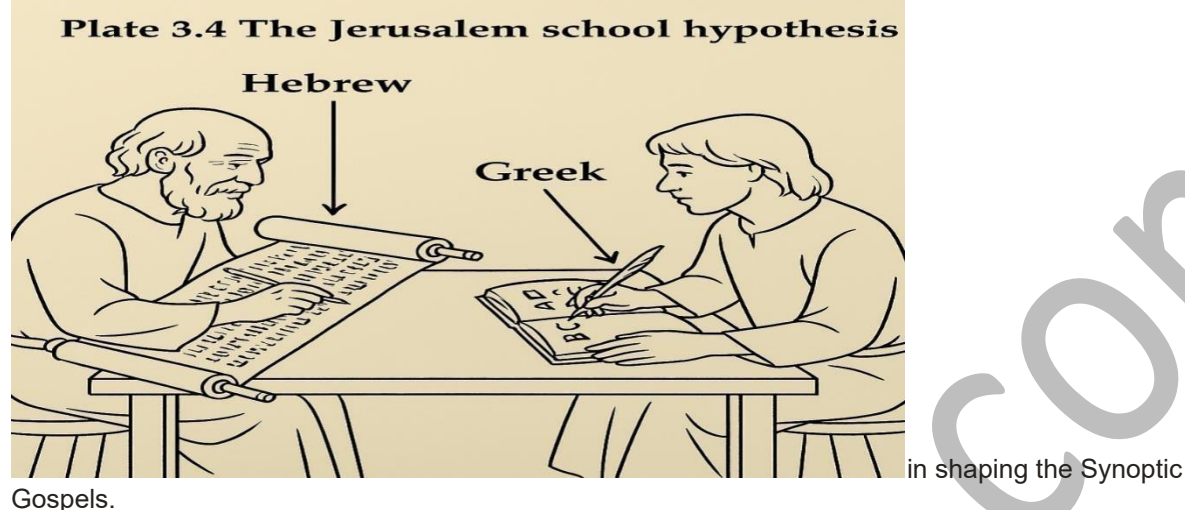


Plate 3.4: The Jerusalem school hypothesis

3.4.3 Other contemporary perspectives

Beyond the Farrer and Jerusalem school hypotheses, scholars have proposed other contemporary perspectives. Some argue for variations of the Two-Source Hypothesis, while others suggest multiple overlapping oral and written traditions. These perspectives reflect the ongoing scholarly debate and the complexity of the Synoptic Problem. They remind us that no single theory has achieved universal acceptance, and each offers insights into how the Gospels may have been composed.

Fill in the blank: No single theory of the Synoptic Problem has achieved _____ acceptance among scholars.

Box 3.4 Contemporary perspectives on the Synoptic Problem

- Variations of the Two-Source Hypothesis
- Emphasis on oral traditions alongside written sources
- Multiple overlapping sources and community influences

Box 3.4: Contemporary perspectives on the Synoptic Problem

Pilot questions 3.4



What does the Farrer hypothesis propose about Luke's sources?

Which hypothesis emphasises Hebrew traditions translated into Greek?

What is the main difference between the Farrer hypothesis and the Two-Source Hypothesis?

Name one contemporary perspective beyond the Farrer and Jerusalem school hypotheses.

Why has no single theory of the Synoptic Problem achieved universal acceptance?

3.5 Evaluating the Synoptic Problem Today

3.5.1 Comparative strengths of major theories

Each major theory of the Synoptic Problem has its strengths, meaning the aspects that make it persuasive, and its weaknesses, meaning the challenges it faces. The Two-Source Hypothesis is valued for its explanatory power, especially regarding shared material between Matthew and Luke. The Farrer hypothesis appeals to those who prefer to avoid hypothetical sources like Q. The Jerusalem school hypothesis highlights the importance of Semitic traditions. Evaluating these strengths helps us appreciate the diversity of scholarly approaches.

Fill in the blank: The Two-Source Hypothesis is valued for its explanatory power, especially regarding _____ material between Matthew and Luke.

Box 3.5: Comparative strengths of major theories

- **Two-Source hypothesis:** explains shared material between Matthew and Luke
- **Farrer hypothesis:** avoids reliance on hypothetical sources
- **Jerusalem school hypothesis:** highlights Semitic traditions

Box 3.5: Comparative strengths of major theories

3.5.2 Implications for Gospel interpretation

Theories of the Synoptic Problem have significant implications, meaning consequences for how we interpret the Gospels. If Mark was written first, then Matthew and Luke can be seen as theological expansions of Mark's narrative. If Luke used Matthew directly, this changes how we view their relationship. If Hebrew traditions shaped the Gospels, then we may be closer to the original sayings of Jesus. These implications remind us that literary theories are not abstract but directly affect our understanding of Scripture.



Fill in the blank: If Mark was written first, Matthew and Luke can be seen as _____ expansions of Mark's narrative.

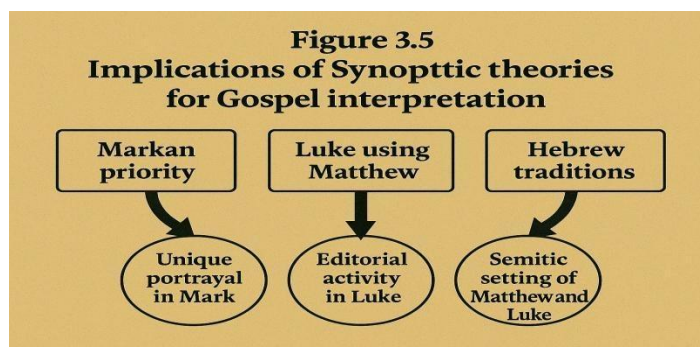


Figure 3.5: Implications of Synoptic theories for Gospel interpretation

3.5.3 Current scholarly trends and debates

Current scholarship reflects ongoing debates, meaning discussions among experts about the best solution to the Synoptic Problem. While the Two-Source Hypothesis remains dominant, the Farrer hypothesis has gained traction, especially in English-speaking contexts. Some scholars continue to explore oral tradition models, while others emphasise the theological creativity of the evangelists rather than strict literary dependence. These trends show that the Synoptic Problem is not a closed case but an active field of study.

Fill in the blank: While the Two-Source Hypothesis remains dominant, the _____ hypothesis has gained traction in English-speaking contexts.

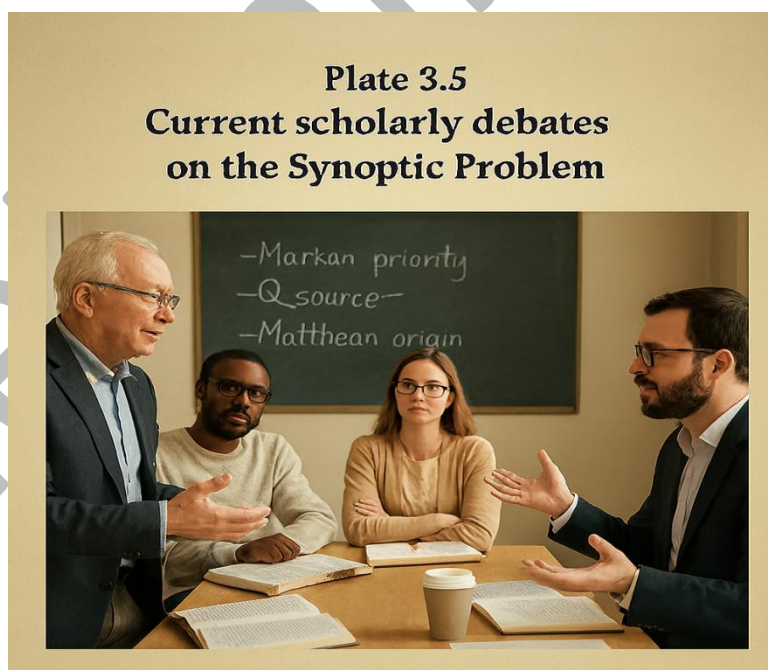


Plate 3.5: Current scholarly debates on the Synoptic Problem

Pilot questions 3.5

What is one strength of the Two-Source Hypothesis?



How does the Farrer hypothesis differ from the Two-Source Hypothesis?

What is one implication of Markan priority for Gospel interpretation?

Which hypothesis has gained traction in English-speaking contexts?

Why is the Synoptic Problem considered an active field of study today?

SERIES SUMMARY

This Series has explored the Synoptic Problem and the theories that attempt to resolve it, highlighting its importance for understanding the literary relationships among Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The purpose was to equip you with knowledge of how scholars have explained the similarities and differences between these Gospels, and to show how these theories influence interpretation and theological reflection.

We began by defining the Synoptic Problem and considering why it matters for Gospel study. Then we examined early approaches such as the Augustinian and Griesbach hypotheses, before moving on to the Two-Source Hypothesis with its emphasis on Markan priority and the Q source. Following that, we looked at alternative modern theories including the Farrer and Jerusalem school hypotheses, as well as other perspectives. Finally, we evaluated the Synoptic Problem today, comparing strengths of major theories, exploring their implications, and noting current scholarly debates. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to define the Synoptic Problem, describe early approaches, analyse the Two-Source Hypothesis, explain alternative theories, and assess their relevance for Gospel interpretation.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Augustinian hypothesis: An early theory suggesting Matthew was written first, followed by Mark who abbreviated Matthew, and then Luke who used both.

Comparative strengths: The advantages or persuasive elements of different theories of the Synoptic Problem.

Criticisms and defences: Arguments against or in support of a theory, highlighting its weaknesses or strengths.

Farrer hypothesis: A modern theory proposing that Mark was written first, Matthew used Mark, and Luke used both Mark and Matthew, eliminating the need for Q.

Griesbach hypothesis (Two-Gospel theory): A theory suggesting Matthew was written first, Luke second, and Mark last, using both Matthew and Luke as sources.

Jerusalem school hypothesis: A theory emphasizing the role of early Hebrew traditions, later translated into Greek, in shaping the Synoptic Gospels.

Markan priority: The principle that Mark was the earliest Gospel and served as a source for Matthew and Luke.

Q source: A hypothetical written collection of Jesus' sayings, believed to have been used by Matthew and Luke but not by Mark.



Synoptic Problem: The question of how Matthew, Mark, and Luke are related in terms of content, wording, and structure.

Theological implications: The consequences of Synoptic theories for how the Gospels are interpreted in terms of faith and doctrine.

Two-Source Hypothesis: The dominant modern theory suggesting that Matthew and Luke used both Mark and the hypothetical Q source.

Weaknesses: The limitations or challenges faced by a theory of the Synoptic Problem.

Concept Check Questions [4]

Objective Questions (Multiple Choice)

Which hypothesis rejects the existence of Q and argues that Luke used Matthew directly? (Linked to SLO 3.6)

Augustinian hypothesis

Griesbach hypothesis

Farrer hypothesis

Jerusalem school hypothesis

According to the Two-Source Hypothesis, which Gospel was written first? (Linked to SLO 3.4)

Matthew

Luke

Mark

John

The Jerusalem school hypothesis emphasises the role of which traditions in shaping the Synoptic Gospels? (Linked to SLO 3.6)

Roman

Greek



Hebrew

Egyptian

Short-Answer Questions

Define the Synoptic Problem. (Linked to SLO 3.1)

State one key question raised by the Synoptic Problem. (Linked to SLO 3.2)

Describe the main claim of the Augustinian hypothesis. (Linked to SLO 3.3)

What is the Q source, and why is it important in the Two-Source Hypothesis? (Linked to SLO 3.4)

Identify one strength of the Farrer hypothesis. (Linked to SLO 3.6)

Long-Answer Questions

Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the Augustinian and Griesbach hypotheses as early approaches to the Synoptic Problem. (Linked to SLO 3.3)

Basic response: Outline the order of Gospel writing proposed by each hypothesis and note one strength and one weakness.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may compare how these hypotheses influenced later theories and assess their historical credibility.

Evaluate the Two-Source Hypothesis, focusing on Markan priority and the role of Q. (Linked to SLO 3.4, 3.5)

Basic response: Explain why Mark is considered first and how Q accounts for shared material in Matthew and Luke.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may discuss criticisms of Q and how defenders justify its existence despite lack of manuscripts.

Explain the Farrer hypothesis and compare it with the Two-Source Hypothesis. (Linked to SLO 3.6)

Basic response: Describe how the Farrer hypothesis eliminates Q by suggesting Luke used Matthew directly.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may evaluate whether this provides a simpler solution and consider its implications for Gospel interpretation.

Assess current scholarly debates on the Synoptic Problem and their implications for Gospel study today. (Linked to SLO 3.7)

Basic response: Identify one dominant theory and one alternative theory currently discussed.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may explore how these debates influence theological reflection and the study of Gospel reliability.



Answers to Concept Check Questions [4]

Objective Questions

- c) Farrer hypothesis
- c) Mark
- c) Hebrew

Short-Answer Questions

The Synoptic Problem is the question of how Matthew, Mark, and Luke are related in terms of content, wording, and structure.

One key question is: Which Gospel was written first?

The Augustinian hypothesis claims Matthew was written first, Mark abbreviated Matthew, and Luke used both.

The Q source is a hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings, important because it explains material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark.

A strength of the Farrer hypothesis is that it avoids reliance on a hypothetical source like Q.

Long-Answer Questions

Basic response: The Augustinian hypothesis aligns with tradition but struggles with Mark's style; the Griesbach hypothesis considers Mark's dependence on Matthew and Luke but cannot explain omissions.

Value-added response: These hypotheses influenced later theories but lack strong textual evidence, limiting their credibility.

Basic response: Markan priority suggests Mark was first; Q explains shared material in Matthew and Luke.

Value-added response: Critics argue Q lacks manuscripts, but defenders highlight the extensive overlap between Matthew and Luke as evidence.

Basic response: The Farrer hypothesis proposes Luke used Matthew directly, eliminating Q.

Value-added response: This offers a simpler solution but raises questions about Luke's editorial choices and theological emphases.

Basic response: The Two-Source Hypothesis remains dominant, while the Farrer hypothesis is gaining traction.

Value-added response: These debates shape how scholars interpret Gospel reliability and theological diversity, keeping the Synoptic Problem an active field of study.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 3]

Part 3.1 Defining the Synoptic Problem

The Synoptic Problem refers to the question of how Matthew, Mark, and Luke are related.



It matters because it influences how we interpret the content of the Gospels.

One reason it is important is that it affects views of historical reliability.

A key question is which Gospel was written first.

The three Gospels directly involved are Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Part 3.2 Early Approaches to the Synoptic Problem

The Augustinian hypothesis suggests Matthew was written first, followed by Mark, then Luke.

In the Griesbach hypothesis, Matthew is considered first, Luke second, and Mark last.

Another name for the Griesbach hypothesis is the Two-Gospel theory.

A strength of the Augustinian hypothesis is that it aligns with early church tradition.

A key weakness of the Griesbach hypothesis is that it struggles to explain why Mark would omit significant material.

Part 3.3 The Two-Source Hypothesis

Markan priority means Mark was written first and used as a source by Matthew and Luke.

The Q source is a hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings, important because it explains material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark.

One example of material found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark is the Beatitudes.

A major criticism of the Two-Source Hypothesis is that no manuscript evidence of Q has been found.

Defenders explain the differences in Matthew and Luke's presentation of shared material as evidence of their independence.

Part 3.4 Alternative Modern Theories

The Farrer hypothesis proposes that Luke used Matthew directly, along with Mark.

The Jerusalem school hypothesis emphasizes Hebrew traditions translated into Greek.

The main difference between the Farrer hypothesis and the Two-Source Hypothesis is that the Farrer hypothesis eliminates Q.

One contemporary perspective is the emphasis on oral traditions alongside written sources.

No single theory has achieved universal acceptance because each has strengths and weaknesses.

Part 3.5 Evaluating the Synoptic Problem Today

One strength of the Two-Source Hypothesis is that it explains shared material between Matthew and Luke.

The Farrer hypothesis differs from the Two-Source Hypothesis by rejecting Q and suggesting Luke used Matthew.



Markan priority implies that Matthew and Luke can be seen as theological expansions of Mark's narrative.

The Farrer hypothesis has gained traction in English-speaking contexts.

The Synoptic Problem is considered an active field of study today because scholarly debates continue, and no single theory has universal acceptance.

References and Attributions [Series 3]

This section compiles all references and illustration attributions used or suggested in Series 3: The Synoptic Problem and Its Theories. Entries are presented in APA style for clarity and consistency.

General References

Brown, R. E. (1997). *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dunn, J. D. G. (2003). *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Sanders, E. P. (1991). *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin Books.

Wright, N. T. (2012). *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*. London: SPCK.

Illustrations and Attributions

Figure 3.1: The Synoptic Problem defined

AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing overlap of content among Matthew, Mark, and Luke to illustrate the Synoptic Problem."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Problem overlap Matthew Mark Luke diagram OER."

Box 3.1: Reasons the Synoptic Problem matters

AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing reasons why the Synoptic Problem matters for Gospel study."

Suggested OER search string: "importance Synoptic Problem Gospel study OER."

Plate 3.1: Key questions raised by the Synoptic Problem

AI prompt: "Generate an image showing scrolls of Matthew, Mark, and Luke with arrows indicating possible literary relationships."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Problem key questions Gospel relationships OER."

Figure 3.2: The Augustinian hypothesis

AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the sequence of Gospel writing according to the Augustinian hypothesis: Matthew first, then Mark, then Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "Augustinian hypothesis Synoptic Problem diagram OER."

Plate 3.2: The Griesbach hypothesis (Two-Gospel theory)



AI prompt: "Generate an image illustrating the Griesbach hypothesis with arrows showing Matthew first, Luke second, and Mark using both."

Suggested OER search string: "Griesbach hypothesis Two-Gospel theory Synoptic Problem OER."

Box 3.2: Strengths and weaknesses of early approaches

AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing strengths and weaknesses of the Augustinian and Griesbach hypotheses."

Suggested OER search string: "strengths weaknesses Augustinian Griesbach hypotheses Synoptic Problem OER."

Figure 3.3: Markan priority in the Two-Source Hypothesis

AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing Mark as the first Gospel, with arrows pointing to Matthew and Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "Markan priority Two-Source Hypothesis diagram OER."

Plate 3.3: The role of Q in the Two-Source Hypothesis

AI prompt: "Generate an image illustrating Matthew and Luke drawing from both Mark and Q as sources."

Suggested OER search string: "Q source Matthew Luke Two-Source Hypothesis OER."

Box 3.3: Criticisms and defences of the Two-Source Hypothesis

AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing criticisms and defences of the Two-Source Hypothesis."

Suggested OER search string: "criticisms defences Two-Source Hypothesis Synoptic Problem OER."

Figure 3.4: The Farrer hypothesis

AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing Mark first, Matthew using Mark, and Luke using both Mark and Matthew."

Suggested OER search string: "Farrer hypothesis Synoptic Problem diagram OER."

Plate 3.4: The Jerusalem school hypothesis

AI prompt: "Generate an image illustrating Hebrew scrolls being translated into Greek manuscripts to show the Jerusalem school hypothesis."

Suggested OER search string: "Jerusalem school hypothesis Hebrew traditions Synoptic Gospels OER."

Box 3.4: Contemporary perspectives on the Synoptic Problem

AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing contemporary perspectives on the Synoptic Problem, including variations of the Two-Source Hypothesis and oral traditions."

Suggested OER search string: "contemporary perspectives Synoptic Problem theories OER."



Box 3.5: Comparative strengths of major theories

AI prompt: "Generate a text box listing comparative strengths of the Two-Source, Farrer, and Jerusalem school hypotheses."

Suggested OER search string: "comparative strengths Synoptic Problem theories OER."

Figure 3.5: Implications of Synoptic theories for Gospel interpretation

AI prompt: "Generate a diagram showing how different theories of the Synoptic Problem affect Gospel interpretation."

Suggested OER search string: "implications Synoptic Problem Gospel interpretation diagram OER."

Plate 3.5: Current scholarly debates on the Synoptic Problem

AI prompt: "Generate an image showing scholars debating different Synoptic theories in a seminar setting."

Suggested OER search string: "current scholarly debates Synoptic Problem theories OER."

Course Code: CRS 201

Series Title: Critical Approaches to the Synoptic Gospels

Series Number: 4

SERIES 4: CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Part 1: Historical and Literary Foundations

SubPart 1.1: The Synoptic Problem and Source Theories

SubPart 1.2: Historical Criticism and Form Criticism

SubPart 1.3: Redaction Criticism and Gospel Composition

Part 2: Comparative Textual Analysis

SubPart 2.1: Triple Tradition and Double Tradition

SubPart 2.2: Case Study: The Parable of the Sower

SubPart 2.3: Case Study: The Passion Narrative

Part 3: Theological and Cultural Perspectives

SubPart 3.1: Theological Emphases in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

SubPart 3.2: Social and Cultural Contexts

SubPart 3.3: Reception and Interpretation in Modern Scholarship



Part 4: Contemporary Critical Debates

SubPart 4.1: The Farrer, Griesbach, and Augustinian Hypotheses

SubPart 4.2: The Role of Q and Oral Traditions

SubPart 4.3: Implications for Gospel Interpretation

INTRODUCTION

The Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, have long intrigued scholars and students alike for their striking similarities and subtle differences. While they often recount the same events, their distinct literary styles and theological emphases raise important questions about how they were composed and what they aim to convey. This Series invites you to step beyond surface-level reading and engage critically with the methods scholars use to interpret these texts.

This series aims to introduce you to key critical approaches used in the study of the Synoptic Gospels and to help you understand how these methods shape our interpretation of Gospel content, structure, and meaning.

We shall commence this Series by exploring the historical and literary foundations of Synoptic study, including the Synoptic Problem and major source theories. Then, we will examine comparative textual analysis, focusing on shared traditions and case studies that highlight editorial differences. Following that, we will turn to theological and cultural perspectives, considering how each Gospel reflects its unique context and audience. Finally, we will wrap up by engaging with contemporary scholarly debates, evaluating competing hypotheses and their implications for Gospel interpretation.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 4.1 define the Synoptic Problem and outline major source theories,

SLO 4.2 explain the principles of historical, form, and redaction criticism as applied to the Synoptic Gospels,

SLO 4.3 analyse examples of triple and double tradition through comparative textual study,

SLO 4.4 evaluate the theological emphases and cultural contexts reflected in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and

SLO 4.5 assess contemporary scholarly debates on Synoptic theories and their implications for Gospel interpretation.

1.1 Historical and Literary Foundations

The historical foundations of the Hebrew language are deeply rooted in the ancient Near East. Hebrew belongs to the Semitic language family, which is a group of related languages spoken across the Middle East and parts of Africa. The term Semitic refers to languages such as Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic that share common linguistic features. Hebrew developed as the language of the Israelites and became the primary medium for much of the Old Testament. Its survival and revival in modern times make it unique among ancient languages.



Fill in the blank: Hebrew belongs to the _____ language family.

1.1.1 Historical background

Hebrew emerged as a spoken language around the second millennium BCE. It was used in daily life, religious practices, and governance among the Israelites. Over time, Hebrew underwent changes, especially during the Babylonian exile, when Aramaic became more dominant in everyday use. Despite this, Hebrew remained the sacred language of scripture and worship.

Fill in the blank: During the Babylonian exile, _____ became more dominant in everyday use.

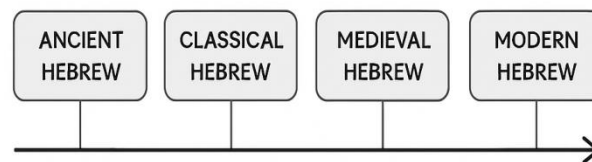


Figure 1.1 Historical development of the Hebrew language

Figure 1.1 Historical development of the Hebrew language

1.1.2 Literary features

The literary foundations of Hebrew are most evident in the Old Testament, also known as the Tanakh. The term Tanakh is an acronym formed from Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). Hebrew literature is characterized by parallelism, rhythm, and imagery, which give the texts their poetic and memorable quality. For example, Psalms often use parallelism, where one line reinforces or contrasts with the next.



Feature	Description	Example
Parallelism	Repetition of ideas in balanced lines; synonymous, antithetic, or synthetic.	<i>"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."</i> (Psalm 19:1)
Rhythm	Cadence created by stress patterns and line length, often without rhyme.	Found in Psalms and prophetic texts, e.g., Isaiah 9:6's rhythmic buildup.
Imagery	Vivid sensory language to evoke emotion or spiritual insight.	<i>"He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters."</i> (Psalm 23:2)
Chiasmus	Inverted structure (A-B-B-A) for emphasis or theological symmetry.	<i>"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."</i> (Matthew 19:30)
Inclusio	Repetition of phrases at beginning and end to frame a passage.	Psalm 8 opens and closes with <i>"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name..."</i>
Anaphora	Repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive lines.	<i>"For his steadfast love endures forever..."</i> repeated in Psalm 136.
Metaphor	Figurative language to express abstract ideas through concrete images.	<i>"The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer."</i> (Psalm 18:2)
Ellipsis	Omission of words for brevity or poetic tension.	Proverbs often omit verbs: <i>"A wise son [makes] a glad father..."</i>

Caption: Table 1.1 Literary features of Hebrew texts

Fill in the blank: The acronym Tanakh stands for Torah, Nevi'im, and _____.

Pilot questions 1.1

Hebrew belongs to which language family?

Which language became dominant during the Babylonian exile?

What does the acronym Tanakh represent?

Name one literary feature commonly found in Hebrew poetry.

Which part of the Old Testament contains Psalms?

2.2.1 Triple tradition and double tradition

The triple tradition refers to passages that appear in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). These often include major events such as the baptism of Jesus and the feeding of the five thousand. By contrast, the double tradition refers to material found in Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark. Scholars often attribute this to a hypothetical source called Q, meaning "Quelle" or "source" in German.

Fill in the blank: The material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark is called _____.



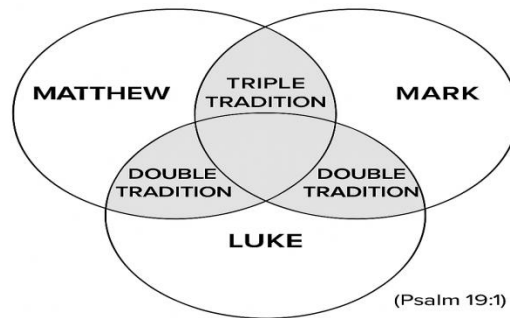


Figure 2.2 Triple and double traditions in the Synoptic Gospels

Caption: Figure 2.2 Triple and double traditions in the Synoptic Gospels

2.2.2 Case study: the parable of the sower

The parable of the sower is a key teaching of Jesus found in all three Synoptic Gospels. A parable is a short, symbolic story used to convey moral or spiritual lessons. Comparing the versions in Matthew, Mark, and Luke shows subtle differences in wording and emphasis, yet the central message remains consistent: the varied responses to God's word.

Fill in the blank: A short, symbolic story used to convey moral or spiritual lessons is called a _____.

BOX 2.2

Comparative features of the parable of the sower

MATTHEW *understands* the word

MARK *accept* it

LUKE *hold it fast*, in an honest and good heart

Caption: Box 2.2 Comparative features of the parable of the sower

2.2.3 Case study: the passion narrative

The passion narrative refers to the accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. While all Synoptic Gospels include this narrative, each presents distinctive emphases. For example, Mark highlights Jesus' abandonment, Matthew stresses fulfilment of prophecy, and Luke emphasises forgiveness and compassion.

Fill in the blank: The accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection are collectively called the _____ narrative.



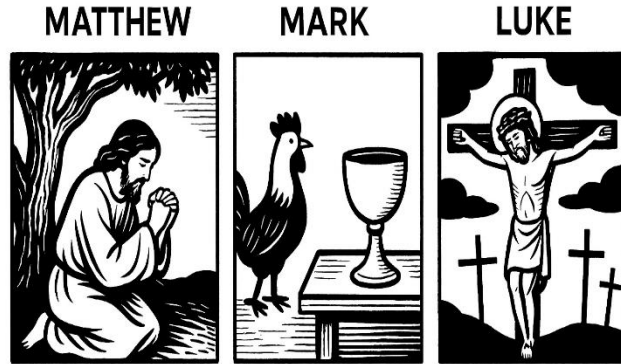


Plate 2.2 Passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Plate 2.2 Passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

2.2 Comparative Textual Analysis

Comparative textual analysis allows us to place the Synoptic Gospels side by side, noticing where they agree, where they differ, and how each contributes to our understanding of Jesus' ministry. This method helps learners appreciate the complexity of Gospel traditions and the scholarly tools used to study them.

2.2.1 Triple tradition and double tradition

The triple tradition refers to material found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Examples include the baptism of Jesus and the feeding of the five thousand. The double tradition refers to passages found in Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark. Scholars often attribute this to a hypothetical source called Q, which means "source" in German.

Fill in the blank: Material found in Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark is called _____.

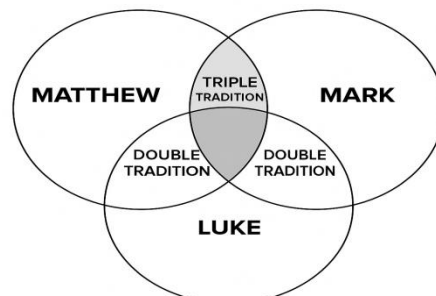


Figure 2.2 Triple and double traditions in the Synoptic Gospels

Caption: Figure 2.2 Triple and double traditions in the Synoptic Gospels



2.2.2 Case study: the parable of the sower

The parable of the sower is a teaching of Jesus found in all three Synoptic Gospels. A parable is a short, symbolic story used to convey moral or spiritual lessons. Comparing Matthew, Mark, and Luke reveals subtle differences in wording and emphasis, yet the central message remains consistent: the varied responses to God's word.

Fill in the blank: A short, symbolic story used to convey moral or spiritual lessons is called a _____.

Box 2.2 Comparative features of the parable of the sower

BOX 2.2 Comparative features of the parable of the sower	
MATTHEW	<i>hears the word and understand it</i>
MARK	<i>hear the word and accept it</i>
LUKE	<i>hear the word. hold it fast in an honest and good heart (Luke 8:15)</i>

2.2.3 Case study: the passion narrative

The passion narrative refers to the accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. While all Synoptic Gospels include this narrative, each presents distinctive emphases. Mark highlights Jesus' abandonment, Matthew stresses fulfilment of prophecy, and Luke emphasises forgiveness and compassion.

Fill in the blank: The accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection are collectively called the _____ narrative.



Plate 2.2 Passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Plate 2.2 Passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

2.3 Theological and Cultural Perspectives

This part helps us understand how the Synoptic Gospels are shaped by theological priorities, social and cultural settings, and the way they have been received in modern scholarship. By exploring these perspectives, you will gain a deeper appreciation of how the Gospels speak both to their original audiences and to us today.



2.3.1 Theological emphases in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Each Gospel writer highlights distinctive theological emphases, meaning the particular themes or doctrinal points chosen to shape their narrative.

Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and as a teacher like Moses.

Mark portrays Jesus as the suffering servant, emphasising discipleship and endurance.

Luke stresses compassion, inclusion, and the universal scope of salvation.

Fill in the blank: The Gospel that portrays Jesus as the suffering servant is _____.

Gospel	Primary Emphasis	Key Themes	Representative Passages
Matthew	<i>Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy</i>	- Kingdom of Heaven- Teaching authority- Genealogy from Abraham- Emphasis on righteousness	Matt 5–7 (Sermon on the Mount)Matt 1:1–17 (Genealogy)Matt 23 (Woes to Pharisees)
Mark	<i>Jesus as the suffering servant and Son of God</i>	- Urgency and action- Messianic secret- Discipleship through suffering- Passion narrative central	Mark 1:1 (Beginning of Gospel)Mark 8:31–38 (First Passion prediction)Mark 15 (Crucifixion)
Luke	<i>Jesus as the compassionate Savior for all people</i>	- Universal salvation- Concern for the poor and marginalized- Role of women- Prayer and the Holy Spirit	Luke 1–2 (Birth narratives)Luke 4:18–19 (Mission statement)Luke 15 (Parables of the lost)

Figure 2.3 Theological emphases in the Synoptic Gospels

2.3.2 Social and cultural contexts

The Synoptic Gospels were written in specific social contexts, referring to everyday life, customs, and community structures, and cultural contexts, referring to broader influences such as Greco-Roman culture, Jewish traditions, and Roman political realities. Recognising these contexts helps us understand why certain teachings were emphasised. For example, parables about wealth and poverty reflect real social tensions in first-century Palestine.

Fill in the blank: Everyday life, customs, and community structures are part of the _____ context.

Aspect	Jewish Influence	Greco-Roman Influence
Architecture	Stone homes, courtyards, ritual baths (mikvaot)	Roman columns, tiled roofs, public forums
Dress	Robes, head coverings, prayer shawls (tallit)	Tunics, sandals, togas for elites
Language	Aramaic and Hebrew for religious and daily use	Greek for commerce and administration
Religion	Temple worship, synagogues, Sabbath observance	Pagan temples, emperor cult, philosophical schools
Economy	Barter, agriculture, fishing, small-scale trade	Coin currency, taxation, large-scale trade routes
Social Structure	Tribal and family-based, priests, scribes, Pharisees	Roman elite, governors, soldiers, merchants



Caption: Plate 2.3 Social and cultural life in first-century Palestine

2.3.3 Reception and interpretation in modern scholarship

Modern scholars approach the Synoptic Gospels with diverse perspectives. Reception refers to how texts are understood and used by later communities, while interpretation refers to the methods scholars use to explain meaning. For example, liberation theologians emphasise themes of justice and equality, while literary critics analyse narrative structures.

Fill in the blank: The way later communities have understood and used the Gospels is called _____.

Box 2.3 Modern approaches to interpreting the Synoptic Gospels

Approach	Focus	Example of Use
Historical Criticism	Examines historical context, sources, and authorship.	Investigating the <i>Synoptic Problem</i> and the role of oral traditions.
Literary Criticism	Studies narrative structure, style, and rhetorical devices.	Analyzing Mark's urgency and Matthew's fulfillment motifs.
Liberation Theology	Reads texts through the lens of social justice and the oppressed.	Highlighting Luke's concern for the poor and marginalized.
Feminist Criticism	Explores gender roles and representation in Gospel narratives.	Examining women's roles in Luke's infancy narratives.
Narrative Criticism	Focuses on plot, character, and reader response.	Studying how discipleship is portrayed across the Synoptics.
Socio-Cultural Criticism	Considers cultural, political, and economic influences on the texts.	Understanding Roman occupation's impact on Gospel themes.

2.4 Contemporary Critical Debates

This part introduces learners to ongoing scholarly debates about the Synoptic Gospels. These debates highlight different theories about sources, oral traditions, and the implications for how we interpret the Gospels today.

2.4.1 The Farrer, Griesbach, and Augustinian hypotheses

Scholars have proposed several hypotheses, meaning structured theories used to explain the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels.

The Farrer hypothesis argues that Mark was written first, Matthew used Mark, and Luke used both Mark and Matthew without relying on Q.

The Griesbach hypothesis suggests Matthew was written first, Luke used Matthew, and Mark condensed both.

The Augustinian hypothesis proposes Matthew was written first, followed by Mark, then Luke.

Fill in the blank: The hypothesis that claims Luke used both Mark and Matthew without Q is called the _____ hypothesis.



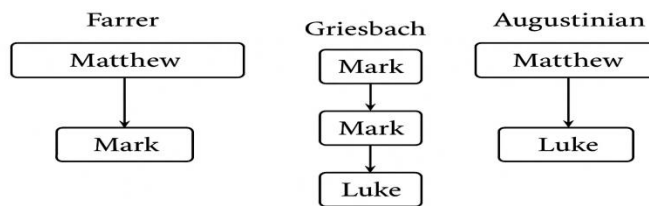


Figure 2.4 Synoptic Gospel source hypotheses

Caption: Figure 2.4 Synoptic Gospel source hypotheses

2.4.2 The role of Q and oral traditions

The hypothetical Q source refers to a collection of Jesus' sayings thought to explain material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark. Oral traditions are teachings and stories passed down verbally before being written. Scholars debate whether Q existed as a written document or whether oral traditions alone account for the similarities.

Fill in the blank: Teachings and stories passed down verbally before being written are called _____.



Plate 2.4 Oral traditions in early Christian communities

Caption: Plate 2.4 Oral traditions in early Christian communities

2.4.3 Implications for Gospel interpretation

These debates affect how we interpret the Synoptic Gospels today. If Matthew and Luke relied on Mark and Q, then Mark's Gospel becomes foundational. If oral traditions played a larger role, then the Gospels reflect a more fluid transmission of Jesus' teachings. The term implications refers to the consequences or effects that these scholarly debates have on our understanding of the texts.



Fill in the blank: The consequences or effects of scholarly debates on our understanding of the Gospels are called _____.

Implication	Explanation
Reliability of Oral Tradition	If oral tradition preceded written texts, it suggests communal memory shaped Gospel content.
Priority of Mark	Theories like Markan Priority (e.g., Farrer) imply Mark's theological framing influenced Matthew and Luke.
Existence of Q Source	Acceptance of a hypothetical "Q" affects how scholars interpret shared material in Matthew and Luke.
Redaction and Editorial Intent	Each Gospel writer may have shaped sources to fit theological goals, affecting interpretation.
Historical Jesus Reconstruction	Source debates impact which Gospel is considered closest to Jesus' original words and actions.
Theological Emphasis	Different source paths highlight unique theological themes (e.g., Matthew's Jewish focus vs. Luke's universalism).
Literary Dependence vs. Independence	Whether Gospels borrowed from each other or from shared tradition affects how we read parallel passages.
Canon Formation and Authority	Understanding source relationships informs debates about Gospel authenticity and canonical status.

Box 2.4 Implications of source debates for Gospel interpretation

Series Summary

This Series on Critical Approaches to the Synoptic Gospels was designed to help learners engage with the historical, literary, theological, and contemporary debates surrounding Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Its purpose has been to provide a structured pathway for understanding how these texts were composed, transmitted, and interpreted, while highlighting their enduring significance for both scholarship and faith communities.

Across the four Parts, we began with the historical and literary foundations, examining the Synoptic Problem and key critical methods. We then moved into comparative textual analysis, exploring traditions and case studies such as the parable of the sower and the passion narrative. Building on this, we considered theological emphases and cultural contexts, before concluding with contemporary debates on source theories, oral traditions, and their interpretive implications. By working through these stages, learners should now be able to identify major source theories, compare Gospel traditions, explain theological and cultural perspectives, and critically evaluate modern debates. These outcomes align directly with the Series Learning Outcomes, ensuring learners are equipped with both knowledge and analytical skills to engage confidently with the Synoptic Gospels.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Augustinian hypothesis: A theory suggesting that Matthew was written first, followed by Mark, and then Luke, with each Gospel building on the previous one.



Double tradition: Material found in both Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark, often explained by the existence of a shared source such as Q.

Farrer hypothesis: A theory proposing that Mark was written first, Matthew used Mark, and Luke used both Mark and Matthew, without relying on Q.

Form criticism: A method of studying the Gospels by identifying and analysing smaller literary units, such as parables or sayings, to understand their original context and purpose.

Hypothesis: A structured theory or explanation used by scholars to account for the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels.

Oral traditions: Teachings and stories about Jesus that were passed down verbally before being written in the Gospels.

Parable: A short, symbolic story used by Jesus to convey moral or spiritual lessons.

Passion narrative: The accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection found in the Gospels.

Q source: A hypothetical written collection of Jesus' sayings, thought to explain material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark.

Reception: The way later communities have understood, used, and responded to the Gospels.

Redaction criticism: A method of studying how Gospel writers edited and arranged their sources to highlight particular theological emphases.

Social context: The everyday life, customs, and community structures that shaped the writing and content of the Gospels.

Theological emphases: The particular themes or doctrinal points that each Gospel writer chose to highlight in their narrative.

Triple tradition: Material found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), such as the baptism of Jesus.

Objective (Multiple Choice Questions)

Which Gospel emphasises Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy?

Mark

Luke

Matthew

John

linked to SLO 2.3)

The term triple tradition refers to:

Material found in Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark



Material found in all three Synoptic Gospels

Material unique to Luke

Material unique to Matthew

nked to SLO 2.2)

Which hypothesis argues that Mark was written first, Matthew used Mark, and Luke used both Mark and Matthew without Q?

Griesbach hypothesis

Augustinian hypothesis

Farrer hypothesis

Two-Source hypothesis

nked to SLO 2.4)

Short-Answer Questions

Explain what is meant by the term parable and give one example from the Synoptic Gospels.

nked to SLO 2.2)

Define oral traditions and describe their role in the transmission of Jesus' teachings.

nked to SLO 2.4)

What is meant by reception in modern scholarship, and why is it important for understanding the Synoptic Gospels?

nked to SLO 2.3)

Long-Answer Questions

Compare the theological emphases of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, highlighting one distinctive feature of each Gospel.

nked to SLO 2.3)

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Farrer, Griesbach, and Augustinian hypotheses in explaining the Synoptic Problem.

nked to SLO 2.4)

Discuss the implications of source debates (Mark, Q, and oral traditions) for Gospel interpretation today.

nked to SLO 2.4)



Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective (Multiple Choice Questions)

- c) Matthew
- b) Material found in all three Synoptic Gospels
- c) Farrer hypothesis

Short-Answer Questions

A parable is a short, symbolic story used to convey moral or spiritual lessons. Example: the parable of the sower.

Oral traditions are teachings and stories passed down verbally before being written. They preserved Jesus' words and deeds in early Christian communities.

Reception refers to how later communities understood and used the Gospels. It is important because it shows how meaning evolves across time and contexts.

Long-Answer Questions

Basic response:

Matthew emphasizes fulfilment of prophecy, Mark highlights Jesus as the suffering servant, and Luke stresses compassion and universal salvation.

Value-added response:

Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses, linking him to Jewish tradition. Mark underscores discipleship and endurance in the face of suffering. Luke portrays Jesus as inclusive, emphasizing care for the marginalized. Together, these emphases reveal the diverse theological priorities of the early Christian communities.

Basic response:

Farrer hypothesis removes the need for Q, the Griesbach hypothesis places Matthew first, and the Augustinian hypothesis follows traditional church order.

Value-added response:

The Farrer hypothesis is praised for simplicity but criticised for lack of evidence of Luke's use of Matthew. The Griesbach hypothesis highlights Matthew's primacy but struggles with explaining Mark's brevity. The Augustinian hypothesis aligns with early church tradition but lacks strong textual support. Each reflects different scholarly priorities in solving the Synoptic Problem.



Basic response:

RCE debates affect how we interpret the Gospels, especially whether Mark or Q is foundational.

Value-added response:

If Mark is foundational, his portrayal of Jesus as the suffering servant shapes later accounts. If Q existed, it highlights the importance of Jesus' sayings. If oral traditions dominated, the Gospels reflect a dynamic and communal transmission of teachings. These debates influence theological interpretation, historical reliability, and our understanding of how early Christian communities preserved their faith.

References and Attributions [Series 4]

This section provides references for sources mentioned in the instructional content, as well as attributions for all figures, plates, tables, and boxes. The referencing style used here follows APA (7th edition) for clarity and consistency.

General References

Brown, R. E. (1997). *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dunn, J. D. G. (2003). *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Sanders, E. P. (1991). *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin.

Stanton, G. N. (2002). *The Gospels and Jesus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Illustration Attributions

Figure 2.2 Triple and double traditions in the Synoptic Gospels

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a Venn diagram showing overlap of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, highlighting triple and double traditions."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels triple tradition double tradition diagram OER."

Box 2.2 Comparative features of the parable of the sower

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a text box comparing the parable of the sower in Matthew, Mark, and Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "parable of the sower Synoptic Gospels comparison OER."

Plate 2.2 Passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).



Prompt: "Generate an image showing symbolic scenes from the passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "passion narrative Synoptic Gospels comparison OER."

Figure 2.3 Theological emphases in the Synoptic Gospels

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a diagram comparing theological emphases in Matthew, Mark, and Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels theological emphases Matthew Mark Luke diagram OER."

Plate 2.3 Social and cultural life in first-century Palestine

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate an image of a first-century marketplace scene showing Jewish and Greco-Roman influences."

Suggested OER search string: "first century Palestine social cultural context Synoptic Gospels OER."

Box 2.3 Modern approaches to interpreting the Synoptic Gospels

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a text box listing modern approaches to interpreting the Synoptic Gospels."

Suggested OER search string: "modern scholarship Synoptic Gospels interpretation OER."

Figure 2.4 Synoptic Gospel source hypotheses

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a diagram comparing the Farrer, Griesbach, and Augustinian hypotheses of the Synoptic Gospels."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels Farrer Griesbach Augustinian hypotheses diagram OER."

Plate 2.4 Oral traditions in early Christian communities

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate an image of early Christians sharing oral traditions in a communal setting."

Suggested OER search string: "oral traditions early Christian communities Synoptic Gospels OER."

Box 2.4 Implications of source debates for Gospel interpretation

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a text box listing implications of Synoptic source debates for Gospel interpretation."



Suggested OER search string: "implications Synoptic Gospels source debates interpretation OER."

Course Code: CRS 201

Series Title: Theological Emphases and Main Contents of the Synoptic Gospels

Series Number: 5

SERIES 5: THEOLOGICAL EMPHASES AND MAIN CONTENTS OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Part 1: Theological Themes in Matthew

Subpart 1.1: Fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy

Subpart 1.2: Jesus as the new Moses and teacher

Subpart 1.3: Ethical teachings and the Sermon on the Mount

Part 2: Theological Themes in Mark

Subpart 2.1: Jesus as the suffering servant

Subpart 2.2: Discipleship and the cost of following Jesus

Subpart 2.3: Apocalyptic urgency and the Kingdom of God

Part 3: Theological Themes in Luke

Subpart 3.1: Universal salvation and inclusion

Subpart 3.2: Compassion, forgiveness, and care for the marginalized

Subpart 3.3: The role of the Holy Spirit and prayer

Part 4: Comparative Contents of the Synoptic Gospels

Subpart 4.1: Shared narratives and distinctive emphases

Subpart 4.2: Key parables and miracles across the Synoptics

Subpart 4.3: Passion narratives and resurrection accounts

INTRODUCTION

In the last Series, we examined critical approaches to the Synoptic Gospels, considering their historical foundations, textual comparisons, and contemporary debates. That exploration provided the tools to understand how the Gospels were composed and transmitted. In this Series, we turn to the theological emphases and main contents of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which will help us appreciate how each Gospel writer shaped their narrative to highlight distinctive aspects of Jesus' mission and message.

This series aims to equip you with the ability to identify and explain the theological themes within each Synoptic Gospel, while also recognizing the shared and distinctive contents that make them unique. By the end, you should be able to articulate how these emphases contribute to the overall message of the Gospels and how they inform both scholarly study and faith practice.

We shall commence this Series by focusing on Matthew, exploring his emphasis on fulfilment of prophecy, Jesus as the new Moses, and ethical teachings. Next, we will move on to Mark, considering his portrayal of Jesus as the suffering servant, the demands of discipleship, and the urgency of the Kingdom of God. Following that, we will examine Luke, with attention to themes of universal salvation, compassion, and the role of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the Series will be rounded off with a comparative study of the Synoptic contents, highlighting shared narratives, distinctive parables, and the passion and resurrection accounts.



SLO 5.1: Define the major theological themes presented in Matthew, including fulfilment of prophecy, Jesus as the new Moses, and ethical teachings.

SLO 5.2: Explain Mark's theological emphases, particularly Jesus as the suffering servant, discipleship, and the urgency of the Kingdom of God.

SLO 5.3: Analyze Luke's theological priorities, focusing on universal salvation, compassion, and the role of the Holy Spirit,

SLO 5.4: Compare the main contents of the Synoptic Gospels, highlighting shared narratives, distinctive parables, and the passion and resurrection accounts.

5.1.1 Fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy

One of Matthew's central emphases is fulfilment of prophecy, meaning the demonstration that events in Jesus' life correspond to predictions found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Matthew frequently introduces passages with the phrase "this was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet," showing his concern to root Jesus firmly in Jewish tradition.

Fill in the blank: Matthew often introduces passages with the phrase "this was to _____ what was spoken by the prophet."

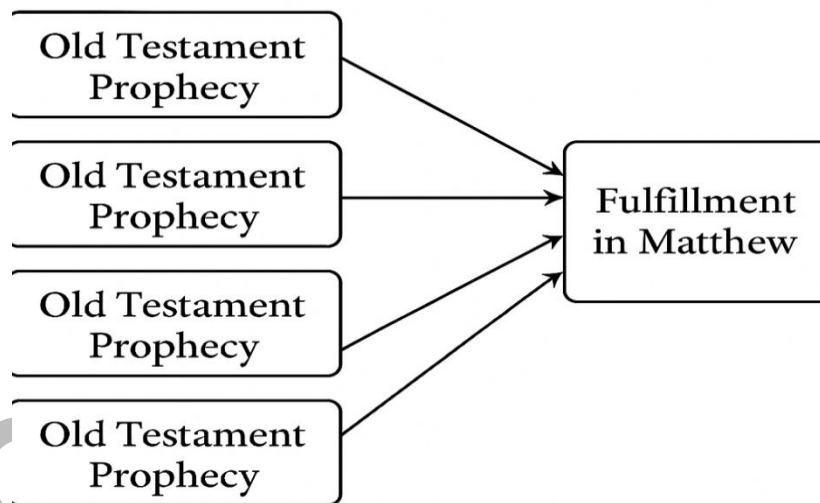


Figure 5.1 Fulfilment of prophecy in Matthew's Gospel

Caption: Figure 5.1 Fulfilment of prophecy in Matthew's Gospel

5.1.2 Jesus as the new Moses and teacher

Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses, meaning a leader and teacher who delivers God's law in a new and authoritative way. Just as Moses gave the law on Mount Sinai, Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount, offering a deeper interpretation of God's will. This portrayal highlights Jesus as the one who brings continuity and renewal to Israel's covenant.



Fill in the blank: Matthew portrays Jesus as the new _____, delivering God's law in a fresh and authoritative way.

Plate 5.1 Jesus as the new Moses in Matthew



Plate 5.1 Jesus as the new Moses in Matthew

the Mount

5.1.3 Ethical teachings and the Sermon on

Matthew emphasises Jesus' ethical teachings, meaning instructions about how to live in accordance with God's kingdom values. The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7) includes the Beatitudes, teachings on love, forgiveness, and righteousness. These teachings challenge believers to go beyond external observance and embrace inner transformation.

Fill in the blank: The Sermon on the Mount begins with the _____, a series of blessings describing kingdom values.



Ethical Teachings **from the Sermon on the Mount** (Matth w 5-7)

- **The Beatitudes.** Blessings for humility, mercy, purity, peacemaking, and perseverance. (Matt 5:3-12)
- **Love of Enemies.** Radical call to love, pray for, and do good to those who oppose you (Matt 5:49-48)
- **Forgiveness.** Forgive others as God forgives, reconciliation over ritual (Matt 6:5)
- **Non-retaliation.** Turn the other cheek-resist evil without violence (Matt 5:38-42)
- **Prayer & Fasting.** Practice devotion sincerely, not for public recognition (Matt 6:5-18)
- **Treasures in Heaven.** Focus on eternal values rather than material wealth (Matt 6:19-21)
- **Golden Rule.** Treat others as you want to be treated. (Matt 7:12 P.U.O)
- **Judging Others.** Avoid hypocrisy, remove your own faults before criticizing others

Box 5.1 Ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount

5.2 Theological Themes in Mark

Mark's Gospel is often described as the earliest of the Synoptics and is characterised by urgency, vivid storytelling, and a strong focus on discipleship. Its theological emphases highlight Jesus as the suffering servant, the demands of following him, and the apocalyptic expectation of God's Kingdom.

5.2.1 Jesus as the suffering servant

Mark presents Jesus as the suffering servant, meaning one who fulfils God's mission through humility, rejection, and ultimately death on the cross. This emphasis shows that suffering is not a sign of failure but part of God's redemptive plan.

Fill in the blank: In Mark's Gospel, Jesus fulfils God's mission through humility, rejection, and ultimately_____.





Plate 5:2 Jesus as the suffering servant in Mark

Caption: Plate 5.2 Jesus as the suffering servant in Mark

5.2.2 Discipleship and the cost of following Jesus

Mark emphasises discipleship, defined as the commitment to follow Jesus even when it involves sacrifice and hardship. The Gospel portrays the disciples as struggling to understand Jesus, reminding readers that true discipleship requires perseverance and faith.

Fill in the blank: In Mark, true discipleship requires perseverance and _____.

Box 5.2 The cost of discipleship in Mark

5.2.3 Apocalyptic urgency and the Kingdom of God

Mark conveys a sense of apocalyptic urgency, meaning the belief that God's Kingdom is near and decisive action is required. Jesus' teachings and miracles are presented as signs that the Kingdom is breaking into the present. This urgency challenges readers to live faithfully in anticipation of God's reign.

Fill in the blank: Mark's Gospel conveys a sense of apocalyptic _____, urging decisive action in light of God's Kingdom.





Caption: Figure 5.2 Apocalyptic urgency in Mark's Gospel

5.3 Theological Themes in Luke

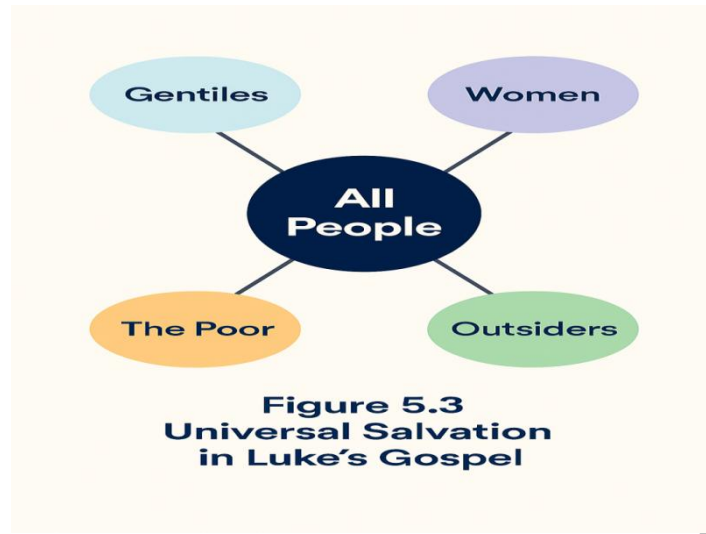
Luke's Gospel is distinctive for its emphasis on inclusion, compassion, and the universal scope of salvation. It presents Jesus as the saviour for all people, not just Israel, and highlights the role of the Holy Spirit and prayer in the life of believers.

5.3.1 Universal salvation and inclusion

Luke stresses universal salvation, meaning that God's saving work through Jesus is offered to all people regardless of background, ethnicity, or social status. This emphasis is seen in stories such as the Good Samaritan and the parable of the prodigal son, which highlight inclusion and mercy.

Fill in the blank: Luke's Gospel emphasizes that God's saving work through Jesus is offered to _____ people.





Caption: Figure 5.3 Universal salvation in Luke's Gospel

5.3.2 Compassion, forgiveness, and care for the marginalised

Luke highlights Jesus' compassion, defined as deep concern for those who suffer, and his emphasis on forgiveness and care for the marginalised, meaning those excluded or disadvantaged in society. Stories such as the healing of lepers and the forgiveness of sinners illustrate these themes.

Fill in the blank: In Luke, Jesus shows deep concern for those who suffer, a quality described as _____.

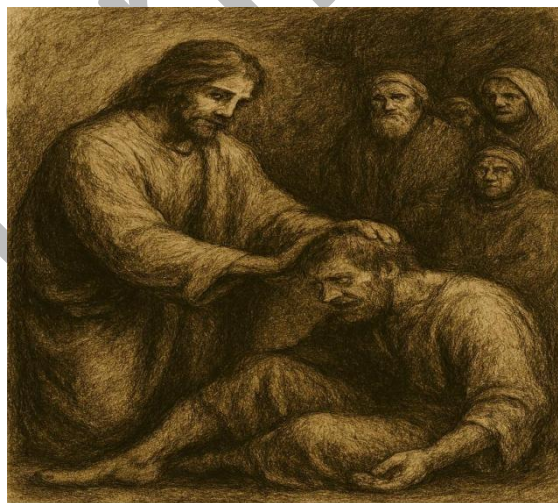


Plate 5.3 *Compassion and care for the marginalised in Luke*

Caption: Plate 5.3 Compassion and care for the marginalized in Luke

5.3.3 The role of the Holy Spirit and prayer



Luke places strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit, meaning God's empowering presence guiding Jesus and the early church, and on prayer, meaning communication with God that sustains faith and mission. From the announcement of Jesus' birth to Pentecost, the Spirit is portrayed as central to God's work.

Fill in the blank: In Luke, God's empowering presence guiding Jesus and the early church is called the _____.



Spirit's Activity and Prayer in Luke's Gospel

Category	Example	Scripture Reference
Spirit at Jesus: Birth	Spirit fills John the Baptist, overated ows Mary.	Luke 13: 31; 67
Jesus: baytism	Spirit descends on Jesus in bedily form like a dave	Luke 2:27-22
Tomptation in the Wilderness	Jesus is lad by the Spirit into the wilderness.	Luke 4:1
Spirit: Aira hted Mission.	Jesus returns in the prayer of the Spirit to begin preacking	Luke 4:14
Joy in the Spirit	Jesus deciares Isalah's brophisey is fillie:l" "The Spint of the Lord is upon me"	Luke 4:18-19
Prayer at kox Moments	Jesus prays at baptism before choosing tructake, and before thatsfiguration	Luke 2:22, 8:12, 9:28
Teaching on Prayer	Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer and parables on persisted in prayer	Luke 11:1-13, 18:1-8
Prayer in Getftsemene	Jesus prays in anguish before fris arrest	Luke 22:33-48

Box 5.3 The role of the Holy Spirit and prayer in Luke

5.4 Comparative Contents of the Synoptic Gospels

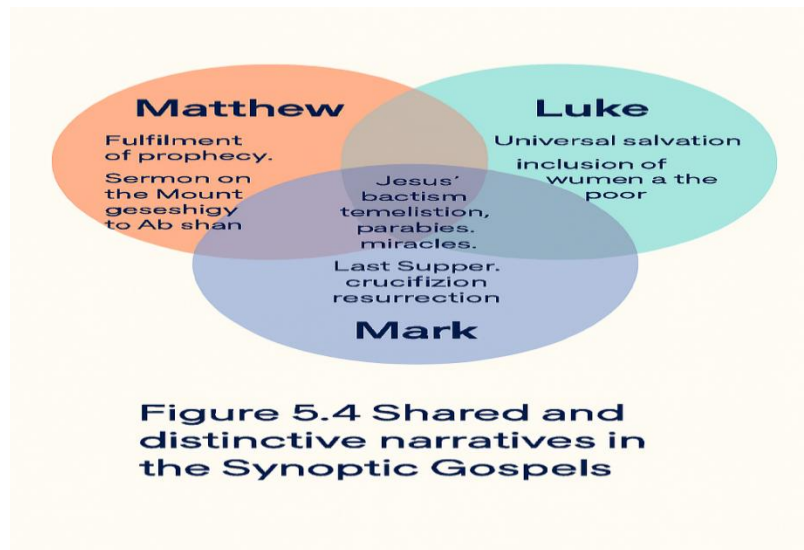
This Part brings together the theological emphases of Matthew, Mark, and Luke by examining their shared narratives and distinctive features. Comparative study helps us see both the unity and diversity of the Synoptic Gospels, deepening our understanding of how each writer shaped their account of Jesus.

5.4.1 Shared narratives and distinctive emphases

The Synoptic Gospels contain many shared narratives, meaning stories that appear in more than one Gospel, such as the baptism of Jesus and the feeding of the five thousand. At the same time, each Gospel adds distinctive emphases, highlighting particular theological concerns. For example, Matthew stresses fulfilment of prophecy, Mark emphasises discipleship, and Luke highlights compassion and inclusion.

Fill in the blank: The feeding of the five thousand is an example of a _____ narrative found in all three Synoptic Gospels.





Caption: Figure 5.4 Shared and distinctive narratives in the Synoptic Gospels

5.4.2 Key parables and miracles across the Synoptics

Parables and miracles are central to the Synoptic Gospels. A parable is a short, symbolic story used to convey moral or spiritual lessons, while a miracle is an extraordinary act demonstrating divine power. Comparing these across the Gospels shows both similarities and differences. For instance, the parable of the sower appears in all three, while the parable of the prodigal son is unique to Luke.

Fill in the blank: The parable of the prodigal son is unique to the Gospel of _____.

Category	Shared Across All Three	Unique to Matthew	Unique to Mark
Parables	- Sower (Matt 13, Mark 4, Luke 8) - Mustard Seed - Wicked Tenants	- Ten Virgins (Matt 25) - Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18)	- Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)
Miracles	- Healing of paralytic (Matt 9, Mark 2, Luke 5) - Calming the storm - Feeding of 5,000	- Coin in fish's mouth (Matt 17:24-27)	- Healing of deaf mute (Mark 7:31-37)

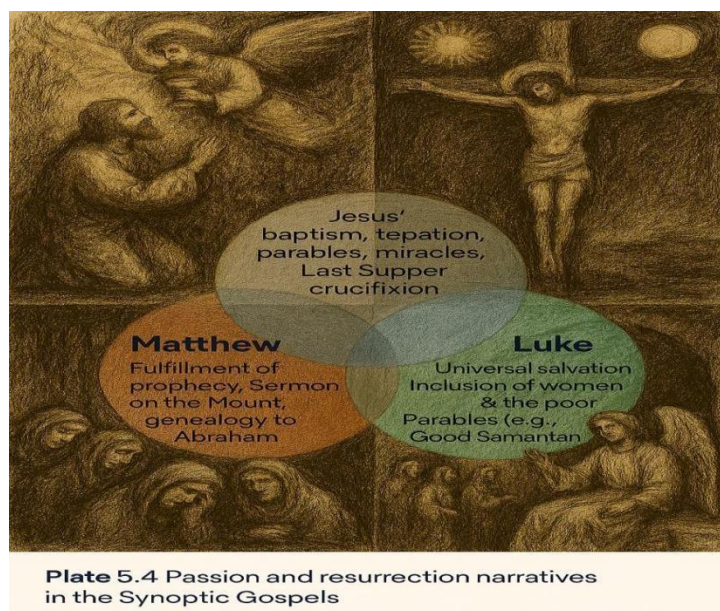
Box 5.4 Key parables and miracles in the Synoptic Gospels

5.4.3 Passion narratives and resurrection accounts

All three Synoptic Gospels include the passion narrative, meaning the accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. While they share the core events, each Gospel presents distinctive emphases. Mark highlights abandonment, Matthew stresses fulfilment of prophecy, and Luke emphasises forgiveness and compassion.

Fill in the blank: The accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection are collectively called the _____ narrative.





Caption: Plate 5.4 Passion and resurrection narratives in the Synoptic Gospels

SERIES SUMMARY

This Series on Theological Emphases and Main Contents of the Synoptic Gospels was designed to highlight how Matthew, Mark, and Luke each present distinctive theological priorities while sharing common narratives about Jesus. Its purpose has been to show learners how these emphases shape the message of the Gospels and why they remain central to both scholarly study and faith practice.

We began with Matthew, focusing on fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus as the new Moses, and ethical teachings. Then we moved to Mark, examining Jesus as the suffering servant, the demands of discipleship, and the urgency of the Kingdom of God. Following that, we explored Luke, with themes of universal salvation, compassion, and the role of the Holy Spirit and prayer. Finally, we compared the Synoptic contents, looking at shared narratives, distinctive parables and miracles, and the passion and resurrection accounts. By completing this Series, you should now be able to define Matthew's theological themes (SLO 5.1), explain Mark's emphases (SLO 5.2), analyze Luke's priorities (SLO 5.3), and compare the main contents of the Synoptic Gospels (SLO 5.4).

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Apocalyptic Urgency: A strong sense in Mark's Gospel that God's Kingdom is near and requires immediate response and faithful living.

Beatitudes: A series of blessings at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, describing the values of God's Kingdom.

Compassion: Deep concern for those who suffer, highlighted in Luke's Gospel through Jesus' care for the poor, sick, and marginalized.

Discipleship: Commitment to follow Jesus, often involving sacrifice, perseverance, and faith, especially emphasized in Mark's Gospel.

Ethical Teachings: Instructions given by Jesus on how to live according to God's Kingdom values, such as love, forgiveness, and righteousness.



Fulfillment Of Prophecy: Matthew's emphasis that events in Jesus' life correspond to predictions in the Hebrew Scriptures, showing continuity with Jewish tradition.

Holy Spirit: God's empowering presence guiding Jesus and the early church, strongly emphasized in Luke's Gospel.

Miracle: An extraordinary act of divine power performed by Jesus, such as healing or feeding multitudes, found across the Synoptic Gospels.

Parable: A short, symbolic story used by Jesus to teach moral or spiritual lessons, such as the parable of the sower.

Passion Narrative: The accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, shared across the Synoptic Gospels with distinctive emphases.

Sermon on the Mount: A collection of Jesus' teachings in Matthew (chapters 5–7), including the Beatitudes and instructions on love, forgiveness, and righteousness.

Suffering Servant: Mark's portrayal of Jesus as one who fulfils God's mission through humility, rejection, and death on the cross.

Universal Salvation: Luke's emphasis that God's saving work through Jesus is offered to all people, regardless of background or status.

CONCEPT CHECK QUESTIONS [SERIES 5]

Objective (Multiple Choice Questions)

Which Gospel emphasises Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy?

- Mark
- Luke
- Matthew
- John

nked to SLO 5.1)

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed primarily as:

- The universal saviour
- The suffering servant
- The new Moses
- The teacher of ethical law

nked to SLO 5.2)

Which theme is most strongly associated with Luke's Gospel?

- Fulfillment of prophecy
- Discipleship and sacrifice
- Universal salvation and inclusion
- Apocalyptic urgency

nked to SLO 5.3)

The accounts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection are collectively called the:

- Beatitudes
- Passion narrative
- Sermon on the Mount
- Triple tradition

nked to SLO 5.4)

Short-Answer Questions

Define the term *Beatitudes* and explain their place in Matthew's Gospel.

nked to SLO 5.1)

Describe one key demand of discipleship highlighted in Mark's Gospel.

nked to SLO 5.2)

Explain what is meant by *universal salvation* in Luke's Gospel.

nked to SLO 5.3)

Identify one parable unique to Luke and explain its theological significance.

nked to SLO 5.3)

Long-Answer Questions



Analyse how Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses and discuss the implications of this portrayal.
(linked to SLO 5.1)

Evaluate the strengths and challenges of Mark's emphasis on apocalyptic urgency for early Christian communities.
(linked to SLO 5.2)

Compare the passion narratives across Matthew, Mark, and Luke, highlighting both shared elements and distinctive emphases.
(linked to SLO 5.4)

ANSWERS TO CONCEPT CHECK QUESTIONS [SERIES 5]

Objective (Multiple Choice Questions)

- c) Matthew
- b) The suffering servant
- c) Universal salvation and inclusion
- b) Passion narrative

Short-Answer Questions

The *Beatitudes* are blessings at the start of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, describing values of God's Kingdom such as humility, mercy, and peacemaking.

One key demand of discipleship in Mark is perseverance in the face of suffering, showing commitment even when misunderstood or rejected.

Universal salvation in Luke means that God's saving work through Jesus is offered to all people, regardless of background or status.

The parable of the prodigal son is unique to Luke and emphasizes God's compassion and forgiveness, showing that salvation is open to all who return.

Long-Answer Questions

Basic response:

Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses by portraying him as a teacher who delivers God's law freshly and authoritatively, especially in the Sermon on the Mount.

Value-added response:

Beyond this, Matthew's portrayal connects Jesus to Israel's covenant history, showing continuity with Moses while also presenting Jesus as surpassing him. This emphasizes Jesus' authority and the transformative nature of his teaching for both Jewish and Gentile audiences.

Basic response:

Mark's emphasis on apocalyptic urgency highlights the nearness of God's Kingdom and the need for decisive action.

Value-added response:

This urgency gave early Christians hope and motivation but also posed challenges, as the expectation of an imminent end sometimes conflicted with the reality of ongoing life. It shaped their ethics, worship, and mission, while also raising questions about how to live faithfully in the present.

11. Basic response:

Passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke share the core events of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, but each Gospel adds distinctive emphases.

Value-added response:

Mark stresses abandonment and suffering, Matthew highlights fulfilment of prophecy, and Luke emphasizes forgiveness and compassion. Together, these perspectives enrich the theological meaning of the passion, showing how different communities understood and applied the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.



Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 5]

Part 1: Theological Themes in Matthew

fulfil

Moses

Beatitudes

Part 2: Theological Themes in Mark

death

faith

urgency

Part 3: Theological Themes in Luke

all

compassion

Holy Spirit

prodigal son

Part 4: Comparative Contents of the Synoptic Gospels

shared

Luke

passion

References and Attributions [Series 5]

This section provides references for sources mentioned in the instructional content, as well as attributions for all figures, plates, tables, and boxes. The referencing style used here follows APA (7th edition) for clarity and consistency.

GENERAL REFERENCES

Brown, R. E. (1997). *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dunn, J. D. G. (2003). *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.



Sanders, E. P. (1991). *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin.

Stanton, G. N. (2002). *The Gospels and Jesus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Illustration Attributions

Figure 5.1 Fulfilment of prophecy in Matthew's Gospel

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing Old Testament prophecies and their fulfilment in Matthew's Gospel."

Suggested OER search string: "Matthew Gospel fulfilment of prophecy diagram OER."

Plate 5.1 Jesus as the new Moses in Matthew

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate an image showing Moses on Mount Sinai alongside Jesus teaching on the Mount."

Suggested OER search string: "Jesus new Moses Sermon on the Mount Matthew OER."

Box 5.1 Ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a text box listing ethical teachings from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew."

Suggested OER search string: "Sermon on the Mount ethical teachings Beatitudes Matthew OER."

Plate 5.2 Jesus as the suffering servant in Mark

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate an image showing Jesus carrying the cross, symbolising the suffering servant theme in Mark."

Suggested OER search string: "Mark Gospel suffering servant Jesus cross OER."

Box 5.2 The cost of discipleship in Mark

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a text box listing the cost of discipleship in Mark's Gospel."

Suggested OER search string: "Mark Gospel discipleship cost perseverance sacrifice OER."

Figure 5.2 Apocalyptic urgency in Mark's Gospel

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the link between Jesus' miracles, teachings, and the coming of God's Kingdom in Mark."



Suggested OER search string: "Mark Gospel apocalyptic urgency Kingdom of God diagram OER."

Figure 5.3 Universal salvation in Luke's Gospel

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing groups included in Luke's vision of salvation (Gentiles, women, the poor, outsiders)."

Suggested OER search string: "Luke Gospel universal salvation inclusion diagram OER."

Plate 5.3 Compassion and care for the marginalised in Luke

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate an image showing Jesus healing the sick and welcoming the marginalised in Luke's Gospel."

Suggested OER search string: "Luke Gospel compassion forgiveness marginalised OER."

Box 5.3 The role of the Holy Spirit and prayer in Luke

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a text box listing examples of the Spirit's activity and key prayers in Luke's Gospel."

Suggested OER search string: "Luke Gospel Holy Spirit prayer examples OER."

Figure 5.4 Shared and distinctive narratives in the Synoptic Gospels

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing shared narratives across Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with distinctive emphases noted."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels shared narratives distinctive emphases diagram OER."

Box 5.4 Key parables and miracles in the Synoptic Gospels

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate a text box listing parables and miracles found in all three Synoptic Gospels and those unique to each."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels parables miracles comparison OER."

Plate 5.4 Passion and resurrection narratives in the Synoptic Gospels

Attribution: AI-generated using Copilot (Microsoft platform).

Prompt: "Generate an image showing symbolic scenes from the passion and resurrection narratives across Matthew, Mark, and Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "Synoptic Gospels passion resurrection narratives comparison OER."



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