



Lecture #2, Part 3

# The Shape of the Gospel Story: The Synoptic Gospels

**Theme:**

Synoptic “seeing together”

*Each Gospel was likely written for a different community of faith at a different time and location to bring the Gospel witness to bear on the needs of that particular community.*

## 3. Jesus’ Galilean Ministry

Mk	Mt	Lk
1:14-8:26	4:12-16:12	4:14-9:17 [50]

This is the largest section of the Gospels and includes nearly half of [Mark](#) and [Matthew](#) and slightly less of [Luke](#). There are many geographical markers but few indications of time. This combined with the fact that individual stories are placed in different contexts in the Gospels means that a reliable chronology of the material is virtually impossible. Once again there is a great deal of difference in how the material is arranged and used. Even with those differences, there are several features that are shared by all three Gospels.

- a. While arranged differently, *the teachings of Jesus* figure prominently in this section of the Synoptics. This includes sayings associated with miracles and as responses to people and circumstances, teaching in parables, and teachings directed to the twelve disciples as well as larger group of followers and the crowds in general.
- b. The *calling of the twelve*, their commissioning, and various narratives surrounding them are included in all three Synoptics.
- c. Most of the *miracle stories* of the Gospels are in this section. About ten of these occur in all three Gospels, although they are given different contexts and points of emphasis. There are other accounts that occur in only one or two of the Synoptics.
- d. *Hostility and opposition* from various representatives of Judaism to Jesus is interwoven in various ways throughout the narratives. Jesus’ interaction with the traditions of Judaism and its perspective on observance to the law creates opposition to his teachings and ministry.

### Mark

tends to follow a more straightforward narrative style in which incidents are connected with verbs of movement and place names. The teachings and sayings of Jesus occur in occasional settings scattered throughout the narrative. There are fewer parables in [Mark](#) than in the other two Synoptics, although the two major parables, the sower ([4:1-9](#), [14-](#)



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[20](#)) and the tenants ([12:1-12](#)) along with the short explanation of the purpose of parables ([4:10-12](#)), serve to call hearers to response.

#### Matthew

expands this section by collecting together in blocks of material the sayings and teachings of Jesus that are in other contexts in [Mark](#) and [Luke](#). The largest of these is the Sermon on the Mount ([5-7](#)), as well as the Mission of the Twelve ([10](#)), and the Parables of the Kingdom ([13](#)). Miracle stories also tend to be clustered together following the Sermon on the Mount, and controversies tend to dominate the later chapters.

#### Luke

introduces the theme of Jesus' mission at the beginning of this section ([4:16-30](#)) and then arranges the events, teachings, and healings to demonstrate the outworking of that mission. [Luke](#) has much shorter blocks of teaching material than in [Matthew](#) often with different settings. By not locating the following section ([9:18-36](#)) at Caesarea Philippi, [Luke](#) effectively extends the Galilean ministry through [9:50](#).

## 4. The Turning Point

<b>Mk</b> <b>8:27-9:8</b>	<b>Mt</b> <b>16:13-17:8</b>	<b>Lk</b> <b>9:18-36</b>
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In different ways, all three Gospels use Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi and Jesus' response with the first prediction of his impending suffering and death (the Passion) to mark a turning point in Jesus' ministry. In this sense, this section marks the hinge at which the Gospel story turns. Before this much of Jesus' ministry was public, accompanied and acclaimed by crowds of followers. After this, Jesus is much more reclusive spending more time with the disciples and in prayer and not as willing to perform spectacular public miracles. The references to his coming death are accompanied by teachings on discipleship. This section also includes the account of the Transfiguration that is almost identical in all three Gospels.

In this way three major themes of the Gospels are highlighted:

- 1) the confession of Jesus as the Christ (Greek; Hebrew = **messiah**);
- 2) the suffering of Jesus and its relationship to following Jesus in discipleship; and
- 3) the hidden glory of Jesus seen only through the eyes of faith.

#### Mark

presents the disciples, represented by Peter, as confused and not really comprehending his teachings or believing his predictions about suffering and death. Jesus has harsh words for Peter ("Satan," [Mk 8:33](#)) after Peter rebukes him for talking about his death.

#### Matthew's

version is only slightly longer and presents the disciples in a better light. Only [Matthew](#) tells of Jesus first responding positively to Peter's confession, blessing him by using a



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word play on his name (“rock,” [16:17-19](#)). [Matthew](#) also includes a short judgment saying ([16:27](#)).

**Luke**

does not locate the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. He leaves it and the following events as part of Jesus’ Galilean ministry and places it much earlier than [Matthew](#). [Luke](#) omits Peter’s rebuke and Jesus’ stern response.

**5. The Journey toward Jerusalem**

Mk	Mt	Lk
9:9-10:52	17:9-20:34	9:37-19:27

[Mark](#) and [Matthew](#) are very similar in this section, while [Luke](#) is considerably different. Basically all three chart a steady movement from Galilee to Jerusalem. [Mark](#) especially includes geographical references that help plot the movement of the story toward Jerusalem. But since there are few time references, and the chronology in [John’s Gospel](#) is considerably different, it is uncertain whether this journey is a physical one or a literary technique in which several trips are schematized into one. All three Gospels include the ironic account of the disciples arguing over who is the greatest and seeking positions of honor when Jesus comes into his Kingdom, in spite of Jesus’ continued predictions of his coming death.

**Mark**

is once again the simplest version of the narrative with almost everything in [Mark](#) also included in the other two Synoptics. In terms of rhetorical structure, [8:1-10:52](#) form a larger narrative unit centering on the themes of discipleship and understanding its cost. In this section, that theme of discipleship is stressed as well as examples of faith that illustrate the nature of the Kingdom of God.