



Lecture #2, Part 4

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.

(Note: [Mark](#) is listed first because it is the simplest version of the narrative, which most biblical scholars consider to be the first Gospel written).

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.

Matthew

follows [Mark’s](#) structure but expands the narrative with questions about paying taxes ([17:24-27](#)) and issues of church discipline ([18:15-20](#)). Also included are two parables that occur only in [Matthew](#), the Unmerciful Servant ([18:23-35](#)) and the Laborers in the Vineyard ([20:1-16](#)).

Luke

shows the greatest divergence here and is considerably longer. The narrative is more obviously structured as a journey with an introductory statement marking its beginning ([9:51](#)). While both [Mark](#) and [Matthew](#) do not mention Samaria (cf. [Matt 10:5](#)), [Luke](#)



Lecture #2, Part 4

recounts Jesus' trip through Samaria ([9:51-56](#), cf. [John 4:5-9](#)). Much of [Luke's](#) expanded material in this section corresponds to material that [Matthew](#) presents in the Sermon on the Mount.

Also included are a whole series of parables that are unique to [Luke](#):

- The Creditor and two Debtors ([7:41-43](#)),
- The Good Samaritan ([10:25-37](#)),
- The Friend at Midnight ([11:5-8](#)),
- The Rich Fool ([12:16-21](#)),
- The Watchful Servants ([12:35-40](#)),
- The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant ([12:42-48](#)),
- The Barren Fig Tree ([13:6-9](#)),
- The Great Supper ([14:16-24](#)),
- Building a Tower and a King Making War ([14:25-35](#)),
- The Lost Coin ([15:8-10](#)),
- The Prodigal Son ([15:11-32](#)),
- The Unjust Steward ([16:1-13](#)),
- The Rich Man and Lazarus ([16:19-31](#)),
- The Unprofitable Servants ([17:7-10](#)),
- The Unjust Judge or Persistent Widow ([18:1-8](#)),
- The Pharisee and Tax Collector ([18:9-14](#)),
- The (Minas) or Pounds ([19:11-27](#)).

Luke also includes an additional unique account, the story of the tax-collector Zacchaeus ([19:1-10](#)).

6. Holy Week

Mk	Mt	Lk
11:1-14:11	21:1-26:16	19:28-22:6

All three Synoptics share the same basic structure with differences in arrangement and content. Once again, most of [Mark](#) is included in the other Synoptics and [Luke](#) shows the most divergence but mostly in details. The final week begins with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem followed by the cleansing of the Temple (**located differently in [John](#)**), which precipitates open hostility from Jewish religious leaders. Jesus responds to questions about his authority, paying taxes to Caesar, and engages the debate about resurrection. Comments about the coming destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem lead into teachings on the end of the age, in different forms in each of the Synoptics. [Mark](#) and [Matthew](#) share several features not in [Luke](#): the cursing of the fig tree, the question about the greatest commandment, and the anointing at Bethany. All three conclude with the betrayal by Judas, although presented from different perspectives.

Mark

inserts the cursing of the fig tree before the cleansing of the Temple and follows later with the explanation of the action.



Lecture #2, Part 4

Matthew

places the cursing of the fig tree after the cleansing of the Temple.
Only [Matthew](#) mentions Jesus healing in the temple ([21:14](#)).

There are several parables found only in Matthew:
the Two Sons ([21:28-32](#)),
the Marriage Feast ([22:1-14](#); cf. [Lk 14:15-24](#) this a similar but different story),
the Ten Virgins ([25:1-13](#)), and
the Talents ([25:14-30](#); cf. [Lk 19:11-27](#) this a similar but different story).

Matthew also includes a short section on the Great Judgment ([25:31-46](#)), and omits the Widow's Offering that is included in the other two Synoptics.

Luke

omits the cursing of the fig tree and recounts Jesus weeping over Jerusalem ([19:41-44](#)). [Luke](#) attributes the betrayal by Judas to Satan entering into him ([22:3](#)).

7. The Passion Narratives

Mk	Mt	Lk
14:12-15:47	26:17-27:66	22:7-23:56

Again, with many differences in details the Synoptics follow basically the same outline in presenting the Passion or suffering of Jesus: the Last Supper/Passover, the Prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus' Arrest, the Trial before Caiaphas, Peter's denial, the Trial before Pilate, the Release of Barabbas, the Mocking and Scourging, and Jesus' Crucifixion, Death, and Burial.

[Mark](#) and [Matthew](#) share several details of the story that [Luke](#) omits or alters: a man carrying a jar of water who leads them to the place where they eat the Passover meal; the mention of the betrayal at the beginning of the meal ([Luke](#) places it after the meal), the singing of a hymn after the meal, the name Gethsemane, Jesus finding the disciples asleep three times (once in [Luke](#)), the disciples deserting Jesus after his arrest, Jesus' Cry of Dereliction from the cross, and the tearing of the temple curtain at Jesus' death.

Mark

begins with a mention of the Passover lamb ([14:12](#)). Only [Mark](#) mentions a young man following Jesus after the other disciples had fled ([14:51-52](#)), but omits the mention of Peter following at a distance that is in [Matthew](#) and [Luke](#).

Matthew

follows [Mark](#) closely here with minor differences. [Matthew](#) includes Jesus saying that he could summon twelve legions of angels if it were his intention to fight.



Lecture #2, Part 4

Matthew differs most in including several accounts surrounding Jesus' death: the remorse of Judas ([27:3-9](#)), Pilate's wife's dream ([27:19](#)), Pilate's hand washing ([27:24-26](#)), the earthquake and resurrection of the saints at Jesus' death ([27:51-53](#)), and the guard at the tomb ([27:62-66](#))

Luke

differs in many details of the account, which leads some to conclude that **Luke** is working with a different tradition or source material here. **Luke** includes the breaking of bread as well as a second cup after the bread ([22:19-20](#)). Luke puts into this setting an account of a dispute between the disciples over who is greatest ([22:24-27](#)) that occurs in different settings in **Mark** and **Matthew**. **Luke** also includes a section of instruction to the disciples, including warnings and a promise of prayer for Peter ([22:28-32](#)). There is also an angel ministering to Jesus as he prayed ([22:43-44](#)), although since these verses do not appear in early manuscripts most textual scholars consider them to be later additions.

Only **Luke** mentions the healing of the servant's ear ([22:51](#)), Jesus turning to look at Peter after his denial ([22:61](#)), the appearance of Jesus before Herod Antipas ([23:6-12](#)), the words to the women of Jerusalem ([23:27-31](#)), and the repentance of one of the criminals ([23:42-43](#)).

Luke omits the Cry of Dereliction but includes Jesus committing himself to God's hands ([23:46](#)).