



Lecture #3, Part 4

The Gospels and The Synoptic Problem The Literary Relationship of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Theme:

Christians before the 18th Century entertained few doubts that the Gospels were to be read as historically reliable accounts of the life of Jesus. The main problem to be faced was that of harmonization.

Other parables, teachings, or particular events in the Gospels are placed at different points in the narrative or in different literary contexts (see **The Time of the Crucifixion which will be study later**). For example, **Luke** places Jesus' rejection at the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth as one of the first events of his public ministry (**Lk 4:16-30**). However, Mark places it much later, about halfway through his Galilean ministry (**Mark 6:1-6**). Mark places Jesus' calling of the disciples before his Capernaum preaching (**Mark 1:16-20**), while Luke places it after (**Lk 5:1-11**).

These are not isolated examples. A careful examination of the structure of the Synoptic Gospels reveals that even though they follow a similar structure of events (compared to **John**), there are differences, sometimes substantial differences, in the order in which material is placed. For example, the first five chapters of **Mark** contain material that is also recounted in **Matthew** and **Luke**. While **Luke** roughly follows the order of **Mark**, **Matthew** organizes that material in significantly different ways.

| Mark | Matthew | Luke |
|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1:21-45 | 7:28-8:15 | 4:31-5:16 |
| 2:1-22 | 9:1-17 | 5:17-39 |
| 2:23-3:12 | 12:1-16 | 6:1-6:11, 17-19 |
| 3:13-19 | 10:1-4 | 6:12-16 |
| 3:20-35 | 12:22-37 | 6:43-45 |
| 4:1-34 | 13:1-34 | 8:4-18 |
| 4:35-5:20 | 8:18-34 | 8:22-39 |
| 5:21-43 | 9:18-26 | 8:40-56 |

In some passages, the difference between the various Gospels is compounded. For example, **Matthew** and **Luke** give us different versions of the Lord's prayer, while **Mark** does not even record the prayer. Even within the same book there are a variety of different readings among various manuscripts (variant readings added in some manuscripts are indicated in red/brackets.)



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| Matthew 6:9-13 | Luke 11:2-4 |
|---|--|
| | He said to them, |
| "Pray then in this way: | "When you pray, say: |
| Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. | Father [in heaven], hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. |
| | [Your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us.] |
| Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. | [Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.] |
| Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. | Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. |
| And do not bring us to the time of trial, | And do not bring us to the time of trial." |
| but rescue us from the evil one. | [but rescue us from the evil one.] |
| [For the Kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen.] | |

Besides the obvious difference between the prayers, we can also note the different contexts in which they are presented in the two Gospels. [Matthew](#) includes the prayer in the concluding section of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus taught the people about practical piety, how the people should live out a life of commitment to God. Yet [Luke](#) sets the prayer in a narrative context in which the disciples see Jesus praying and ask him to teach them to pray.