

WHAT IS A GOSPEL?

- εὐαγγέλιον (=“good news”) in NT always refers to the spoken message about Jesus (Mk 1:1; Gal 1:6-9; Rom 1:16-17)
- Paul’s gospel (mid 50s) was received from tradition and focused on Christ’s suffering, death, & resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-5)—Ignatius (†108) adds virgin birth & baptism
- neither noun nor verb appear in Johannine writings

WHAT IS A GOSPEL? CONTINUED...

- Mark (c. 70) uses “gospel” in a manner similar to Paul, to refer to message about Christ’s suffering & death
- Matthew uses “gospel” to refer to Jesus’ preaching about the kingdom of heaven, not his death & resurrection (Mt 4:23; 24:14; 26:13)—frequently omits the term when Mark uses it—significantly different content from Pauline usage of term

WHAT IS A GOSPEL? CONTINUED...

- first reference to written gospel probably Lk 1:1 (late 1st C), which calls such written accounts “narrations”
- about 3 or 4 dozen gospels known in whole or in part, sometimes only by the title
- types of gospels:
 - sayings gospels (focus on words of Jesus: Q, Thomas)
 - biographical (focus on deeds as well as words of Jesus: Mt, Mk, Lk, Jn)
 - post-resurrection gospels (conversations between Jesus & disciples: GMary, GPhilip)
 - infancy gospels (early years of Jesus: Infancy Gospel of James, Infancy Gospel of Thomas)

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS: MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE

- *synopsis* from Greek words meaning “similar perspective”
 - same broad outline of Jesus’ ministry
 - focus on Galilee for public ministry
 - Jesus as teacher, healer
 - emphasis on parables as primary teaching strategy
 - short vignettes
- similar, but not identical, portrayal of Jesus

WHAT IS THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM?

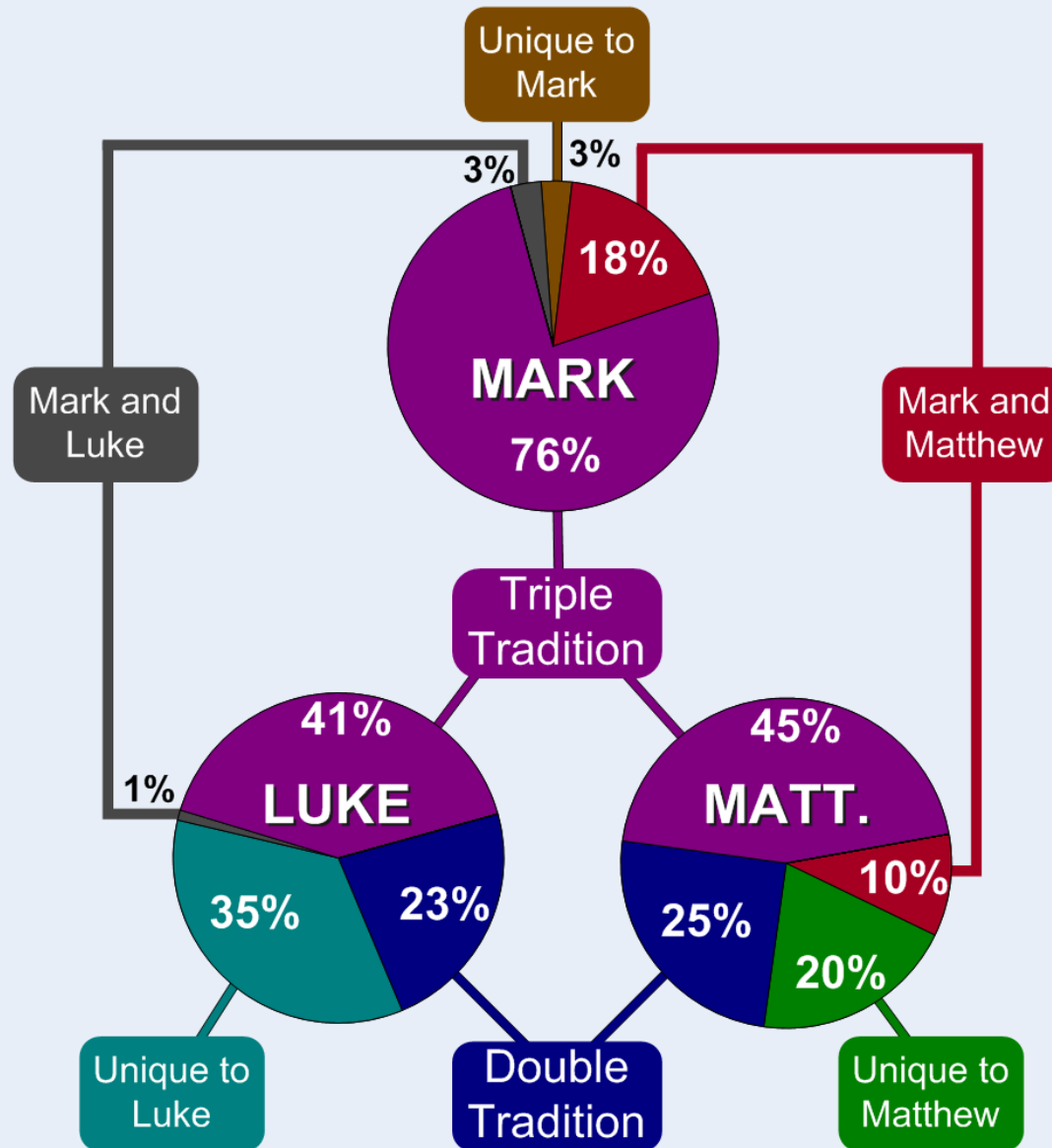
- common outline of Jesus' life and ministry
- significant agreements in content
- significant linguistic agreements
- significant agreements in order

Conclusion: some sort of literary relationship among Synoptic Gospels

OUTLINE OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY

- baptism by John the Baptist
- ministry in Galilee
- journey to Jerusalem
- final week in Jerusalem
- trial, crucifixion, and resurrection

Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels



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LINGUISTIC AGREEMENTS

Matthew	Luke
ιδων δε πολλους των	ελεγεν ουν τοις
φαρισαιων και σαδδουκαιων	εκπορευομενοις οχλοις
ερχομενους επι το βαπτισμα	βαπτισθηναι υπ
αυτου ειπεν αυτοις	αυτου
γεννηματα εχιδνων τις	γεννηματα εχιδνων τις
υπεδειξεν υμιν φυγειν απο	υπεδειξεν υμιν φυγειν απο
της μελλουσης οργης	της μελλουσης οργης
ποιησατε ουν καρπους	ποιησατε ουν καρπους
αξιους της μετανοιας	αξιους της μετανοιας
και μη δοξητε λεγειν εν	και μη αρξησθε λεγειν εν
εαυτοις πατερα εχομεν τον	εαυτοις πατερα εχομεν τον
αβρααμ λεγω γαρ υμιν οτι	αβρααμ λεγω γαρ υμιν οτι
δυναται ο θεος εκ των λιθων	δυναται ο θεος εκ των λιθων
τουτων εγειραι τεκνα τω	τουτων εγειραι τεκνα τω
αβρααμ ηδη δε και η αξινη	αβρααμ ηδη δε και η αξινη
προς την ριζαν των δενδρων	προς την ριζαν των δενδρων
κειται παν ουν δενδρον μη	κειται παν ουν δενδρον μη
ποιουν καρπον καλον	ποιουν καρπον καλον
εκκοπτεται και εις πυρ	εκκοπτεται και εις πυρ
βαλλεται	βαλλεται

AGREEMENTS IN ORDER

- Matthew and Luke generally follow Mark's order when a pericope is found in Mark
- When Matthew and Luke share pericopes that are not present in Mark, the order varies greatly

REFERENCE TOOLS: SYNOPSIS VS. HARMONY

- A synopsis arranges the four gospels in such a way that their distinctive features are readily apparent and can be studied. A good synopsis presents the material in a theory-neutral manner.
- A harmony combines material from the four gospels to produce a single story. A harmony blurs the distinctives of the four gospels and expresses its own perspective on the life of Jesus.

EXCERPT FROM A MEDIEVAL SAXON HARMONY BASED ON THE DIATESSARON: THE HELIAND

The happy Child of God remained for a long time in the deep forest until the time came when He felt He would rather make known His great strength to people. He then left the protective cover of the woods, His desert dwelling, and made His way back to the company of earls, to the great crowds of people, to the comings and goings of men.

HELIAND EXCERPT CONTINUED...

He went to the shoreline of the Jordan. There John found Him, God's Peace-Child, his Lord, the holy King of Heaven. When John saw Him walking along there he said to his followers, the heroes, "That is the Lamb of God who will take away evil sin, the crimes of mankind, from this wide world—the great Chieftain, the Strongest of kings!"

WHAT IS A SYNOPTIC APPROACH?

EXAMPLE 1: GENEALOGIES (MT 1:2-17; LK 3:23-38) CONTINUED...

- synoptic approach examines differences to ascertain meaning:
 - Mt begins genealogy with Abraham, because his gospel emphasizes Jesus as Jewish messiah
 - Lk ends genealogy with Adam, son of God, because his gospel (and Acts) emphasizes extension of message to all people, Gentiles as well as Jews

WHAT IS A SYNOPTIC APPROACH?

EXAMPLE 1: GENEALOGIES: MATT 1:2-17; LUKE 3:23-38 CONTINUED...

- Mt mentions four OT women, all foreigners integrated into Judaism, to show that gospel for all nations (cf. Mt 28:19)
- first four women in Mt's genealogy all had controversial sexual pasts, like Mary (controversy only mentioned in Mt, not Lk), but were honored by Jewish tradition and chosen by God
- Mt follows royal line from David, emphasizing Jesus' role as messianic king—Lk follows secondary line from David, portraying Jesus as having humble roots

WHAT IS A SYNOPTIC APPROACH?

EXAMPLE 2: RICH YOUNG RULER (MT 19:16-22; MK 10:17-22; LK 18:18-23)

- in Mk a rich man, in Mt a rich young man, in Lk a rich ruler—in none a rich young ruler
- Mk & Lk say “Good teacher,” “Why do you call me good?” and “No one is good but God alone”—Mt says “Teacher, what good deed...,” “Why do you ask me about what is good?” and “There is one who is good”—Mt rewords Mk, which implies that Jesus is not wholly good

WHAT IS A SYNOPTIC APPROACH?

EXAMPLE 2: RICH YOUNG RULER (MT 19:16-22; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23) CONTINUED...

- Mk alone has “Do not defraud,” not found in the Ten Commandments like the others, but Sir 4:1 (in reference to the poor)—Mt & Lk omit, perhaps as less appropriate in context
- Lk reverses order of “Do not kill” & “Do not commit adultery,” perhaps to emphasize a matter of greater concern in his community, or maybe simply to follow more closely the LXX order (textual variants in Mk also follow Lk’s order)

WHAT IS A SYNOPTIC APPROACH?

EXAMPLE 2: RICH YOUNG RULER (MT 19:16-22; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23) CONTINUED...

- in Mk & Lk man says, “I have kept all these from my youth”—in Mt he is a young man who says, “I have kept all these”
- only Mk describes Jesus’ love for the man—Mt & Lk often remove references to Jesus’ emotions (cf. Jn 11:36)
- only Mt says “If you would be perfect,” a particular emphasis of Mt (“be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” Mt 5:48)
- in Lk man does not go away at end of pericope but hears Jesus’ warning to the rich (Lk 18:24, “Jesus looking at him ...”)—in Mk & Mt Jesus speaks to disciples

REVERSE CHRISTOLOGY

- In NT, the later the book, the earlier the first event in the life of Jesus that concerns it
- Pauline letters (c. 50-64): Jesus' death on the cross
- Gospel of Mark (c. 65-75): Jesus' baptism at the beginning of his ministry
- Gospels of Matthew & Luke (c. 80-90): Jesus' miraculous, virgin birth
- Gospel of John (c. 90-100): Jesus as God's agent in creation
- in general, the later the book, the "higher" the Christology