

The Synoptic Problem

FOUR VIEWS

Edited by
Stanley E. Porter
and Bryan R. Dyer


Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2016 by Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Porter, Stanley E., 1956– editor.

Title: The synoptic problem : four views / edited by Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016013302 | ISBN 9780801049507 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Synoptic problem. | Bible. Gospels—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BS2555.52 .S96 2016 | DDC 226/.066—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2016013302>

Unless indicated otherwise, Scripture translations are those of the authors.

Scripture quotations labeled NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Preface vii

Abbreviations ix

1. The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction to Its Key Terms, Concepts, Figures, and Hypotheses 1
Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer
2. The Two Source Hypothesis 27
Craig A. Evans
3. The Farrer Hypothesis 47
Mark Goodacre
4. The Two Gospel Hypothesis 67
David Barrett Peabody
5. The Orality and Memory Hypothesis 89
Rainer Riesner
6. Two Source Hypothesis Response 113
Craig A. Evans
7. Farrer Hypothesis Response 127
Mark Goodacre
8. Two Gospel Hypothesis Response 139
David Barrett Peabody
9. Orality and Memory Hypothesis Response 151
Rainer Riesner

10. What Have We Learned regarding the Synoptic Problem, and What Do We Still Need to Learn? 165

Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer

Glossary 179

List of Contributors 181

Index of Authors and Subjects 183

Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Sources 187

Preface

The Synoptic Problem continues to fascinate biblical scholars and students of the New Testament, with no end in sight so far as arriving at a final solution or even a truce in the ongoing debate. This is the environment in which we offer this volume as a contribution to the continuing discussion. The current form of the discussion presents four major views of the Synoptic Problem. These are the Two Source Hypothesis, the Farrer Hypothesis, the Two Gospel Hypothesis, and the Orality and Memory Hypothesis. Each hypothesis has points of overlap with the others, but each one also has a distinct viewpoint on resolution of the major questions. As a result, it is our privilege to publish this introduction to the topic, with fresh articulations and interactions by leading proponents of each of the major views. We are grateful to each of the four scholars—Craig A. Evans, Mark Goodacre, David Barrett Peabody, and Rainer Riesner—for their excellent essays and constructive responses. We have enjoyed working with each of these scholars and hope that the model that they provide in this volume—one of respect despite differing viewpoints—will encourage future discussion on this topic.

The opening chapter of this volume sets the stage for the discussion of the Synoptic Problem. Students new to the issue will find a presentation of the critical issues, the key terms, a brief history of scholarship, and an introduction to the four views that follow. We then offer the major proposals by each of the proponents of their viewpoints. These four positive proposals are followed by a response to the other three by each of the major proponents. A concluding chapter offers an assessment of the discussion and lays out ways forward in scholarship on the Synoptic Problem. These opening and concluding chapters frame the discussion of the multiple views by placing it

within a historical context and assisting in finding agreements and points of departure among the four proponents. We trust that readers will find value in these summative chapters.

This is the second collaborative work that we as the editors have engaged in together. We have found it a rewarding experience to be able to work together on a project of such importance to the field of New Testament studies that we value so highly. We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate.

We also offer sincere thanks to James Ernest, our editor at Baker Academic, and to the entire team there, including Jim Kinney and Tim West. Finally, we wish to extend our deepest appreciation to our wives, Wendy Porter and Anna Dyer, for their ongoing support and encouragement.

Abbreviations

1QS	1QRule of the Community	CCS	Classical Culture and Society
1QSa	1QRule of the Congregation	CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
11QPs ^a	11QPsalms ^a	ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
AB	Anchor Bible	<i>Cont. Life</i>	Philo, <i>On the Contemplative Life</i>
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992.	COQG	Christian Origins and the Question of God
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Against Apion</i>	<i>Dreams</i>	Philo, <i>On Dreams</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>	ÉB	Études bibliques
ASBT	Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology	<i>EChr</i>	<i>Early Christianity</i>
AT	author's translation	<i>Embassy</i>	Philo, <i>On the Embassy to Gaius</i>
BAG	Bauer, W., W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago, 1957.	<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament	ET	English translation
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum Iovaniensium	<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>b. Hag.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, tractate <i>Hagigah</i>	FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
BibSem	Biblical Seminar	HermSup	Hermeneia Supplements
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries	HSCL	Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature
BRS	Biblical Resource Series	<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft	<i>J ECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
CamCS	Cambridge Classical Studies	<i>Jos. Asen.</i>	<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i>
		<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
		JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
		<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
		<i>J.W.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>

KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)	SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
KTAH	Key Themes in Ancient History	SBLECL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Christianity and Its Literature
LCL	Loeb Classical Library	SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
LD	Lectio Divina	SJSJ	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>Life</i>	Josephus, <i>The Life</i>	SLFCS	Studies in Literacy, Family, Culture, and the State
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies	SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
LXX	Septuagint	SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
<i>m. Abot</i>	Mishnah, tractate <i>Abot</i>	<i>T. Abr.</i>	<i>Testament of Abraham</i>
MNTS	McMaster New Testament Studies	TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
MP	Myth and Poetics	<i>TD</i>	<i>Theology Digest</i>
<i>m. Shab.</i>	Mishnah, tractate <i>Shabbat</i>	<i>T. Dan</i>	<i>Testament of Dan</i>
NA	New Accents	TI	Theological Inquiries
NA ²⁸	Nestle-Aland, <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . 28th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.	<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
NGS	New Gospel Studies	TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>	TSJTSA	Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum	TSK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
NPNF ²	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 2	<i>TTKi</i>	<i>Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>	WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
PL	Patrologia Latina [= Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–64.	WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>		
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study		
RSV	Revised Standard Version		

The Synoptic Problem

*An Introduction to Its Key Terms, Concepts,
Figures, and Hypotheses*

Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer

The Unity and Diversity of the Four Gospels

The New Testament begins with four accounts of the life, teaching, and death of Jesus of Nazareth. These accounts, or Gospels, are formally anonymous but throughout the history of the Christian Church have been attributed to four writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All four Gospels tell a similar story about Jesus: he came from Nazareth; he was announced by John the Baptist; he had twelve disciples, taught them many things, and performed a variety of healings; his disciple Judas betrayed him; he was crucified and raised from the dead. Numerous events are told in all four Gospels: the baptism of Jesus, the miraculous feeding of five thousand people, Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Peter's confession, and many events surrounding Jesus's death (his arrest, trial, and burial). There is strong agreement among the four Gospels regarding who Jesus was, his historical context, and the theological significance of his life. Broadly speaking, each Gospel writer paints a similar portrait of Jesus.

Yet, while these Gospels provide similar accounts, they are also four separate and distinct Gospels. This may seem obvious, but it is not uncommon for the four Gospels to be conflated into one narrative. The most common example of this is the imagery and retelling of the nativity scene surrounding the birth of Jesus, reenacted every Christmas season.¹ Almost any person sitting in a pew during a Christmas service can describe the scene: Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, where Jesus is born and placed in a manger in the presence of farm animals, angels, shepherds, magi offering gifts, and a bright star above. It is a familiar scene, but one that takes bits and pieces found in different Gospel retellings. In fact, only two Gospels—Matthew and Luke—contain accounts of Jesus’s birth; Mark’s Gospel begins with Jesus’s baptism, and John’s Gospel begins on a cosmic scale, describing the divine *logos*. Luke’s is the only Gospel to situate the newborn Jesus in a manger and the only one to include shepherds. While Matthew’s Gospel similarly places Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem, it is the only Gospel to give the account of magi following a star and presenting gifts of frankincense, gold, and myrrh.

This illustrates the great benefit of having four Gospel accounts. Mark’s Gospel, for whatever reason, does not include a description of the birth of Jesus. If it were the only Gospel we had, we would know little of the various traditions surrounding Jesus’s birth. Fortunately, Matthew and Luke, while sharing several details, both offer unique descriptions that represent differing traditions of Jesus’s birth.² However, it is not always the case that each Gospel either shares the exact information with the other Gospels or provides brand-new information not otherwise accounted for. It is often the case that these Gospels provide the same account but offer differing viewpoints or provide specific information unique to the Gospel. All four Gospels, for example, describe the person Barabbas, the prisoner whom the crowd chooses to receive freedom instead of Jesus at his trial (Matt. 27:15–23; Mark 15:6–14; Luke 23:17–23; John 18:39–40). In his Gospel, Matthew describes Barabbas as a notorious prisoner (Matt. 27:16); Mark and Luke describe him as a murderer who started an insurrection (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19); John simply notes that he was a robber (John 18:40). These descriptions of Barabbas need not conflict with one another; he may have been a notorious prisoner who started an insurrection and was guilty of murder and theft. But it is curious that each

1. This illustration is also provided in the opening of Mark Goodacre’s introduction to the Synoptic Problem: *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze*, BibSem 80 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 13.

2. The relationship between these two accounts has been the subject of much speculation and, in some circles, major controversy. The theories that have been proposed variously argue for independence or various types of dependence.

Gospel writer chose the description that he did. If Barabbas were a known murderer, why would Matthew and John not mention this?

The differences between the Gospels regarding Barabbas may seem insignificant, but what are we to do with even greater differences that we encounter in the four accounts? Each of the Gospel writers describes Jesus's cleansing of the temple, but should we understand that it happened right at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry (John 2:14–22) or at the end of his ministry while in Jerusalem (Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46)? Did Jesus cleanse the temple on two occasions? Or, when Jesus miraculously fed five thousand people, should we understand it as occurring in the city of Bethsaida (Luke 9:10), on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1–3), or in an uninhabited, deserted place (Matt. 14:13; Mark 6:32)? Most readers who have spent significant time with the four Gospels have asked these or similar questions. What is the relationship of the Gospels to one another? Why do some stories appear in multiple Gospels and others in only one? What are we to do with the differences between accounts, whether minor points or more significant variations?

Harmony and Harmonization

In the middle of the second century, within a hundred years of the Gospels' compositions, a Syrian Christian by the name of Tatian created the earliest known attempt to smooth out the differences of the four Gospels into one single narrative. Titled *Diatessaron* (meaning “through the four”), Tatian's work is the first of what has become known as a **harmony** of the Gospels.³ Tatian's harmony wove together main sections from all four Gospels into one continuous story and essentially became the Gospel manuscript used throughout Syria into the fifth century. No full copies of the *Diatessaron* exist today (Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus in the fifth century, destroyed over two hundred copies out of orthodox zeal), but various later versions and commentaries on it remain, and numerous early Christian writers refer to it.

The *Diatessaron* was probably not the first and certainly not the last attempt to harmonize the Gospels.⁴ In fact, it is a popular approach to addressing the

3. On Tatian's *Diatessaron*, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 89–92; Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 18; Stanley E. Porter, *How We Got the New Testament: Text, Transmission, Translation*, ASBT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 88–93.

4. Justin Martyr (100–165 CE) may have been the first to construct a harmony of the Synoptic Gospels.

differences that appear within the Gospel accounts. Another famous example is Andreas Osiander's *Harmoniae Evangelicae*, published in 1537, which similarly combined the four Gospel accounts into one seamless narrative. Unlike Tatian's harmony, however, it was common for Osiander to interpret differing accounts of a similar incident as indications of two (or more) separate occasions. So, for example, Jesus is presented as raising Jairus's daughter twice, and Peter is portrayed as denying Jesus nine times instead of three.

Today few follow Osiander to the extent that he went to disprove any potential contradictory elements in the Gospels, but harmonization remains an approach to explaining at least some of the differences encountered when surveying the Gospels. **Harmonization**, then, refers to *the attempt to reconcile seeming contradictions in the Gospels by arguing that the Gospel writers are describing separate events or different aspects of a single event*.⁵ The opening example of combining the birth narratives of Jesus into one story is an illustration of harmonization. In the last two centuries harmonization has been approached with skepticism, although it is often pointed out that any re-creation of any historical event involves some level of harmonization of sources.

A Synopsis and the Synoptics

In order to compare the Gospels and assess their similarities and differences, a tool called a **synopsis** is often utilized. A synopsis (from the Greek *syn*, "with," + *opsis*, "seeing") presents parallel texts from each of the Gospels side by side in vertical columns in order to compare and contrast the individual accounts. Table 1.1 indicates what a synopsis might look like for the passages describing the confrontation at Jesus's arrest.

Table 1.1. Jesus Arrested

Matthew 26:51-52	Mark 14:47	Luke 22:49-51	John 18:10-11
		And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord shall we strike with the sword?"	
And behold, one of those who were with	But one of those who stood by	And one of them	Then Simon Peter, having a sword,

5. See Craig L. Blomberg, "The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academic, 1986), 144.

Matthew 26:51-52	Mark 14:47	Luke 22:49-51	John 18:10-11
Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear.	drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.	struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.	drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus.
Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."		But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him.	Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"

A synopsis is set up so that similar material appears horizontally; in this way, it aids in seeing where and how the Gospel writers include both similar and different materials in their discourses. So in the example above, it becomes obvious that while all four accounts mention the high priest's slave's ear being cut off, only two (Luke and John) specify that it was his right ear. Similarly, all four Gospels make clear that the person with the sword was standing by Jesus, but only John's Gospel attributes the act to Simon Peter. Only Matthew's Gospel contains the famous saying that those who "take the sword will perish by the sword." Only Luke's Gospel mentions that Jesus heals the slave, while John is the only Gospel writer to identify the slave's name.

In many ways, synopses developed out of the popularity of harmonies as scholars attempted to analyze and make sense of the variation found within the Gospel accounts. The first synopsis proper—that is, one that was not created for the intent of harmonizing the Gospels—was composed by Johann Jakob Griesbach in 1776. Numerous synopses have appeared since the eighteenth century (many of them still called harmonies), many of them by some of the best-known New Testament scholars. Some of the most notable are from Wilhelm de Wette and Friedrich Lücke, Constantine Tischendorf, Ernest De Witt Burton and Edgar J. Goodspeed, Albert Huck, H. F. D. Sparks, Burton H. Throckmorton, John Bernard Orchard, and Robert W. Funk.⁶ The

6. See John S. Kloppenborg, "Synopses and the Synoptic Problem," in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem: Oxford Conference, April 2008; Essays in Honour of Christopher M. Tuckett*, ed. Paul Foster et al., BETL 239 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 51-85; J. K. Elliott, "Which Is the Best Synopsis?," *ExpTim* 102 (1991): 200-204.

most widely used synopsis today is *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* by Kurt Aland (also available in Greek).⁷

One thing that becomes immediately apparent when looking at a synopsis of all four Gospels is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain a good deal of similar material. These three Gospels share many of the same stories, often in similar order and utilizing the same wording. They are so alike that they have been given the name “Synoptic Gospels” to emphasize their similarities. Furthermore, the term **Synoptic Gospels** differentiates Matthew, Mark, and Luke from John’s Gospel, which has numerous unique accounts and often uses different wording when telling a similar story. Relatively few pages in a synopsis of the Gospels contain material from all four Gospels. The bulk of material is shared by the Synoptic Gospels, while the material found in John’s Gospel is often by itself.

The Similarities of the Synoptic Gospels

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke have been identified as having such strong similarities that they are often grouped together and understood as related to one another in some special way other than the way they relate to John’s Gospel. But what are these similarities, and what do they tell us of the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels? At least four types of similarities in the Synoptic Gospels point to some kind of relationship. First, there is the sheer amount of material shared by these Gospels. While it is not always apparent what constitutes “shared material,” it is abundantly clear that the Synoptic Gospel writers shared the same stories, sayings, and accounts of Jesus and his followers. Second, the wording found within this shared material is often so alike that some type of relationship between Gospels seems to be evident. Third, the order of each Gospel, along with how each author presents his material, is so similar that some form of influence between Gospels is often suggested. Fourth, there are editorial or parenthetical comments found in multiple Gospels at exactly the same place, which is difficult to account for if the Gospel writers wrote independently of one another. Each of these types of material warrants further comment.

Shared Material

If one looks closely at a synopsis of the Gospels, it is clear that many of the same stories are told in the Synoptic Gospels. In fact, numerous scholars

7. Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, 10th ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993); Aland, ed., *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2005).

have estimated that over 90 percent of Mark's Gospel is shared with either Matthew or Luke or with both. In fact, nearly all of that 90 percent of Mark is found in Matthew's Gospel, while roughly 50 percent of Mark's Gospel is found in Luke. Nearly 60 percent of Matthew is shared with the other two Gospels; around 40 percent of Luke is shared.⁸ Of the roughly 665 verses in Mark's Gospel, over 600 appear in some form in Matthew or Luke. Additionally, Matthew and Luke share over 230 verses not found in Mark. Often it is useful to look not only at verses but also at the different stories or sayings found in the Gospels. The term **pericope** (pl. pericopae) refers to a collection of verses that form a contained unit in the text—a speech of Jesus, miracle account, or other episode in the narrative. Mark's Gospel can be divided into eighty-eight pericopae; of those eighty-eight, only five do not appear in either the Gospel of Matthew or the Gospel of Luke.

Material that appears in all three Synoptic Gospels is called the **triple tradition**. The bulk of this material is narrative, but it does contain some sayings of Jesus as well.

Table 1.2. The Triple Tradition

Pericope*	Matthew	Mark	Luke
John's Messianic Preaching	3:11–12	1:7–8	3:15–18
The Baptism of Jesus	3:13–17	1:9–11	3:21–22
The Temptation	4:1–11	1:12–13	4:1–13
Peter's Confession	16:13–20	8:27–30	9:18–21
Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by a Spirit	17:14–21	9:14–29	9:37–43a
Jesus Blesses the Children	19:13–15	10:13–16	18:15–17
The Rich Young Man	19:16–22	10:17–22	18:18–23
The Triumphal Entry	21:1–9	11:1–10	19:28–40
The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen	21:33–46	12:1–12	20:9–19
The Betrayal by Judas	26:14–16	14:10–11	22:3–6
The Trial before Pilate	27:11–14	15:2–5	23:2–5

*The names of pericopae are taken from Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*.

Since 90 percent of Mark is found in Matthew and 50 percent is found in Luke, some material shared by Matthew and Mark is not in Luke. A good

8. The statistics in this section are taken from Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 80–81; Brooke Foss Westcott, *An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, 8th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1895), 195–97; Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 132.

chunk of this material (Matt. 14:22–16:12//Mark 6:45–8:26)⁹ has been titled Luke’s “great omission.” Some material that Mark and Luke share is not present in Matthew’s Gospel, including the account of the chief priests conspiring against Jesus (Mark 11:18–19//Luke 19:47–48).

Over 230 verses found in Matthew and Luke are absent from Mark’s Gospel. This material is often called the **double tradition** and has a high percentage of sayings of Jesus (including Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount and Luke’s Sermon on the Plain) but some narrative elements as well. As we will see, the double tradition is a key issue in how scholars have understood the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels. There is, of course, material found in either Luke or Matthew that has no parallel in the other Synoptics. This is often called **Special Matthew** (or **M**) and **Special Luke** (or **L**) and includes each Gospel’s unique birth narrative, resurrection account, numerous parables, and narrative material.

Close Wording in Shared Material

Not only do the Synoptic Gospels share an abundant amount of material, but also in many places the wording in each Gospel is so similar as to suggest some type of close relationship. As an example, consider the account of Jesus being questioned about his authority. In the synopsis below, underlining marks identical wording in all three Gospels, broken underlining refers to identical wording in two Gospels, and squiggly underlining refers to very similar wording in two or more Gospels.

Table 1.3. Jesus Questioned about His Authority

Matthew 21:23–27	Mark 11:27–33	Luke 20:1–8
When he entered <u>the temple,</u> <u>the chief priests</u> <u>and the elders</u> of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you <u>doing these things, and</u> <u>who gave you this authority?”</u>	Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking <u>in the temple,</u> <u>the chief priests,</u> <u>the scribes,</u> <u>and the elders</u> came to him and said, “By what authority are you <u>doing these things?</u> <u>Who gave you this authority</u> to do them?”	One day, as he was teaching the people <u>in the temple</u> and telling the good news, <u>the chief priests and</u> <u>the scribes</u> came with <u>the elders</u> and said to him, “Tell us, <u>by what authority are you</u> <u>doing these things? Who is it</u> <u>who gave you this authority?”</u>

9. The two virgules, //, identify parallel material found in the indicated Gospels.

Matthew 21:23–27

Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.
Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?”
And they argued with one another,
“If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’
But if we say,
‘Of human origin,’
we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.”
So they answered Jesus,
“We do not know.”
And he said to them,
“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

Mark 11:27–33

Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.
Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.”
They argued with one another,
“If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’
But shall we say,
‘Of human origin?’”
—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet.
So they answered Jesus,
“We do not know.”
And Jesus said to them,
“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Luke 20:1–8

He answered them, “I will also ask you a question, and you tell me:
Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?”
They discussed it with one another, saying,
“If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’
But if we say,
‘Of human origin,’ all the people will stone us; for they are convinced that John was a prophet.”
So they answered that they did not know where it came from.
Then Jesus said to them,
“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

In this example we see how often the three Gospel writers use exactly or nearly the same wording in their accounts. In this particular example what jumps out is how often quotations from both Jesus and his opponents are the parts that are so close in wording across the three Gospels.

As another example, consider the calling of Levi:

Table 1.4. The Calling of Levi

Matthew 9:9–10

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, “Follow me.”

And he rose and followed him.

And as he sat at table in the house, behold,

many tax collectors and sinners

Mark 2:13–15

And as he passed on, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, “Follow me.”

And he rose and followed him.

And as he sat at table in his house,

many tax collectors and sinners

Luke 5:27–32

After this he went out, and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, “Follow me.”

And he left everything, and rose and followed him.

And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a

large company of tax collectors

Matthew 9:9-10	Mark 2:13-15	Luke 5:27-32
came and <u>sat down</u> with Jesus and his disciples.	<u>were sitting</u> with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him.	and others <u>sitting</u> at the table with them.

Here again we see exact wording, not just in quotations, but also in narrative descriptions (“sitting at the tax office,” “rose and followed him”). When one notices such close wording across Gospels—and there are numerous other examples—the logical explanation is that they have some relationship to one another. It is difficult to believe that three retellings of the encounter, independent of any shared source or relationship, would be so similar and even verbatim at certain points.

The close wording that one finds in the triple tradition is also found in the material shared by Matthew and Luke (but not Mark)—the double tradition.

Table 1.5. Close Wording in the Double Tradition

Matthew 23:37-39	Luke 13:34-35
<u>Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until</u>	<u>Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when</u>
<u>you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”</u>	<u>you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”</u>

Although Matthew and Luke differ at a few places in the pericope in table 1.5 (different Greek terms for “gather together,” for example), the bulk of this material is verbatim in each Gospel.

That this shared material is so close in the actual wording has led numerous scholars to suggest that the relationship among the Synoptic Gospels is on some level a literary one. The **literary dependence** among Matthew, Mark, and Luke is a key tenet of multiple theories of how these Gospels are related to one another. Oral traditions about Jesus and his followers may account for some of the shared material, it is reasoned, but can hardly explain the word-for-word overlap evidenced in the three Gospels. In his Gospel, Luke indicates that he used sources in his research (1:1), and these may well have been written sources. Literary dependence among the Synoptics might involve either direct dependence (one Gospel writer using a previous Gospel)

or indirect dependence (multiple Gospel writers using the same or similar previous non-Gospel source or sources).

Order of the Pericopae

That the Synoptic Gospels are somehow formally related to one another is seen not just in that they share material but also in that the material they share often appears in identical order. If the arrangement of pericopae were simply a matter of historical material, then one could attribute this to multiple narratives merely being arranged in chronological order—Jesus was born, ministered in Galilee, headed to Jerusalem, was crucified, and so on. However, the Gospel writers often arrange nonnarrative material in identical ways, often including material that may not obviously go together.

In table 1.6, all three Synoptics use the same general order for this shared material. Some pericopae do not appear in one or more Gospels, but even when a pericope is absent from one Gospel (such as “The Coming of Elijah” in Luke), that Gospel picks right back up in step with the other two. This set of examples is, of course, a selective sampling from the Gospels, and they do not always line up so closely in their arrangement. However, generally speaking, the Synoptic Gospels tend to arrange their material in a similar order, which suggests some type of relationship linking them together.

Table 1.6. Order of Pericopae

Pericope	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Peter’s Confession	16:13–20	8:27–30	9:18–21
Jesus Foretells His Passion	16:21–23	8:31–33	9:22
“If Any Man Would Come after Me . . .”	16:24–28	8:34–9:1	9:23–27
The Transfiguration	17:1–9	9:2–10	9:28–36
The Coming of Elijah	17:10–13	9:11–13	
Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by a Spirit	17:14–21	9:14–29	9:27–43a
Jesus Foretells His Passion Again	17:22–23	9:30–32	9:43b–45
Payment of the Temple Tax	17:24–27		
True Greatness	18:1–5	9:33–37	9:46–48
The Strange Exorcist		9:38–41	9:49–50
Warnings concerning Temptations	18:6–9	9:42–50	

Editorial Comments and Decisions

The last piece of evidence that demonstrates a relationship among the Synoptic Gospels consists of what we are describing as “editorial” similarities

that are difficult to explain if attributed to chance. An example of this appears in Matthew 24:15 and its parallel in Mark 13:14.¹⁰

Table 1.7. Editorial Comment 1

Matthew 24:15-16	Mark 13:14
<u>So when you see</u> <u>the desolating sacrilege</u> standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), <u>then those in Judea must flee to the</u> <u>mountains;</u>	<u>But when you see</u> <u>the desolating sacrilege</u> set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), <u>then those in Judea must flee to the</u> <u>mountains;</u>

As with the examples that we have already considered, these two passages share identical wording. However, both passages contain the editorial comment, “Let the reader understand,” just prior to the remark about those in Judea fleeing to the mountains. The chances of both Gospel writers independently deciding to insert this comment, using exactly the same wording at approximately the same place in their discourse, are extremely low. It is more likely that Mark and Matthew share some sort of relationship: either one Gospel used the other, or both had access to the same or a similar source.

Another example of shared editorial comments is found in Matthew 26:14// Mark 14:10//Luke 22:3.

Table 1.8. Editorial Comment 2

Matthew 26:14	Mark 14:10	Luke 22:3
Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests.	Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.	Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve;

The intriguing part of this parallel is that each of the three Gospel writers found it appropriate to remind his audience that Judas was one of the twelve at this same point in his narrative. Each of the writers had already introduced Judas as a member of the twelve earlier in the narrative (Matt. 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:15). So the fact that each writer felt the need to remind his audience that Judas was one of the twelve disciples when describing his betrayal of Jesus points to some relationship among the Synoptics.

10. Luke’s Gospel contains a parallel in 21:20–21, but apart from the line “then those in Judea must flee to the mountains,” the parallel is not as close in wording. The point of this example, however, is the line “Let the reader understand,” which does not appear in Luke’s account.

A Problem?

In light of this evidence, scholars for some time have recognized that the Synoptic Gospels are somehow related to one another. The question involves the type of relationship involved. Was one Gospel written first and used by the other two? Did all three share common sources or traditions? Did the Gospel writers borrow and copy from one another? How do we explain the abundance of shared material and often exact wording found in the Synoptics? The inquiry into the relationship among the Synoptic Gospels, usually on a literary level, has commonly been called the **Synoptic Problem**. Investigations into the Synoptic Problem attempt to explain the similarities (and differences) found in the Synoptic Gospels by articulating a theory of their relationships to one another. The question usually revolves around the topic of which Gospel was written first and how it was used by the other Gospel writers.

Despite the fact that it is well established within New Testament studies, the term “Synoptic Problem” itself is problematic for two reasons. First, the word “problem” implies that there is something potentially wrong with how the Synoptic Gospels relate to one another. Instead of an appreciation for the similarities that one finds between the Synoptics, this term automatically labels their relationship a dilemma and therefore in need of fixing. Second, by labeling it as a problem, one is implying that a solution is possible. As we will see in this volume, the issues are complex, and very good arguments continue to be put forward to support differing theories regarding the relationship of the Synoptics. In short, the term “Synoptic Problem” implies some fault found within the Gospels and suggests that one can offer a solution, much like solving a math equation. If we can use the term “Synoptic Problem” in its best possible manner—to refer to an issue that has garnered much scholarly attention and a variety of opinions—then we welcome its use. The term has become so ingrained in Gospel scholarship that it is difficult to avoid. Therefore we will continue to use it throughout this volume, but we do not wish to imply that the Synoptics are either inherently problematic or that an easy solution is possible.

Theories of the Synoptic Problem

For most of church history it was believed that Matthew’s Gospel was the first to be written, as its placement at the beginning of the New Testament

suggests.¹¹ Just about every reference that we have from the earliest interpreters of the Gospels seems to work from the assumption that Matthew's Gospel was the first to be written.¹² In his *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen writes the following:

I have learned by tradition that the Gospel according to Matthew . . . was written first; and that he composed it in the Hebrew tongue and published it for the converts from Judaism. The second written was that according to Mark, who wrote it according to the instruction of Peter. . . . And third, was that according to Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, which he composed for the converts from the Gentiles. Last of all, that according to John.¹³

Writing about two hundred years later, Augustine offered the same order in his *Harmony of the Gospels*: “Now, those four evangelists whose names have gained the most remarkable circulation over the whole world, and whose number has been fixed as four . . . are believed to have written in the order which follows: first Matthew, then Mark, thirdly Luke, lastly John” (1.2.4).¹⁴ It must be pointed out that early Gospel interpreters like Origen and Augustine were not interested in the question of the Synoptic Problem as we know it today. They were transmitting the tradition concerning the composition of the Gospels rather than comparing the texts with an eye toward which might have been written first. It is clear, however, that the tradition of the church in the early years of Christianity was that the order of composition for the Gospels was the same as the canonical order we have today: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

The Griesbach Hypothesis

The earliest attempt at a solution to the Synoptic Problem is associated with Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812), mentioned above for composing the first synopsis, although earlier scholars had articulated similar theories.¹⁵ The

11. For an excellent history of the Synoptic Problem, see David L. Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

12. E.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.24.

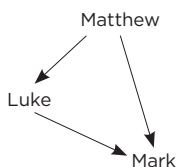
13. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 1.1. Translation from John Patrick, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, ed. Allan Menzies (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1896).

14. Translation from S. D. F. Salmond, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1888).

15. Most notably, Henry Owen, *Observations on the Four Gospels: Tending Chiefly, to Ascertain the Times of Their Publication; and to Illustrate the Form and Manner of Their*

Griesbach Hypothesis maintains that Matthew was the earliest Gospel, but that it was followed by Luke, and then Mark was the third. This deviates slightly from the early tradition, putting Luke second and Mark as the third Gospel written. Not only does the Griesbach Hypothesis propose an order for the composition of the Gospels, but it also argues that there is a direct literary dependence among the Gospels. So, according to the theory, Luke made use of Matthew's Gospel, and Mark had and used both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels. This theory and ones that posit a similar relationship to Matthew's Gospel are often described as illustrating **Matthean priority**.

Figure 1.1
The Griesbach Hypothesis



The Two Source Hypothesis

In the late nineteenth century, however, scholarly opinion began to sway away from theories of Matthean priority to what has become known as the Two Source Hypothesis. An important turning point in the history of the Synoptic Problem was a seminar dedicated to the topic held by William Sanday at Oxford University beginning in 1894. Meeting several times a year for nine years, Sanday and his graduate students published the massively influential *Studies in the Synoptic Problem* in 1911.¹⁶ By this time the Griesbach Hypothesis had come under harsh criticism, and different areas of the Synoptic Problem were being scrutinized. The **Two Source Hypothesis** (or Two Document Hypothesis, as it was earlier called) argues that Mark was the first Gospel written and was used by both Matthew and Luke.¹⁷ This theory also argues that Matthew and Luke not only used Mark as a source but also shared another source that is lost to us but given the name “Q” in

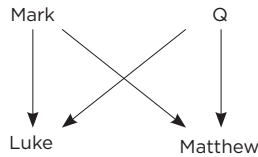
Composition (London: St. Martin's, 1764). On the possible relationship between Owen and Griesbach, see Dungan, *History*, 314–18.

16. William Sanday, ed., *Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, by Members of the University of Oxford (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911).

17. An earlier incarnation of the Two Source Hypothesis was called the Oxford Hypothesis due to its origins with Sanday and his seminar.

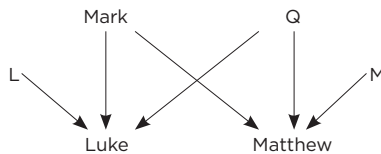
scholarly circles. This theory and those like it are said to reflect **Markan priority**.

Figure 1.2
Two Source Hypothesis



The Two Source Hypothesis also recognizes that Matthew and Luke incorporate unique material found only in their Gospels (“M” and “L”). Thus some scholars refer to the Four Document Hypothesis.

Figure 1.3
Four Document Hypothesis



Differentiating between the Two Source/Document and Four Document Hypotheses can lead to confusion, since both really refer to the same basic hypothesis. Furthermore, most proponents of the Two Source Hypothesis would argue that the number of sources involved in the composition of the Gospels is more than two or four. Most adherents to this hypothesis believe that Mark used sources—oral and written—not represented in the diagram above. Some scholars do not limit their understanding of Q to one document but potentially include numerous documents or traditions shared by Matthew and Luke. Thus one should not hold so closely to the number of documents in the titles of these hypotheses. The skeleton of the diagram for the Two Source Hypothesis communicates the basic premise of those who identify as proponents of either the Two Source/Document Hypothesis or the Four Document Hypothesis. Therefore, in an effort to avoid confusion, we will use the title “Two Source Hypothesis” in this volume while acknowledging that some prefer the other title.

There are two major facets of the Two Source Hypothesis, which should be studied independently: Markan priority and the Q document.

Markan Priority

What is known as Markan priority, meaning that Mark's Gospel was the first written, was argued in some form by several scholars but is most closely associated with B. H. Streeter, especially his *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins*.¹⁸ The arguments in favor of Markan priority will be explored in detail in the chapters that follow as those for and against the hypothesis take up the challenge, but the major arguments are worth summarizing here. According to Streeter, there are four major arguments that Matthew and Luke used Mark's earlier Gospel.¹⁹ First, the fact that so much of Mark's Gospel appears in the other two points to its use and earlier composition. If in fact Mark was written last, Streeter argues, it is difficult to understand why he would have left out so much of Matthew and Luke. Second, the wording of the material shared by all three Gospels (the triple tradition) reveals Matthew and Luke more often being close in verbal agreement to Mark and almost never agreeing against Mark. Third, the arrangement of pericopae demonstrates that Mark's ordering is more original, with the other two following his lead. When Matthew or Luke departs from Mark's order, the other typically maintains the Markan order. This can be seen in table 1.6 above: Luke does not include the "Coming of Elijah" pericope, but Matthew and Mark continue in the same arrangement; later Matthew does not include the "Strange Exorcist" pericope, but Luke and Mark continue in the same order. Streeter's point is that Mark remains what is later called the "middle term," which the other two seem to be following. Fourth, Streeter argues that Mark's language and grammar are often improved upon by Matthew and Luke, which demonstrates the movement by which the Gospels were used.²⁰

Streeter's arguments for Markan priority have been picked up and developed by numerous scholars²¹ and became widely accepted among New Testament scholars. Markan priority certainly has been the majority opinion regarding

18. B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins, Treating of the Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, and Dates* (London: Macmillan, 1924), esp. 157–69. Other early proponents of Markan priority include Karl Lachmann, "De ordine narrationum in evangeliiis synopticis," *TSK* 8 (1835): 570–90; Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, *Die synoptischen Evangelien: Ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter* [The synoptic gospels: Their origin and historical character] (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1863); F. Crawford Burkitt, *The Earliest Sources for the Life of Jesus* (Boston: Houghton, 1910).

19. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 157–64.

20. Streeter has a fifth argument (that Matthew and Luke used Mark and other sources independently of each other), but it is based upon Markan priority rather than arguing for it (*ibid.*, 164–69).

21. For more arguments in favor of Markan priority, see Metzger, *New Testament*, 81–84. Still one of finest treatments of Markan priority is G. M. Styler, "The Priority of Mark," in C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, BNTC (London: A&C Black, 1962), 223–32.

Synoptic origins, but it has not been without its critics.²² In response to the fact that so much of Mark appears in the other two Gospels, several scholars have argued that this can be explained by understanding Mark as conflating or combining the other two Gospels.²³ Much has been made of the argument regarding the order of pericopae and what this can tell us about the origins of the Gospels. That Matthew and Luke never agree in order against Mark or apart from Mark is commonly presented as a definitive argument for Markan priority. In 1951, however, B. C. Butler criticized this reasoning and showed how several conclusions could be drawn from this evidence.²⁴ Finally, the argument that Mark's grammar is of a low quality and was improved upon by Matthew and Luke has been disputed, and examples of Mark's superior Greek in instances of shared material have been put forward.

As will be clear in the chapters that follow, Markan priority is an important issue in discussions of the Synoptic Problem. Once heralded as not a mere hypothesis but a fact of Gospel studies, Markan priority has come under fire in recent years, especially from proponents of the Two Gospel Hypothesis (more below). However, for many scholars, Markan priority remains the best answer.

Q

Markan priority is an attempt to account for the triple tradition and to explain the relationship of the three Gospels to one another. Given the premise that Mark's Gospel was written first and used by both Matthew and Luke, one must still account for the double tradition and how these two later Gospels came to share so much material. The Two Source Hypothesis addresses this by arguing that Matthew and Luke shared a common source that is now lost to us. This hypothetical source was given the name Q, short for the German word for "source," *Quelle*. Proponents of Q argue positively that Matthew and Luke appear to share a good deal of material absent in Mark. These same proponents argue negatively that this shared material is not the result of either Matthew or Luke using the other as a source.²⁵

22. See David L. Dungan, "Mark—The Abridgement of Matthew and Luke," in *Jesus and Man's Hope*, vol. 1, ed. David G. Buttrick (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1970), 51–97, esp. 54–74.

23. See David B. Peabody, Lamar Cope, and Allan J. McNicol, eds., *One Gospel from Two: Mark's Use of Matthew and Luke; A Demonstration by the Research Team of the International Institute for Renewal of Gospel Studies* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 92–96.

24. B. C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew: A Critique of the Two-Document Hypothesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 62–71.

25. For a substantial argument that Luke did not use Matthew as a source, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 73–75.

Since Q is a hypothetical source, there are many more opinions regarding this tenet of the Two Source Hypothesis than the first concerning Markan priority. Some understand Q as a single written document, like Mark's Gospel, that was used by Matthew and Luke. Others use the term "Q" as representative of what were likely numerous sources shared by the two Gospel writers. There is ongoing discussion of whether Q comprises written or oral sources or some combination of both. Attempts have gone into reconstructing Q and understanding its formation.²⁶ Since the bulk of material shared by Matthew and Luke consists of sayings of Jesus, it is often hypothesized that Q was a "sayings source" that began as oral traditions that were eventually written down.

Proponents of the Two Source Hypothesis demonstrate a range of thinking regarding the contents of Q, but they all appeal to Q as some type of source or sources that explain the shared material found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark. As noted earlier, the author of Luke's Gospel mentions using numerous sources in his composition. In its simplest form the Q hypothesis argues that the author of Matthew's Gospel also used one or more of those sources.

The Two Gospel Hypothesis

Both tenets of the Two Source Hypothesis—Markan priority and Q—have come under strong attack and help to differentiate the other major proposals for the Synoptic Problem from it and one another. At a time when Markan priority was the clear majority view and sometimes described as an assured result of New Testament criticism, William Farmer published a significant work that challenged the established consensus.²⁷ Farmer built on the earlier Griesbach Hypothesis by arguing that Matthew was written first, that Luke wrote second and used Matthew's Gospel as a source, and that Mark used both prior Gospels as sources and wrote last. This theory, as articulated by Farmer and his students, has become known as the **Two Gospel Hypothesis** and differentiates itself by the inclusion of oral tradition in its understanding of the Synoptic Problem.

According to the Two Gospel Hypothesis, Matthew used multiple sources when composing his Gospel. Luke used Matthew's Gospel, along with several other sources, which explains the double-tradition material. Mark, writing

26. John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, SAC (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Christopher M. Tuckett, *Q and the History of Early Christianity: Studies on Q* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

27. William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

last, used both Matthew and Luke, combining their narratives and offering a shorter account that essentially conflates the earlier Gospels. Proponents of the Two Gospel Hypothesis argue that Mark likely did not use many sources beyond Matthew and Luke's Gospels and employ the term **Markan Overlay** to refer to the material unique to Mark that ties his Gospel together.

Supporters of the Two Gospel Hypothesis have offered numerous criticisms of Markan priority, several of which have been referred to above. A major issue in this discussion is the places where Matthew and Luke agree with each other against Mark's Gospel. These instances, labeled the "**minor agreements**," are thought of as major agreements by proponents of the Two Gospel Hypothesis because they are difficult to explain if Mark wrote first, but they fit well with the premise that Luke directly used Matthew without any connection to Mark. Consider the example in table 1.9.

Table 1.9. Example of Minor Agreement

Matthew 6:21	Mark 8:31	Luke 9:22
From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo <u>great suffering</u> at the hands of <u>the elders and chief priests and scribes,</u> and be killed, <u>and on the third day be raised.</u>	Then he began to teach them that <u>the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,</u> and be killed, and after three days rise again.	. . . saying, "The Son of Man must <u>undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes,</u> and be killed, <u>and on the third day be raised.</u> "

The important line of this triple-tradition material is the last one. Just prior to this last phrase, all three Gospels use nearly the exact same wording in Greek as they list the elders, chief priests, and scribes. At the end of their verses both Matthew and Luke use exactly the same wording: "and on the third day be raised." Under the Two Source Hypothesis, one would need to explain how Matthew and Luke, independently of each other, edited Mark's Gospel in the same way, using exactly the same wording.²⁸ Two Gospel Hypothesis adherents have an easier time explaining this change since, according to their view, Luke would have copied this line from Matthew's text, and Mark decided to deviate from both Matthew and Luke.

28. This is easier to explain if one allows that either Luke or Matthew used the other as a source in addition to Mark's Gospel. The Farrer Hypothesis (to be introduced next) can explain such minor agreements by arguing that Luke had access to Matthew's Gospel in addition to Mark's.

The Two Gospel Hypothesis has the longest history of all proposed solutions to the Synoptic Problem, drawing from the earliest interpreters of the Gospels. As was presented above, all the earliest Christian documents that address the issue work from the assumption that Matthew's Gospel was the first to be written. This appears to be the tradition concerning the order of composition of the Gospels that circulated in the early church. While many Synoptic Problem scholars focus on **internal evidence**—that found within the text of the Synoptics—proponents of the Two Gospel Hypothesis have support for their theory from this **external evidence** as well.

The major differentiation of the Two Gospel Hypothesis from the Two Source Hypothesis concerns the order of composition of the Gospels. While those who follow the Two Gospel Hypothesis may challenge the notion of Q in order to expose potential weaknesses in the Two Source Hypothesis, Q is essentially irrelevant to Two Gospel Hypothesis proponents because the double tradition is explained by Luke (writing second) using Matthew's Gospel (written first) as a source. Thus there is no need for a hypothetical source since, according to the Two Gospel Hypothesis, one can point to an actual written source that explains the double tradition.

The Farrer Hypothesis

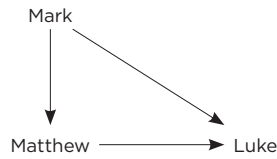
Much as Farmer's influential work put into question the consensus of Markan priority, an important article by Austin Farrer in 1955 challenged the concept of Q.²⁹ In this article Farrer argues that Matthew and Luke did not use Mark independently of each other. Rather, he contends that Luke used not only Mark as a source but also Matthew, erasing the need for a hypothetical source (i.e., Q) to explain the double tradition. The **Farrer Hypothesis** agrees with the Two Source Hypothesis that Mark's Gospel was the first written but argues that Luke, written last, also had the Gospel of Matthew as a source (fig. 1.4, p. 22).

Farrer's article initiated a theory of origins of the Synoptic Gospels sometimes referred to as "Markan Priority without Q," but it was Michael Goulder who most fully developed the theory and built upon it.³⁰ In fact, the hypothesis is sometimes labeled the Farrer-Goulder Hypothesis. In recent years the Farrer Hypothesis has been defended and developed by Mark Goodacre. Francis

29. Austin Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot*, ed. Dennis E. Nineham (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 55–88.

30. Michael Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 2 vols., JSNTSup 20 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).

Figure 1.4
The Farrer Hypothesis



Watson, in his *Gospel Writing*, also presents a version of the Farrer Hypothesis in his reconstruction of the Synoptic tradition.³¹

The arguments for the Farrer Hypothesis center on demonstrating Luke's familiarity with and use of Matthew's Gospel. Much like the arguments for Markan priority, evidence of close wording, similar order of pericopae, and discernible editorial changes are appealed to in order to establish that Luke used Matthew as a source. The minor agreements between Luke and Matthew against Mark are significant for the Farrer Hypothesis because this hypothesis supposedly more easily explains these passages than does the Two Source Hypothesis. For the Farrer Hypothesis, as with the Two Gospel Hypothesis, the minor agreements are the result of Luke's relationship to Matthew's Gospel, in this instance Luke's use of Matthew. In a similar way, the material of the double tradition is supposedly more easily explained in the Farrer Hypothesis if Luke had access to Matthew's Gospel and therefore used it for material of which Mark was not aware.

Oral Tradition

The major explanations of the Synoptic Problem have focused heavily on the literary relationships between the Gospels. The creation of synopses, the close readings of parallel passages, and analysis of exact wordings in the Synoptics all treat the relationships between the Gospels on the literary level. Alongside the advances in the Two Source, Two Gospel, and Farrer Hypotheses have been advances in what we know about **oral tradition** and how it might help explain the Synoptic Problem. Many of these early advances in Synoptic relations occurred within German scholarship and focused on establishing literary relationships. Only later were their theories made to coincide with the rise of **form criticism**, which identified units of texts according to literary patterns and attempted to tie them to oral conventions. In his 1851 introduction to

31. Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), esp. 117–216.

the Gospels, B. F. Westcott, a major English scholar, departed from then-contemporary German criticism by appealing instead to oral tradition to explain the relationships between the Synoptics.³² Westcott argued that the traditions eventually written down in the Synoptic Gospels originated in the preaching of the apostles. This apostolic tradition safeguarded the faithfulness of the oral transmission. Theories of oral tradition often explain variations in the Gospel accounts by arguing that Jesus delivered similar words on several occasions, often linked to theories of location tradition.³³

Each hypothesis of the Synoptic Problem presented so far does, to some extent, allow for a level of oral tradition to explain Synoptic relations. Oral tradition may be included in what constitutes Q or M or L—that is, sources that are not canonical Gospels. Most scholars, regardless of which solution to the Synoptic Problem they endorse, agree that oral traditions are behind the Synoptics in some way. That said, the literary relationship is often given greater emphasis as the oral tradition is given peripheral treatment.

Scholars who study the oral tradition behind the Gospels have long worked to give proper emphasis to the role of eyewitness accounts, memory, oral transmission, and traditions about Jesus in early Christianity. Several scholars argue for what is called the **Tradition Hypothesis**, which asserts that the relationship among the Synoptics can be explained purely by oral traditions and sources. However, here again the issue is a matter of emphasis, and most scholars who stress oral traditions combine a theory of oral tradition with literary sources when addressing the Synoptic Problem. For them, any hypothesis of Synoptic relations is necessarily more complex than what is possible to know with certainty. It is likely, they would argue, that the Synoptic writers utilized numerous sources and possibly different variations of oral traditions and eyewitness accounts.

Placing the Four Contributors within the Conversation

This brief overview of the history and major hypotheses and figures of the Synoptic Problem just scratches at the surface of the scholarship and the discussion that have surrounded this important topic. In the essays that follow, leading scholars of the four major views on the Synoptic Problem that we have outlined above present more detailed articulations of these hypotheses

32. Westcott, *Study of the Gospels*, 165–212. On Westcott’s proposal, see Stanley E. Porter, “The Legacy of B. F. Westcott and Oral Gospel Tradition,” in *Earliest Christianity within the Boundaries of Judaism*, ed. Alan Avery-Peck, Craig A. Evans, and Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 326–45.

33. See Bo Reicke, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

and then enter into dialogue with one another. It is an important and potentially productive time in the history of the Synoptic Problem, as all the founders and major early proponents associated with each hypothesis—for example, Holtzmann, Streeter, Griesbach, Farmer, Farrer, Goulder, Westcott, and Reicke—have passed on, and a new generation of scholars has picked up the mantles left behind.

Craig A. Evans, John Bisagno Distinguished Professor of Christian Origins at Houston Baptist University in Houston, Texas, is an accomplished scholar and an expert in Gospel and Jesus studies. In this volume Evans represents what is still probably the majority view among New Testament scholars: the Two Source Hypothesis. He has articulated this stance on numerous occasions, often defending it against other hypotheses of Synoptic relations. His most rigorous defense of the Two Source Hypothesis is found in his Word commentary on the second half of Mark.³⁴ In an essay titled “Sorting Out the Synoptic Problem: Why an Old Approach Is Still Best,” Evans defends the Two Source Hypothesis, especially Markan priority, and points to its ability to explain parallel passages better than any other theory.³⁵

Mark Goodacre, Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins in the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, is the foremost contemporary scholar articulating and defending the Farrer Hypothesis. In much the same way as Goulder advanced the earlier view of Farrer, Goodacre has advanced the Farrer Hypothesis to such an extent that it is not uncommon to see it referred to as the Farrer-Goulder-Goodacre Hypothesis (or Theory). Goodacre has published numerous works on the topic, including *Goulder and the Gospels* and *The Case against Q*. He has also published the widely used introduction to the Synoptic Problem, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze*.³⁶

David Barrett Peabody, Professor of Religion at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Nebraska, is a leading scholar in the Synoptic Problem and leading proponent of the Two Gospel Hypothesis. A student of Farmer, Peabody is part of an international team of scholars who have heartily defended the Two Gospel Hypothesis and published two important volumes

34. Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, WBC 34B (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), xliii–lviii.

35. Craig A. Evans, “Sorting Out the Synoptic Problem: Why an Old Approach Is Still Best,” in *Reading the Gospels Today*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, MNTS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 1–26.

36. Mark Goodacre, *Goulder and the Gospels: An Examination of a New Paradigm*, JSNT-Sup 133 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Goodacre, *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002); Goodacre, *Synoptic Problem*. See also Mark Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin, eds., *Questioning Q: A Multidimensional Critique* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

on the theory.³⁷ Peabody has written several key articles supporting different aspects of the Two Gospel Hypothesis, and his published dissertation, *Mark as Composer*, is a landmark in the contemporary expression of the hypothesis.³⁸

Rainer Riesner, Professor Emeritus at Dortmund University in Germany, is an expert in theories of oral transmission and has published widely on the role of memory and orality in the composition of the New Testament. In the present volume Riesner argues for an Orality and Memory Hypothesis that takes into consideration oral transmission and practice in order to address the Synoptic Problem. His significant work on the background of Jesus's teaching, *Jesus als Lehrer* (Jesus as teacher), made an important impact on the understanding of how early Jesus traditions were transmitted.³⁹ In addition to this work, Riesner has published several articles on the topics of Synoptic relations, memory and orality, and early Christian traditions.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The unity and diversity of the Gospels, including similarities and differences in their very wording, have fascinated readers of the New Testament from its earliest interpreters to the present day. The contemporary framework of the Synoptic Problem continues to intrigue scholars, and articulations of fresh theories continue to surface.⁴¹ At the present time, however, four main views

37. Peabody, Cope, and McNicol, *One Gospel from Two*; Allan J. McNicol, David L. Dungan, and David B. Peabody, eds., *Beyond the Q Impasse: Luke's Use of Matthew; A Demonstration by the Research Team of the International Institute for Gospel Studies* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

38. W. R. Farmer, David L. Dungan, Allan J. McNicol, J. Bernard Orchard, and David B. Peabody, "The Two-Gospel Hypothesis: The Statement of the Hypothesis," in *The Interrelations of the Gospels: A Symposium Led by M.-É. Boismard, W. R. Farmer, F. Neirynck, Jerusalem 1984*, ed. David L. Dungan, BETL 95 (Leuven: Leuven University Press; Peeters, 1990), 125–56; David B. Peabody, "Reading Mark from the Perspectives of Different Synoptic Source Hypotheses: Historical, Redactional and Theological Implications," in Foster et al., *New Studies*, 159–85; Peabody, *Mark as Composer*, NGS 1 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press; Leuven: Peeters, 1987).

39. Rainer Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer: Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung der Evangelien-Überlieferung*, WUNT 2.7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981).

40. Rainer Riesner, "Jüdische Elementarbildung und Evangelien-Überlieferung," in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 1, *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 209–23; Riesner, "From the Messianic Teacher to the Gospels of Jesus Christ," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *How to Study the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 405–46.

41. Some recent theories responding to the Synoptic Problem include Delbert Burkett, *Rethinking the Gospel Sources*, vol. 1, *From Proto-Mark to Mark* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004); Burkett, *Rethinking the Gospel Sources*, vol. 2, *The Unity and Plurality of Q*,

on the Synoptic Problem represent the vast majority of scholarship on the subject. We are grateful to have leading scholars representing these views in the present volume.

In what follows, each contributor offers his main essay putting forward his view on the Synoptic Problem. Since the Two Source Hypothesis, and its two tenets—Markan priority and Q—is probably still the majority view among New Testament scholars, Evans's essay is presented first and sets the course for the remaining essays. Goodacre's essay on the Farrer Hypothesis, which shares a major tenet with the Two Source Hypothesis (Markan priority), is placed next. This is followed by Peabody's essay on the Two Gospel Hypothesis, which moves significantly away from Evans's view but shares common features with Goodacre's view, especially in dispensing with Q. The fourth essay is Riesner's articulation of an Orality and Memory Hypothesis, which is both quite distinct in some ways from the other three views and surprisingly similar in others. Instead of immediately following each proposal with responses from the other contributors, as some multiple-views books do, this volume presents all four position essays up front. This allows the reader to be exposed to each view on its own merits without outside voices entering the discussion. Then, after each view's positive proposal has been made, each contributor offers a single essay in response to the other three views. The concluding chapter, written by the editors, summarizes the discussion and presents next steps for future studies on the Synoptic Problem.

SBLECL 1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); James Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).