



The Synoptic Problem

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What is the Synoptic Problem?

- Synoptic means "looking together."
 - Matthew, Mark & Luke are very similar.
 - John is rather different.
- How are the Synoptic Gospels related?
 - How explain their similarities?
 - How explain their differences?



What is the Synoptic Problem?

- Synoptics are unusually similar:
 - 3 years ministry, only a few hours given
 - 100s healed, just a few narrated
- Those who reject Gospels claim:
 - Similarities due to copying
 - Differences due to:
 - Intentional changes
 - Authors unaware of each other

The Phenomena of the Synoptic Problem



The Phenomena of the Synoptic Problem

- Verbal agreements & differences
- Differences in order of events
- Overlap & uniqueness of content



Verbal Agreements & Differences

- Sample – the Parable of the Sower
- Alford's summary:

The phenomena presented will be much as follows: first, perhaps, we shall have three, five or more [words] identical, then as many wholly distinct, then two clauses or more, expressed in the same words but differing order; then a clause contained in one or two and not in the third [Gospel]; then several words identical; then a clause not only wholly distinct, but apparently inconsistent...



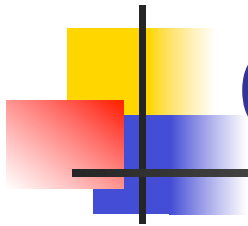
Verbal Agreements & Differences

- Book – unique – agree w 2 – agree w 1
- Mark 40% 22% 38%
- Matt 56% 14% 30%
- Luke 67% 12% 21%

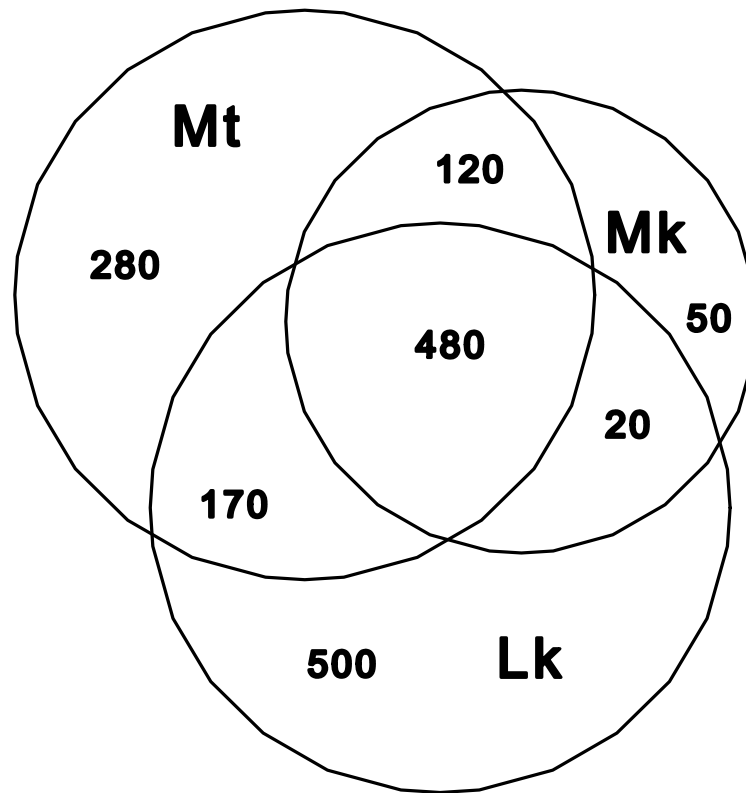


Differences in Order

- Order is mainly the same.
 - Check any Synopsis.
- Some differences do occur:
 - Healing Peter's m-in-law vs leper
 - Order of temptations
 - Order of cup & bread at Last Supper
- Some complications
 - Correct text?
 - Same event?



Overlap & Uniqueness





Overlap & Uniqueness

- Canon/Content/Sections
- 1 – All Four – 74
- 2 – 3 Synoptics – 111
- 3 – Mt/Lk/Jn – 22
- 4 – Mt/Mk/Jn – 25
- 5 – Mt/Lk – 82
- 6 – Mt/Mk – 47
- 7 – Mt/Jn – 7
- 8 – Lk/Mk – 13
- 9 – Lk/Jn – 21
- Canon/Content/Sections
- 10a – Matthew – 62
- 10b – Mark – 19
- 10c – Luke – 72
- 10d – John - 96



Summary on Overlap

- Almost all of Mark is in Matthew or Luke.
- Matthew & Luke have much in common that is not in Mark.
- Matthew & Luke have much material unique to each.

Sketch History of the Synoptic Problem



Early History

- Tatian's *Diatessaron* (c170)
- The Canons of Eusebius (c330)
- Augustine, *Harmony of the Evangelists* (c400)
 - Successive dependence Mt – Mk – Lk
- Reformation Harmonies
 - Two different strategies
 - Lump or split?

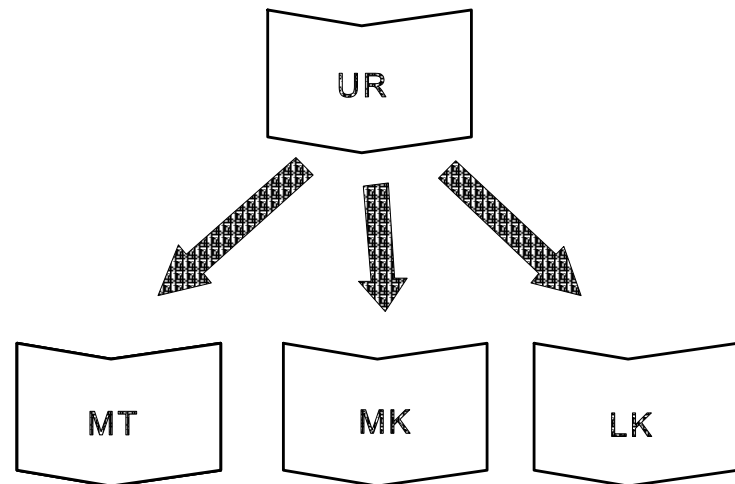


Modern History

- Primitive Gospel (Urevangelium)
- Successive Dependence
- Fragmentary
- Oral Tradition
- Two Document
- Four Document

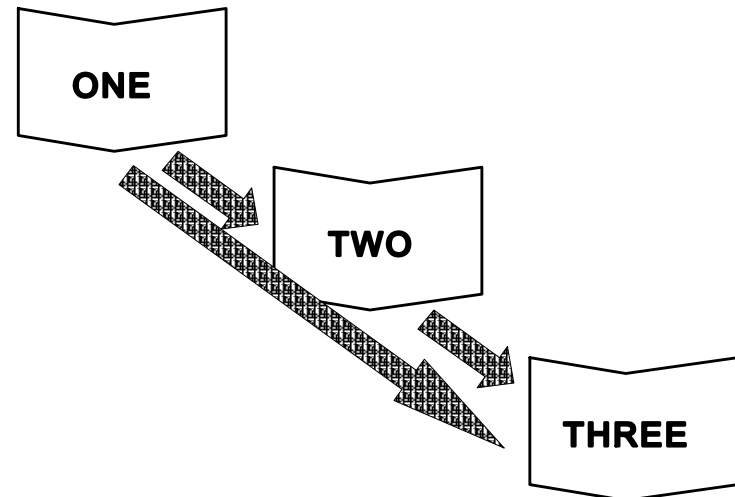
Primitive Gospel (Urevangelium)

- Advantages:
 - Common source
 - Might have disappeared w/ language change
- Problems:
 - No evidence for this document
 - If Aramaic Matthew, why so diff from Greek?
 - Order differences
 - Apparent discrepancies
 - Why did Mark pick only what is in Matt & Luke?



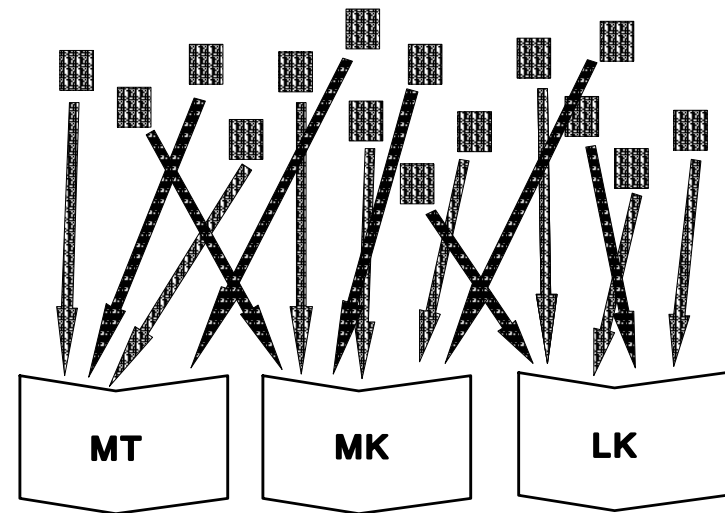
Successive Dependence

- Advantages:
 - No need to postulate missing documents.
- Problems
 - Order not obvious
 - How verbal differences arise?
 - Where does later material come from?
 - How explain apparent discrepancies?



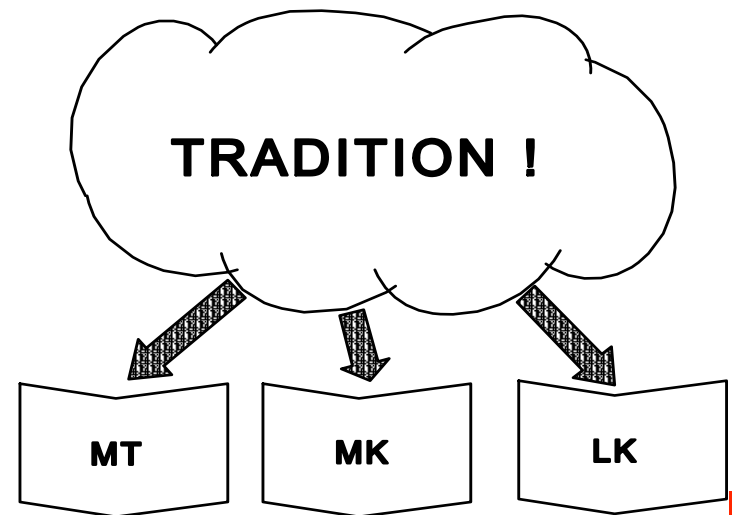
Fragmentary

- Advantages:
 - Luke 1 implies many attempts.
 - Gospels look like series of anecdotes.
 - Apparently a variety of sources used.
- Problems:
 - Often used to reduce reliability of sources.
 - View shares problems of Form Criticism.
 - Probably some merit, but needs repair.



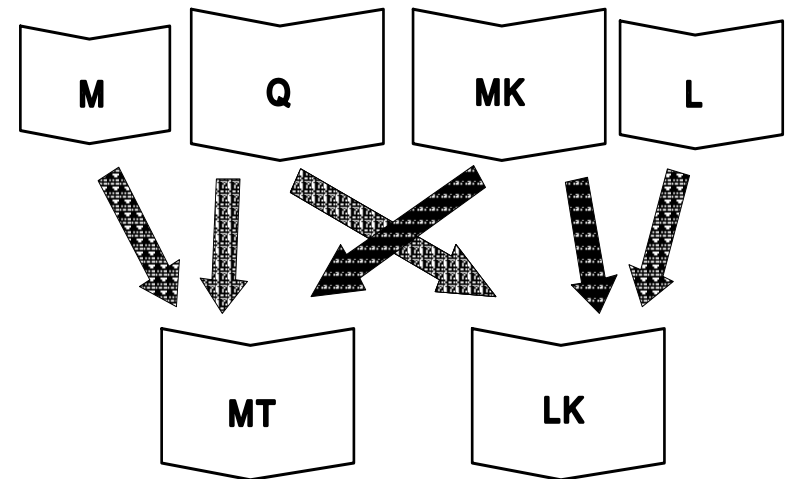
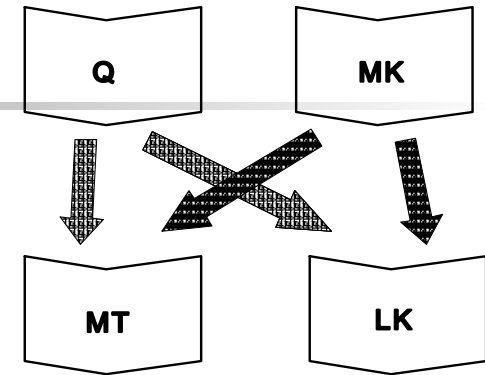
Oral Tradition

- Advantages:
 - Seems to have been an early oral period
 - But oral transmission is often very reliable
- Problems:
 - Should not insist all sources were oral
 - Shorthand did exist in antiquity
 - Probably a combination of oral & written sources



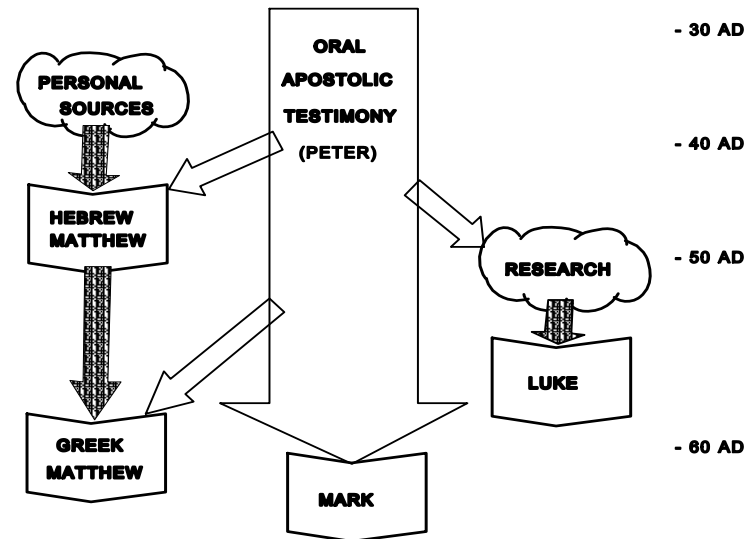
Two & Four Document Theories

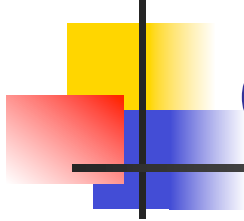
- Advantages:
 - Matt & Luke do follow Mark's order.
 - When divergent, don't follow each other.
- Problems:
 - No evidence for Q, M, L.
 - Verbal differences peculiar for copying.
 - Why did Luke omit a large section of Mark?
 - Why did Matt follow Mark so slavishly?



A Proposed Solution

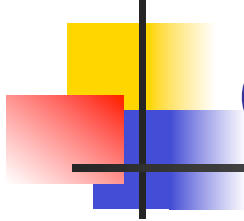
- Gospels written by traditional authors, who used both oral and written sources.
- Internal evidence looks like Mark is source for Matthew & Luke, but doesn't fit order of writing.
- Suggest that Matt & Luke depend on oral form of Mark, i.e. the apostolic tradition.





How does this explain the similarities?

- All depend on the life of Christ, real series of historical events.
- All depend on oral teaching of Apostles.
- Peter (source of Mark) was their spokesman.
- Both Matthew & Luke used Jesus' oral teaching materials in addition.
- Perhaps the disciples memorized his teaching.
- Some notes were likely used.



How does this explain the differences?

- Jesus teaching was repetitive.
- Some of his actions were repeated.
- Witnesses emphasize different features.
- Oral repetition produces variation.
- Gospel writers condensed materials.
- They did not know everything.
- They did not use all they knew.



How does this fit with inspiration?

- Inspiration is not usually dictation.
 - Authors have various styles.
 - Consistent with approximate language...
- The accounts are harmonious.
 - But we may not be sure how to harmonize
- Inspiration is a revealed doctrine, not an inductive one.
 - Like sinlessness of Christ, goodness of God



The End

But not the end of the debate!