

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 9, Synoptic Problem Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 9, Synoptic Problem, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Robert Newman's lecture explores the Synoptic Problem, which examines the similarities and differences among the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The lecture begins by defining the problem as the challenge of explaining the relationships that account for shared content and unique variations. **Newman then discusses verbal agreements, disagreements, and the order of events within the gospels.** He introduces statistical data and diagrams to highlight the overlaps and distinctions in content between the synoptic gospels. **The lecture further reviews various proposed solutions to the Synoptic Problem throughout history, from Tatian's Diatessaron to the two-document theory.** Finally, Newman proposes his own solution, suggesting that the gospels were written by their traditional authors, drawing on both oral and written sources influenced by the apostolic testimony.

2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → Synoptic Gospels).



**Newman_Synoptics
_Session09.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 9, Synoptic Problem

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture notes on the Synoptic Problem.

Briefing Document: The Synoptic Problem

Subject: An overview of the Synoptic Problem, examining its nature, history, proposed solutions, and a suggested resolution.

Executive Summary:

The "Synoptic Problem" arises from the striking similarities and puzzling differences among the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This lecture explores the nature of these agreements and disagreements (verbal, order of events, and content overlap), examines the historical attempts to explain these phenomena, reviews various proposed solutions (Ur-Gospel, Successive Dependence, Fragmentary, Oral Tradition, Two-Document, Four-Document), and presents a suggested resolution focusing on a combination of oral and written sources, apostolic influence, and the nature of inspiration.

I. Defining the Synoptic Problem:

- **Synoptic Definition:** "Synoptic means looking together." The first three Gospels share a similar perspective on the life of Jesus, especially when compared to John.
- **The Problem:** The challenge is to explain the relationship among these Gospels that accounts for both their significant similarities and significant differences.
- **Key Question:** How can we explain the verbal agreements and disagreements, variations in the order of events, and the unique content found in each Gospel?
- **Challenge to Inspiration Deniers:** Those who reject the inspiration of scripture see the similarities as due to copying and the differences to intentional or unintentional changes.

II. Phenomena of the Synoptic Problem:

- **Verbal Agreements and Disagreements:** The lecture illustrates this with a detailed comparison of the Parable of the Sower in Greek, highlighting both identical wording and variations.

- **Example:** While all three Gospels use the same verb for "to sow," Matthew uses a definite article with a present infinitive, while Mark uses an aorist infinitive without an article, and Luke uses an aorist infinitive with an article.
- **Summary (Alford):** "First is 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 different order...and so forth."
- **Statistics (Schaff):** Quantitative data reveals the extent of verbal agreement and uniqueness.
- Mark has the lowest percentage of unique words (40%), followed by Matthew (56%), and then Luke (67%).
- Mark agrees with both Matthew and Luke in 22% of its words, whereas Matthew and Luke only agree with the other synoptics in 14% and 12% of words respectively.
- **Key Observation:** "Mark is more like the others than the others are like each other."
- **Order of Events:** While generally consistent, there are instances where the order varies (e.g., healing of Peter's mother-in-law versus the leper).
- **Example:** The healing of Peter's mother-in-law is in Matthew 8, Mark 1, and Luke 4, but the healing of a leper appears in different orders in these gospels.
- Matthew and Luke rarely agree against Mark in the order of events.
- Narratives may follow topical rather than strict chronological order.
- **Overlap and Uniqueness of Content:** A Venn diagram illustrates shared and unique material.
- Luke has the most unique verses (500), followed by Matthew (280), and Mark (50).
- All three Gospels overlap in approximately 480 verses.
- **Eusebian Canons:** Early attempts to catalog parallel passages across the Gospels.

III. History of the Synoptic Problem:

- **Early Recognition:** The problem was noticed as early as the 60s when multiple gospels began circulating. Opponents of Christianity exploited the discrepancies.

- **Tatian's Diatessaron (c. 170 AD):** An early attempt to "harmonize" the Gospels into a single narrative, eliminating repetition.
- **Canons of Eusebius (c. 340 AD):** Tables indexing parallel accounts.
- **Augustine's Harmony of the Evangelists (c. 400 AD):** The first book-length discussion, harmonizing the Gospels incident by incident.
- Proposed a "Successive Dependence Theory" - Matthew -> Mark -> Luke
- **Renaissance and Reformation:** Renewed interest in harmonizing the Gospels.

IV. Proposed Solutions:

- **Primitive Gospel (Ur-Evangelium):** A hypothetical original Gospel (likely Aramaic) from which the Synoptics drew.
- Similarities arise from this common source; differences from editing and translation.
- **Successive Dependence Theory:** One Gospel is written first, and the subsequent Gospels build on it. (Different orders have been proposed.)
- Augustinian: Matthew -> Mark -> Luke
- Griesbach: Matthew -> Luke -> Mark
- Markan: Mark -> Luke -> Matthew
- **Fragmentary Theory:** Matthew, Mark, and Luke independently collected and compiled written fragments circulating in the early church.
- **Oral Tradition Theory:** The Gospels are based on independent use of oral traditions.
- More conservative version: Apostles unified traditions into written narratives.
- **Two-Document Theory:** Mark and a hypothetical source called "Q" (from German "Quelle," meaning "source") were the primary sources for Matthew and Luke. Matthew and Luke did not know each other's gospel.
- "Q" is primarily sayings of Jesus.
- **Four-Document Theory:** Builds on Two-Document Theory, adding unique sources "M" (for Matthew) and "L" (for Luke).

V. Analysis of Theories (Advantages & Disadvantages):

- **Ur-Evangelium:** Explains similarities well but struggles to account for differences and lack of evidence for such a document.
- **Successive Dependence:** Avoids hypothesizing lost documents, but struggles to explain *which* Gospel borrowed from *which* and how verbal differences arose.
- **Fragmentary:** Accounts for multiple sources but can downplay reliability and historicity.
- **Oral Tradition:** Highlights the role of oral transmission but potentially overlooks the use of written notes.
- **Two-Document/Four-Document:** Explains Matthew and Luke's dependence on Mark, but lacks evidence for "Q," "M," and "L" and may conflict with traditional views of Gospel origins (e.g., Matthew written before Mark).

VI. Proposed Solution (Dr. Newman's Model):

- **Core Idea:** The Gospels were written by the traditional authors (Matthew, Mark, Luke) using both oral and written sources.
- **Emphasis on Oral Apostolic Testimony:** Peter is a major spokesman, and the apostles organized their material together.
- **Specifics:** Matthew wrote a Hebrew Matthew, then possibly a Greek version, drawing on oral apostolic testimony (possibly in both Aramaic and Greek).
- Luke, during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, interviewed people (including apostles and those familiar with Jesus' ministry) and compiled his Gospel.
- Mark, in Rome, wrote down Peter's account.
- **How Similarities are Explained:** Rooted in actual historical events.
- Common selection of events guided by the apostolic preaching and teaching, shaped by group discussions and the influence of Peter.
- Shared use of Jesus' teaching materials ("Q" material) – Jesus was an itinerant speaker who repeated teachings.
- Memorization of Jesus' teachings, similar to rabbinic practices.
- Use of some documents or notes.

- **How Differences are Explained:** Jesus' teaching varied slightly depending on the audience.
- Some of Jesus' actions were repeated (e.g., multiple healings, feedings).
- Different witnesses emphasize different aspects of the same event.
- Oral repetition naturally leads to verbal variation.
- Gospel writers likely did not intend to convey *verbatim* transcripts.
- Writers had their own research and did not know all the same things.
- Writers selected materials to keep accounts concise and emphasize specific points.

VII. How This Fits With Inspiration:

- Inspiration does not require dictation; it allows for the author's style and selectivity while maintaining truthfulness.
- Inspiration is consistent with approximate language, summarization, and non-chronological arrangements.
- Inspiration assures us that the accounts are harmonious (though we may not always know how to fully harmonize them).
- Inspiration is a revealed doctrine, deduced from what the Bible teaches.

VIII. Conclusion:

The Synoptic Problem is a complex issue with a range of proposed solutions. Dr. Newman advocates for a model that emphasizes the role of oral tradition, particularly the collective apostolic testimony, alongside the potential use of some written sources, and recognizes the freedom of the Gospel writers to select and present material in a way that aligns with their purposes and audiences, all within the framework of inspiration. This provides a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels.

4. Study Guide: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 9, Synoptic Problem

Synoptic Gospel Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What does "synoptic" mean, and why is it used to describe the first three Gospels?
2. According to the lecture, what is the core issue at the heart of the Synoptic Problem?
3. What are the three main types of variations found between Synoptic Gospels?
4. What does the professor mean by a "harmony" of the gospels?
5. Briefly explain the Ur-Evangelium theory and what it proposes about the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels.
6. What is the core idea behind the Successive Dependence theory?
7. Explain the key components of the Two-Document Hypothesis.
8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Oral Tradition theory in addressing the Synoptic Problem?
9. According to Newman, what key problems do evangelicals face when adopting the Two-Document Hypothesis?
10. Briefly summarize the solution that Newman proposes to address the synoptic problem.

Quiz - Answer Key

1. "Synoptic" means "looking together." The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are called Synoptic Gospels because they share many similarities in content, structure, and perspective. They often tell the same stories in similar ways, as if viewing Jesus' life from a common vantage point.
2. The Synoptic Problem centers on explaining the relationships among the first three Gospels, specifically accounting for their striking similarities and significant

differences. The challenge lies in understanding how these Gospels can be so alike and yet distinct in their accounts of Jesus' life and teachings.

3. The lecture highlights three main types of variations: verbal agreements and disagreements (similarities and differences in wording), differences in the order of events, and variations in the inclusion or exclusion of specific content. Understanding these variations is crucial in addressing the Synoptic Problem.
4. A "harmony" of the Gospels refers to an attempt to combine the accounts of the Gospels into a single, cohesive narrative. The goal of gospel harmonies is often to reconcile differences and present a unified picture of Jesus' life and teachings.
5. The Ur-Evangelium theory posits that there was a single, original gospel (often believed to be in Aramaic) from which Matthew, Mark, and Luke drew their material. Similarities between the Synoptics are attributed to their shared use of this Ur-Gospel, while differences arise from their individual editing and translation choices.
6. The Successive Dependence theory suggests that the Gospels were written in sequence, with each subsequent Gospel author relying on and incorporating material from the earlier Gospels. The variations of this theory differ on which gospel was written first, second, and third.
7. The Two-Document Hypothesis proposes that Matthew and Luke both independently drew from two primary sources: the Gospel of Mark and a hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings called "Q" (from the German "Quelle," meaning "source"). This theory suggests that Mark provided the narrative framework, while Q contributed primarily discourse material.
8. The Oral Tradition theory acknowledges the importance of oral transmission of Jesus' teachings and stories in the early church. A strength of the theory is that it acknowledges the importance of the oral tradition, but its weakness is its reliance on an oral tradition without written resources.
9. Newman suggests that a key problem for evangelicals when adopting the Two-Document Hypothesis is its implication that Matthew, an apostle and eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, relied heavily on Mark, a non-apostle, in writing his Gospel. This challenges the traditional view of Matthew as an authoritative, independent account.
10. Newman proposes that all three Synoptic Gospels used mostly oral sources combined with some written supplements. He suggested that Matthew's earlier

gospel was followed by Luke's version, and finally Mark's, which followed Peter's own oral preachings.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the Two-Document Hypothesis as a solution to the Synoptic Problem.
2. Compare and contrast the Ur-Evangelium theory and the Oral Tradition theory, highlighting how each attempts to explain the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels.
3. Evaluate Newman's proposed solution to the Synoptic Problem, considering its strengths, weaknesses, and plausibility.
4. Analyze the role of textual criticism and harmonization in understanding and addressing the Synoptic Problem.
5. Explore the implications of the Synoptic Problem for understanding the nature of biblical inspiration and the authority of Scripture.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Synoptic:** From the Greek, meaning "seeing together"; used to describe the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share similar content and structure.
- **Synoptic Problem:** The challenge of explaining the similarities and differences between the Synoptic Gospels.
- **Verbal Agreement/Disagreement:** Similarities and differences in the specific wording used in the Synoptic Gospels when describing the same event or teaching.
- **Gospel Harmony:** An attempt to combine the accounts of the four Gospels into a single, unified narrative, resolving apparent contradictions and differences.
- **Ur-Evangelium:** German for "original gospel"; a hypothetical, early gospel source that some scholars believe was used by the authors of the Synoptic Gospels.
- **Successive Dependence:** The theory that one Gospel writer used one or more of the other Gospels when writing his account.
- **Two-Document Hypothesis:** The dominant theory for explaining the Synoptic Problem, proposing that Matthew and Luke used Mark and the Q source as their primary sources.
- **Q (Quelle):** A hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings and teachings that some scholars believe was used by Matthew and Luke.
- **Four-Document Hypothesis:** An expansion of the Two-Document Hypothesis, suggesting that Matthew and Luke also used unique sources (M and L, respectively) in addition to Mark and Q.
- **Oral Tradition:** The transmission of stories, teachings, and other information by word of mouth before being written down.
- **Form Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that analyzes the Gospels in terms of their literary forms and the social settings in which they originated.

5. FAQs on Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 9, Synoptic Problem, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

The Synoptic Problem FAQ

Here is an 8-question FAQ that best captures the main themes and ideas of the provided source:

- **What is the Synoptic Problem?**
- The Synoptic Problem concerns the literary relationship between the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), also called the Synoptic Gospels, which are very similar but also have significant and puzzling differences. The core question is: what explains their similarities and differences?
- **What are some examples of the similarities and differences between the Synoptic Gospels?**
- Similarities include identical words, phrases, and order of events. Differences can be as small as the presence or absence of a definite article in a phrase or as significant as the order of events within a narrative. For instance, in the Parable of the Sower, Matthew and Mark both begin with "behold," while Luke does not. Event order differences include the order of the temptations of Jesus.
- **What statistical patterns are observed in the wording of the Synoptic Gospels?**
- When comparing the overlapping sections of the Synoptic Gospels, statistics show that Mark has the least unique content, and Luke has the most. Mark is more similar to both Matthew and Luke than they are to each other. Agreements in the order of events between Matthew and Luke against Mark are rare.
- **What are some historical attempts to solve the Synoptic Problem?**
- Early attempts include Tatian's Diatessaron (a woven harmony of the four Gospels), Eusebius' Canons (indexing parallel accounts), and Augustine's Harmony of the Evangelists (harmonizing the Gospels incident by incident). Augustine also proposed a Successive Dependence Theory, suggesting Matthew was written first, then Mark used Matthew, and Luke used both.
- **What are the main theories proposed to solve the Synoptic Problem?**
- Several theories have been proposed, including:

- **Ur-Evangelium Theory:** An original Aramaic gospel was the source for all three Synoptics.
- **Successive Dependence Theory:** One gospel was written first, and the others used it as a source.
- **Fragmentary Theory:** Independent collections of written anecdotes were compiled into the Gospels.
- **Oral Tradition Theory:** Oral sources lie behind the three Gospels, independently used by each author.
- **Two-Document Theory:** Mark and a source called "Q" (hypothetical saying source) were used by Matthew and Luke independently.
- **Four-Document Theory:** An extension of the two-document theory which proposes Matthew and Luke each had their own unique written sources, M and L respectively, in addition to Mark and Q.
- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Two-Document Theory?**
 - *Advantages:* It explains why Matthew and Luke largely follow Mark's order and why they do not follow each other when deviating from Mark. *Disadvantages:* There is no physical evidence for the existence of "Q." It also goes against the historical tradition that Matthew was written before Mark. Additionally, it raises questions about why Matthew, an apostle, would depend so heavily on Mark's (secondhand) account.
- **What is the proposed solution to the Synoptic Problem by Dr. Newman from the lecture?**
 - The proposed solution suggests that Matthew, Mark, and Luke primarily used oral sources and that some written supplements may have also been utilized. Matthew created a Hebrew version first and later Greek, Luke interviewed people for his gospel, and Mark wrote down Peter's teaching.
- **How does inspiration fit into this proposed solution?**
 - Inspiration does not require strict dictation but allows for the author's style and selection of material while maintaining truthfulness. Similarities come from common historical events, apostolic teaching, and possibly memorization. Differences arise from varying perspectives, oral repetition, summaries, and incomplete knowledge.