

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 6 Genre and Synoptics

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson presenting his New Testament History and Literature, lecture 6, Genre and the Synoptics.

All right, let's go ahead and get started. Let's open with prayer and then we ended the last class period, which was when Monday or something like that.

It seems my whole week has been thrown off, but on Monday we ended by talking a little bit about the diverse literary types or forms, the literary genres in the New Testament. We began talking about narrative, which makes up the Gospels and the Book of Acts, although Acts is a little bit different type of literature than the Gospels. They resemble each other in that they are narratives, depictions of certain characters and their speeches and certain events.

We'll look at two other dominant literary forms or literary types that make up the New Testament. Again, we said what is significant about this is the New Testament contains literary forms and types that may or may not correspond to literary forms and types that we're used to today. We need to try to understand the mode in which authors were writing in the first century.

What literary forms did they utilize and how might that affect the way we read and interpret certain Old Testament texts? We'll finish up discussing the narrative genre, talk a little bit about letters or epistles, and then one final literary type, and then kind of start to inch our way into talking about the Gospels. Although we probably won't start talking about specific Gospel texts or books until Monday. Hopefully, we can start to introduce them today.

Let's open with prayer and then we'll talk a little bit about the literary types of the New Testament. Father, we thank you for the privilege and the responsibility of studying what is nothing less than your revelation to us. I pray that we'll have a greater appreciation, awareness, and understanding of the New Testament text as they were produced in a specific historical, cultural, literary, and linguistic context, while at the same time affirming that it continues to function for us today as nothing less than the Word of God.

I pray that we'll be able to understand it from those perspectives in all its richness and variety. We pray that you'll guide our discussion today and give us wisdom and insight into your revelation to us. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

All right, so we talked a little bit about narrative in preparation for looking at the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which we said are arranged or occur in the New Testament not in their chronological order, the order in which they were written. At least Matthew and perhaps Luke would have been written even after Paul's epistles and Paul's letters, and it's possible that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were not even written in that order. But instead, the New Testament is arranged more logically.

But the four Gospels comprise what is a group of writings that fit the narrative genre. And as we said, it's important to understand in the first century how that would have been looked at and how that would have been understood. In the first-century narrative or biography, the Gospels fit, for the most part, very well within the category of first-century Greco-Roman biographies.

The difference between the Gospels and modern-day biographies is that first-century biographies, especially the Gospels, do not seem to be interested in giving you a blow-by-blow account or a detailed account of everything a person did in his or her life and everything they said. But instead, the Gospels appear to be far more selective. That is, the Gospels are actually written from a particular theological perspective.

And we'll look at that. When we look at the four Gospels, one of the things we're going to ask is why four Gospels? Why didn't the early church just lump them all together into one grand narrative and historical account of the life and teaching and deeds of Jesus Christ? But instead, the church allowed four different Gospels as a stand. So, the Gospels are written by authors who have a theological point, something they want to get across, a spin on the Gospel story and the account of Jesus' life.

And what they do is they're very selective in what they include and how they record it in order to get across their point. One of the questions we'll ask is, why do only Matthew and Luke contain the so-called Christmas story? Why do only Matthew and Luke contain an account of Jesus' birth whereas Mark doesn't seem interested in that? And John seems to capture it in one very short statement or verse at the very beginning of his Gospel. And then when you compare Matthew and Luke, their Christmas stories are very different.

Luke has shepherds coming to visit Jesus. Matthew says nothing about that. And instead, he's more interested about a year or so later having these magi, these foreign astrologers, come and visit Jesus.

So why do they do that? What's up? So, what you can see, though, is a narrative in the first century or biography in the first century, especially as encapsulated in the Gospels, were not interested in giving you a detailed account of the person's life

from birth to death. Instead, they were far more selective. In order to communicate the theological point they were trying to get across, the authors would be selective in the events they recorded and often how they recorded them, therefore accounting for the differences you see between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

And also accounting for the fact that you don't have, except for a few short verses in Luke, you have nothing about Jesus' early childhood in any of the Gospels, simply because they're not interested in telling you everything there was to know about Jesus. The other thing to know about first-century Greco-Roman biography was that when it comes to recording what someone said, in their speech, in the first century it was far more common to summarize than it was to, as we're interested in putting something in quotations and giving a word-for-word account of everything someone said. Instead, it seems that first-century writers were far more interested in summarizing the meaning and the gist of what someone said, capturing the voice rather than the exact verba or words that an author said.

In fact, if Jesus spoke largely in Aramaic and the Gospels are written in Greek, then we actually have a translation of what Jesus said. And in fact, as we talk about in another of my classes, if you sit down and read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in a modern-day translation, it'll probably take you roughly, I don't know, ten minutes or so to read through it, depending how quickly or slowly or contemplatively you read it. I really doubt Jesus spoke for ten minutes on that day.

More likely, the Sermon on the Mount is an accurate and adequate summary of what it was that Jesus said and what it was that exactly Jesus was trying to get across. So, there are times in the Gospels where perhaps the authors do contain exact wording or close to the wording, especially if Jesus spoke in Aramaic and our Gospels are in Greek, then we have Greek translations of what Jesus said. But outside of those instances, probably most of Jesus' speeches are more summaries, accurate and adequate summaries of what it was Jesus said.

And in the first century, no one would have thought any different. It might be a little bit analogous to when, for example, when we have a faculty meeting here at Gordon, the minutes are roughly two or three pages long, yet the meeting lasts for an entire hour. No one would fault a secretary at a board meeting for summarizing in the minutes what someone said.

As long as it accurately and adequately conveys what was said, the minutes will pass and no one will think a second thought. That may be a little bit analogous to sometimes what we find in the Gospels, which are summaries of what it was Jesus communicated and what it was he taught, though again, accurate and adequate summaries. So, we'll look at that when it comes to how that affects the way we read the Gospels.

The second genre is epistolary. This may be one that we're more familiar with, but even then, first-century epistles could deviate from what we do when we write epistles today. Epistles in the first century were a very common way of communicating just about any kind of information.

They could be used for business transactions. They could be used for even up to philosophical tractates and anything in between. So, you could use a letter to frame and communicate just about any kind of information.

What most people overlook is the very last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, is actually a letter. It's framed in the form of a letter. So, a letter could be used in the first century to communicate just about any kind of information.

It was fairly well-stylized as well. That is, it had a fairly common format that a writer in the first century would follow. So, when you look at Paul's letters, for example, most of them, although they deviate in significant ways, they, for the most part, follow a very common first-century format and way of writing.

We actually have a number of letters that have been uncovered, written during the first century that kind of testify to what first-century letters looked like in Paul's letters. Although there are more than that, there is nothing less than common first-century letters where you could communicate about anything in the form of a letter. A couple of other things about letters, number one, a letter often functioned as well a kind of surrogate for the presence of the speaker.

So, you would write a letter if you had something important to say to someone and you could not be in their presence, a letter would be a substitute for that. So, the letters were often substitutes for Paul's apostolic authority, and he expected the readers to take them with the same seriousness with which they would take Paul were he present to address them in person. So, letters could function as a substitute for the presence of the speaker.

The other thing, too, is in the same way that there are different kinds of letters today, there were different types of letters in the first century, and there are a couple of letters that Paul writes that resemble very common types of first-century letters, and it actually makes a little bit of a difference in the way you read and interpret the letter. We'll look at that when we get to it. But again, letters were just a very common way of communicating.

Paul didn't make up these letters or the letter format, he was just following a standard way of communicating information in the first-century Greco-Roman environment. This kind of epistolary genre is also reflected in probably the book of Hebrews to some extent, 1 and 2 Peter, John's letters, and Jude, and as I said, even

Revelation actually is in the form of a letter. The last literary type that only really comprises one book, and that's the book of Revelation, is an apocalypse.

We'll talk more about this when we get to the book of Revelation at the end of the semester because I'm convinced understanding the literary genre of this book is crucial and essential for avoiding the way Revelation has often been treated and sometimes abused. Again, we need to understand that the book of Revelation is simply written, it was received by the author and written in a very common literary form in the first century, along with the letter, a literary form known or that we've labeled as an apocalypse. Basically, an apocalypse was a first-person autobiographical account of a visionary experience.

So, when you read the book of Revelation, begins in chapter 4, John says, I saw heaven opened, and John then is told to come up and he goes to heaven. That was common in apocalypses written roughly from 200 BC to 200 AD, roughly 200 years before and after the writing of the book of Revelation. So, you can actually find English translations of a number of these apocalypses.

I can point you in the direction of that if you're interested, but the point is John's book of Revelation is not unique. It didn't just come out of the blue. He's following a very common method of writing, of receiving a revelation from God, but then recording it for his readers, known as apocalypse.

Again, basically, it is a first-person account of a visionary experience, and it's usually communicated in very highly symbolic language. It's communicated in the symbols of strange beasts and images and things like that, and the key is to try to sort out where the author, what's the background for these images. What do they mean? What would they have communicated to the first-century readers? Not so much what they seem to mean to us in the 21st century. So, we'll talk more about Revelation when we get there, but at least in the New Testament, it's the only example of an apocalypse.

However, it's not the only example of an apocalypse in the first century. There were numerous. It was a fairly common literary type that the readers would have been familiar with when they first heard it read to them.

All right, so that's just a little bit of a flavor of the diversity of literary types. Even within this literature, there are diverse kinds of literary types. Some of them we'll look at.

For example, we'll spend some time looking at the parables. What's a parable? One of the common forms of Jesus' teaching. Again, the parable would have been a very common literary form or means of teaching in the first century.

And so however distinct his teaching and content is, the form of it would have followed what would have been common and recognizable among first-century listeners and readers. So, when we come to different books, we'll ask the question, how does the literary genre or literary type affect the way we approach this book and the way we read it? Now to zoom in a little bit closer, I want to start to talk more specifically about the Gospels before we start examining the specific texts themselves, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I just want to make some observations overall in regard to how we approach them.

One issue is, can we trust our Gospels? And by that I mean, can we trust that when we read the Gospels they provide us with accurate and reliable accounts of what Jesus did and what Jesus said? Or should we understand them as more fictional or as the church's fabrication of what they thought Jesus did and said or what they wanted to make Jesus out to be doing and saying? So, can we trust the Gospels? That is, do they, to some extent, give us reliable and accurate accounts and information of Jesus' teaching and the things that he did? You're probably aware of C.S. Lewis. Some of you are aware of C.S. Lewis's well-known trilemma. I think he argued for this in a book that you used to, several years ago before the Great Conversation class, kind of the freshman seminar-type class known as Christianity, Character, and Culture.

And one of the books you read, the first one I think, was C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. Some of you have perhaps read that. And I think it's there he argues for what has been called Lewis's trilemma.

That is, when you read the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels and what Jesus claims, Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or he was Lord. That is, Jesus was either lying about who he was. When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and claimed to die for the sins of humanity and that he would rise again, Jesus was either lying or perhaps Jesus was just out of his mind.

He was a lunatic. He didn't know what he was talking about. He was so flipped out that what he was saying had no basis in reality at all.

Or, Jesus was who he claimed to be. He was Lord. And, of course, Lewis argues that it's the latter.

The problem is, Lewis left a fourth one out. And that is, in fact, a question that you have to ask before you ask these three. And that is whether the Gospels are legends.

One could claim that Jesus, yes, Jesus was Lord as he claimed to be, but the Gospels are fictional, legendary accounts not to be taken seriously. So, one has to deal with that question before we can deal with Lewis's liar, lunatic, or Lord. In fact, there have been a number of attempts to ask the question, who was Jesus? So, that's the first question in your notes.

Who indeed was Jesus? A very popular way, in fact, this was made popular not long ago by a book that looked like this, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. But, I think we've referred to this before, but what Brown was saying really was a popularized version of what is often being done in academic circles. And that is to see Jesus, or to see the Gospels, not as historically reliable accounts or historical accounts about Jesus, but again, following a more legendary or fictional type of genre.

So, the Gospels are not meant to give us an historical account of who Jesus was and what he said, but instead, the Gospels reflect, in Brown's view and the view of others, more reflect the theology of the early church. In other words, it's the early church's theologizing and thinking that made Jesus out to be Lord. In fact, Jesus actually, a lot of scholars think that we can know virtually nothing about Jesus.

If you stripped all the husks away, the historical kernel at the center of the Gospel, basically all you know about Jesus is he was some man in the first century who wandered around Palestine teaching nice things and was finally put to death for what he believed. That's about all we can know about Jesus. Everything else is basically, this little kernel of Jesus has been overlaid and kind of blown out of proportion based on the faith of the church.

In other words, the Gospels don't reflect who Jesus was. They reflect who the church believed he was, what the church taught he was, and what the church thought he was. So, Jesus really was not the son of God who died for the sins of humanity and was raised from the dead, instead, he came from heaven, who was God incarnate.

Instead, that's again kind of, that's reflecting the faith of the church. That's who the church thought he was. But if you strip that away, all you have is just a human being who taught nice things in the first century and was put to death for what he believed.

So, the question is, do the Gospels, are the Gospels more of a reflection of the church's faith and who they thought Jesus was, or do the Gospels actually provide us with reliable and historically verifiable information about what Jesus taught and who he actually was? That is, can we trust the Gospels? Do they provide us with an accurate portrait of Christ who he was and what he did? Or are the Gospels simply a reflection of the church's theology, their faith, and their thinking? And they reflect who the church made Jesus out to be. That's also wrapped up with another question in your notes, reconstructing church history. Along with this picture, a portrait of Jesus that we can know virtually nothing about except what the church made him out to be and what they believed him to be, is that often church history is kind of reconceptualized to look like this.

Actually, in the first three or four centuries of the early church, there was no one view of Jesus Christ. There were different Christianities. You'll notice in your notes I have an individual named Bart Ehrman's name and beside it a title of one of his works that is Lost Christianities, plural.

So, what he's saying is that, and what a lot of scholars are saying is that Christianity was very pluralistic in the first century. There was no one dominant view of Christianity or of who Christ was and it was only later when that finally emerged. That was several centuries later, the winners, the most powerful, decided here's what Christianity is going to look like, and here's what we're going to say about Jesus Christ.

And so again, what we find in the Gospels is simply one reflection of one element of Christianity and who they thought Jesus was, but it's not the only one and it's certainly not the dominant one according to this view. Now how do we evaluate that? First of all, I don't know if I have this in your notes or not. First of all, by way of evaluation, it seems to me when you read the New Testament, it's simply not true that Christianity tolerated a variety of perspectives and there was no interest in a correct view of Christianity or a correct view of Jesus Christ.

Read through the New Testament documents and notice how interested they are in preserving the truth as opposed to falsehood or error. We'll see that a number of New Testament documents were actually written in response to deviant views of Christ or deviant views of the Christian life, for example. So, it's simply not true that the church had no interest in what was true or that it simply tolerated a diversity of opinions very early on.

Already in the New Testament documents themselves, you find a concern for what was true as opposed to and over against a false view of Jesus Christ. Second, this viewpoint also seems to be operating with this false dichotomy between history and theology. If a New Testament writer was writing theology, he could not have been writing history is often how it goes.

But again, that seems to me to be an illegitimate approach to understanding the New Testament, especially the gospel writings. Just because they wrote theology, just because they had a certain perspective and ideology that they were trying to communicate did not necessarily mean that they distorted the facts or played fast and loose with the facts. So, it's not true that just because someone's writing theology that therefore they're not interested in history.

Again, we've seen that the New Testament authors are not just writing history documents. They are writing theological documents. They're interested in portraying Christ in a certain way.

But at the same time, it's not necessary to conclude therefore they must have gotten history wrong or they weren't interested in a historically accurate account of Jesus' teaching and what he did. So, it's incorrect to draw such a disjunction between history and theology as if they can't coexist. Finally, the church, there is evidence as you read the gospels, there is evidence that the church was interested in accurately portraying the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Not least of all would have been the reliance on and the presence of eyewitnesses in the first century. At least one gospel writer, Luke, clearly tells us that he relies on for the writing of his gospel. He clearly mentions the presence of eyewitnesses that he relied upon when he wrote his gospel.

So, the presence of eyewitnesses and other indicators seem to suggest that the church was interested in however much the gospels are recording theologically the significance of Christ, his life and death, and teaching. At the same time, they are also interested in accurately preserving what it was Jesus did and taught rather than fabricating an account that only reflects what the church believed and not necessarily what Jesus himself taught and thought. So, we raised the question at the beginning, can we trust our gospels? And again, before C.S. Lewis's trilemma, Jesus was either a liar, lunatic, or Lord, we have to ask, well, could the gospels have been legend? I've suggested to you that instead, we can trust our gospels.

First of all, as I said, would have been the presence of eyewitnesses that could have been consulted to keep the tradition and the teaching and writings in check. So, the presence of eyewitnesses would have made it difficult for mere fabrications to be passed off as true in the first century, especially in the gospels. In fact, sometimes I use this example and I borrow this example from Craig Blomberg who will be my colleague at Denver Seminary when I teach there next year.

But Craig Blomberg, who's well known, I refer to his book in your notes as a very helpful resource for the historical reliability of the gospels. A common analogy that a lot of scholars use to show that the gospels were not, that legendary material inaccuracies, et cetera, would have crept in is the game of telephone conversation. Maybe you've played that in some setting, probably not here at Gordon.

But if I started and I whispered something in your ear that no one else could hear and you pass it on, by the time, if we had time, we could do it and you could see how it works. By the time it got to the back, it usually ended up being something completely different than what I said and everybody had a good laugh because it ends up sometimes ridiculous and it's not even close to what I said. And that's often seen as an analogy to what happens to the gospels.

As you know, it is true that most of the material that we have in the gospels was for the most part passed down orally. There is evidence that some of it would have been

written down, and that the gospel writers would have had access to some written material, but a lot of the teaching of Jesus would have been passed down orally and that's difficult for us sometimes to conceive of in our highly electronic and technological age where everything is passed on by email or something like that or on Facebook or whatever. But in the first century, a lot of information would have been passed down orally and a lot of Jesus' teachings would have been preserved and passed down orally.

In fact, Paul tells us, that the apostle Paul tells us that that's how he received the gospel, it was passed on to him orally. But some take that and they use this analogy of the telephone, that is, again, if I were to whisper something to you and you pass it on by the time you get to the end of the room, it sounds ridiculous and some would say that's what happened to the gospels. As they got passed around, it would have been added and maybe misunderstood and so by the time it finally gets to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, what they write is obviously going to be embellished and added to and very different from what actually happened.

Again, Craig Blomberg says the only problem with that analogy is that a better analogy would be because of the presence of eyewitnesses and perhaps even other written material to keep it in check a better analogy would be if every seventh person I said, now stand up and tell me what I said. And if they're wrong, then I could correct them and then they start and they go through seven more and then I'd tell that person, stand up and tell me what you heard. And again, if it were incorrect, then I would be able to correct them to ensure that the end product was largely going to be correct and an accurate reflection of what I said.

So, the presence of eyewitnesses probably played a significant role in keeping the tradition in check from simply becoming a free-for-all and an inaccurate portrayal of who Jesus was. The agreement between the Gospels, is interesting, while many are quick to point out the discrepancies, so-called discrepancies, or differences in the Gospels, what is interesting are the similarities and the agreements between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that point to a rather stable tradition rather than an uncontrolled passing down of material. The fact that a lot of the information can be confirmed historically, I'll point you to a book that will answer some of those questions.

And when we realize and when we allow for the nature of the Gospels themselves, again, when we consider and take into account the fact that the Gospels are not trying to give you a blow-by-blow account of word-for-word exactly everything Jesus said and they're not trying to give you a detailed biography of everything Jesus said, when we realize that the writers can summarize Jesus' speech, when we realize that sometimes they can draw out the significance of what Jesus meant and the significance of the things Jesus did, when we measure them in light of what were acceptable standards of writing in the first century, then it seems to me that the

answer to the question, can we trust our Gospels, is a resounding yes. And I would, again, I've listed a book at the bottom of the page by one of the most helpful books on the historical reliability of the Gospels a book by that name by Craig Blomberg that goes through and examines a number of passages, especially passages in the Gospels that apparently contradict or seem to conflict and he provides plausible solutions that demonstrate that there's no need to call into question the trustworthiness of the Gospels. There's no need to see them as mere fabrications or only reflections of what the church thought, only reflections of the faith of the church, not rooted in reality, in historical reality, but that's the historical reliability of the Gospels by Craig Blomberg.

Unfortunately, the date 1987 was the original publication. It has been revised in the last couple of years, so there is a revised version. I just haven't updated my notes yet to reflect that.

All right, any questions so far? There's a lot more that could be said. I've summarized that in a very painfully brief way, but any other questions? Again, I'd recommend you look at Blomberg's book if you're interested in pursuing this more. Yes? Sure, that would certainly be the case.

I'm just thinking if I'm going to respond to someone who doesn't think that's the case, then it really wouldn't get me anywhere to say, well, this is written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, therefore it's accurate. For someone that doesn't believe that, I'll look at some of these other things, but certainly, I would agree, ultimately, that behind all this lies God's Spirit guiding the writers, as even one of the Gospels claims is the case, that God's Spirit guiding the writers so that what they would produce, without taking away the humanness, again, read Luke 1:1-4. Luke underwent a very human first-century process of compiling a bibliography, but at the same time, you're exactly right, realizing that the Holy Spirit worked through that process so that the end result is nothing less than God's Word to us.

Right, one other thing to say about the Gospels just in general, and that is when you read Matthew, Mark, and Luke in particular, John is a little bit different. We'll talk about when we get to John's Gospel, the fourth Gospel, we'll ask the question, why does it look so different than Matthew, Mark, and Luke? You find, not only is the language a lot different, but you find a lot of accounts and things that Jesus taught in John that you find nowhere in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So, we'll ask the question, why is John so different from the other three Gospels? But the question I want to focus on is, why are Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the first three Gospels, so similar to each other? Hopefully, you're caught up, you've kept up with your New Testament reading, and that means you've hopefully been through Matthew, Mark, and Luke already, and hopefully, there is a sense of Deja vu as you read it that is, by the time you get through Luke, it's like, man, I've seen this material twice already.

It almost gets repetitive sometimes, because Matthew, Mark, and Luke have fairly extensive overlap between them, not only in the content they convey and in the order, but even at times in the wording, the way the Gospels are phrased, and the way things are put together. So this is what is known, or what scholars call, and hopefully, you picked this up from your textbook, this is what scholars call the Synoptic Problem. That is, the Synoptic Problem is a term that refers to, what is the relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke. How do we account for the fact that these three Gospels, when seen together, hence synoptic, to look at or see together, when seen together, these three Gospels resemble each other very closely?

How do you account for that? How do you explain the similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Again, it's not just the order of events, they include some of the same material, down to the exact wording of several sections of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. When Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referring to a certain event or certain saying of Jesus, the wording is almost identical. It's so close that if I got three research papers from you that were as close as Matthew, Mark, and Luke are in wording, I'd probably call you up and ask what's going on because I would suspect some kind of collaboration.

So, the question is, how do we explain the similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Here's one example. This is the verse that leads up to... Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus' transfiguration. Remember, about halfway through each of the Gospels, Jesus goes up on a mountain with Peter, James, and John, and he's changed or transfigured before them, known as the transfiguration in all three Gospels.

The verse leading up to that in Matthew 17.1, and after six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. Now I want you to notice, that this is not a quotation of Jesus. You might be able to argue sometimes, well, if they were similar in the quotations of Jesus, that just meant they had access to the same material.

That they were all quoting Jesus fairly word for word. But this is not a quotation. This is part of Matthew's own narrative.

He wrote this. He's not quoting someone else's word. This is his narrative account, leading up to the events of Jesus being transfigured.

Here's Mark, chapter 9, and after six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. That's interesting. I can't remember what translation I'm following.

This may be my own, but I'm trying to also reflect what the Greek text would look like as well. But you see Mark and Matthew, and what's significant, this is not a

quotation of what someone's saying, is these are the narrative comments of the authors themselves. Here's Luke.

Sorry if I'm getting a little low here for some of you. Now, about eight days after this, notice Luke uses eight days. Right now we're not going to go into why he does that, but he took with him Peter, and John, and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

So, Luke does have it a little bit different, but still, it's interesting that he roughly has the same order of the reference of the eight days, the mention of Peter, James, and John, though he switches James and John, and then the fact that he went up onto a mountain. But Luke adds that he went to pray, which interestingly, Jesus praying is a very common theme in Luke. You find it emphasized over and over.

So that may account for why Luke has it and the others don't. But how are we to account for this? And this just isn't this verse. It's all over Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Again, if I had three papers that had the extent of verbal similarity that I find in these three verses, I would have to have a conversation with you and maybe the dean to figure out what happened. Or I could have you submit it to SafeAssign and it would catch it or something like that. But again, this is not just these three verses.

This is widespread throughout Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And the question is, what's going on and how do we explain this? This is what is known as the synoptic problem. How do we explain the relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, three documents that reveal such striking similarities down to not only the order of events but the wording, even the wording itself?

There have been a number of attempts, and this is under the who's using who in your notebook. The first one is that some have suggested that despite this similarity, the gospels are actually independent of each other. That is, they were written independently with no knowledge of each other.

There are a couple of ways to understand this. Some have attributed this simply to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit because Matthew, Mark, and Luke were inspired by the Holy Spirit, which I believe in, is that accounts for the similarities. The problem with that view is, what about the differences? Despite these similarities, there are, you know, what happened here? Did the Holy Spirit get tired out and Luke didn't quite get everything that the Holy Spirit wanted to say or what went on? So, it doesn't explain some of the differences that you find in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

So yes, I affirm the Holy Spirit inspired these documents, yet does that account for the similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Another approach is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke had access to a common oral tradition. Remember we said

a lot of the gospel material was passed along orally until it was finally committed to writing in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. So, some have suggested Matthew, Mark, and Luke, were independent of each other, but they just drew on the same oral tradition that was passed on to them.

And that accounts for the similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke. That's possible. However, most New Testament students and scholars prefer to see some kind of literary dependence or relationship.

That is, one of the gospels wrote first and the other two utilized that gospel, or some kind of explanation like that. That is, one or more of the gospels were using one or more of the other gospels. There's some kind of copying or borrowing or relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

And that accounts for the similarity in wording. Again, what's significant about this? This is narrative. This is not the quotation in some speech.

This is the narrative comment of the authors themselves. So, the common explanation is there's some kind of relationship literarily. One or more of these writers are dependent on another one.

Now, there have been different ways, point number two ways this has been explained. Point number two in your notes, St. Augustine, one of the early church fathers, St. Augustine thought, and this might account for the order of the gospels in your New Testament, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. St. Augustine thought that Matthew was written first.

I don't know if I have this in my notes. No. St. Augustine thought that Matthew was written first and that Mark was written second and used Matthew as one of his sources.

And then Luke was written third and Luke actually borrowed from both Mark and Matthew. So, Matthew was written first, the first gospel he wrote on his own. Mark came along and wrote his gospel using Matthew as kind of one of his sources, kind of his basis.

And then Luke wrote third and when he wrote, he used both Matthew and Mark as his main source. Again, that view probably accounts for why you have the gospels in the order they occur, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Maybe one of the reasons in the New Testament.

That's one possibility. The dominant view though, that most people seem to hold to today though, looks like this. Mark was the first gospel written and Matthew and Luke both used Mark as their basis.

So, Mark wrote on his own, was the first gospel written, and then Matthew and Luke would have both had access to Mark and they used Mark as kind of the basis for writing their own gospel. That is the most common way of understanding these differences. So, Mark would have been written first, Matthew and Luke both used Mark, independently of each other.

Matthew and Luke perhaps didn't know each other was writing the gospel. They weren't relying on each other. They were writing independently but they both had access to Mark.

And that's what explains the similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Now, I want to jump ahead to this chart. You'll notice the second thing in your notes under Mark wrote first.

So, here's Mark. This is meant to reflect the fact this chart is going to kind of show you a common way of understanding the relationship between the gospels. Mark would have been written first, and hang on I'll explain this in a moment, and then Matthew and Luke would have separately and independently utilized Mark.

Now, you might ask, so why would they borrow Mark? We'll look at that in just a moment but one well-known writer very early in the second century in the church actually described Mark as a close associate and an interpreter of Peter. So, Peter was given the prominence of Peter. Remember, he was one of the persons that went up on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured in those texts that we just showed.

So given the prominence of Peter, if Mark is the interpreter of Peter and a close associate of Peter, given the stature of Peter in the first century, that may have been enough reason why Matthew and Luke would want to use his gospel as kind of a basis for their own. So Mark was written first, Matthew and Luke then followed Mark. Now, another interesting thing you find when you read the gospels is there's a lot of material in Matthew and Luke that you don't find in Mark.

For example, the Sermon on the Mount. There is no record of the Sermon on the Mount in Mark, yet both Luke and Matthew have it. And it points, the wording again is very, very, very close.

Now the way, and there are other places. There are other places where Matthew and Luke have material that's very similar, but you find it nowhere in Mark. How do you explain that? Well, scholars have concocted what is called Q. The word Q simply stands for the German word source.

There's disagreement as to whether this was written or whether it was oral or whatever, and I'm not interested in figuring out. In fact, scholars have speculated,

they've even come up with a community that produced Q and what the community of Q believes. They kind of pile speculation on top of speculation.

All I mean by this is that Q simply stands for the material that you find in Matthew and Luke, such as the Sermon on the Mount, but you find it nowhere in Mark. Or the birth narrative, the narrative of Jesus' birth that's found in Matthew and Luke, but you don't find it in Mark. Again, scholars use the word Q to designate that.

So, what this suggests then is Mark was written first perhaps reflecting the teaching and preaching of Peter, as a close associate of Peter. Given that, Matthew and Luke would have used Mark as their primary source in constructing their own gospel, and Matthew and Luke also had access perhaps to another document or another body of information that scholars call Q that would account for the material you find in Matthew and Luke, like the Sermon on the Mount, but you don't find it anywhere in Mark. So again, the purpose of this is I'm not interested in arriving at a firm conclusion.

It's just important that you know when you read the gospels, why are they so similar. What's going on? How do we explain the similarity between Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Now, back to the reasons for seeing Mark as the first gospel. Why do most people think Mark was written first? First of all, do Matthew and Luke often seem to smooth Mark over? Especially when Mark writes in a way that may be a little awkward or in a way that could be misunderstood, you often find Matthew and Luke kind of smoothing him over to clarify. For example, in one place, Jesus is in a conversation with a rich young ruler, and the rich young ruler calls Jesus basically something like a good teacher, Jesus in Mark, Jesus replies, why do you call me good? What could be implied by that? When Jesus says, why are you calling me good? I mean, what could someone perhaps conclude from that? Yeah, Jesus isn't good.

Why are you calling me good? I'm not. This is not what Mark meant, but might be taken that way. Matthew, interestingly, says, why do you ask me about what is good? Perhaps, again, to try to clear up a potential misunderstanding.

That may not be the only reason Matthew says that, but there are examples like that where Matthew and Mark seem to condense or smooth Mark or Matthew and Luke seem to condense or smooth Mark over. That's what you would expect. You would expect if Matthew and Mark or Matthew and Luke are borrowing from Mark, you would expect that they would condense and smooth things over.

You wouldn't expect that someone would complicate something or make it rougher or potentially misunderstood. So that's a reason why, one of the reasons why many think Mark was written first. Second, another reason is most of Mark is found in both Matthew and Luke.

Ninety percent, ninety-seven percent of Mark's gospel gets reproduced in Matthew. Almost ninety percent, eighty-eight percent gets reproduced in Luke. Again, that's what you would expect.

Matthew and Luke would use most of Mark, but then they would include other material as well. Again, that's another thing that a lot of scholars point to, to argue that Mark was written first. The differences, another one, when Matthew, Mark, and Luke are parallel, when you look at all three of them, that is when comparing Matthew, Mark, and Luke and their teaching, Matthew and Luke almost never disagree with Mark.

They almost, Matthew and Luke almost never at the same time deviate from Mark. But sometimes Matthew and Mark do from Luke, and Luke and Mark do from Matthew. This is just a complicated way of saying, if they're borrowing if Matthew and Luke are borrowing from Mark, this is what you'd expect, that together they would never disagree or kind of deviate from Mark in some way.

So, this is just another reason why, when you compare the three gospels, you almost never, almost never find Matthew and Luke departing from Mark in the same way. They say, that's what you would expect, they say, if Matthew and Luke are utilizing Mark. So, in conclusion, I'm not going to assume a certain view of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Instead, what I think is more important for us to do, is when we compare Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is to notice how they differ from each other. To notice, again, to notice what it is each of the gospels seems to emphasize over against the others. Again, when I compare Matthew and Luke, their Christmas story, why does Luke have the story of the shepherds, but Matthew doesn't? Instead, Matthew includes the story of the magi, or so-called wise men coming to Jesus, and seems to not know about or care about the story of the shepherds.

Why is that? How do we account for that? Again, when you go back to our example here, when I compare these three, why does Luke have eight days instead of six? And why does he mention that they went up to pray when the other gospel writers don't? So that's what I'm more interested in doing. When we have three writings that speak on and talk about the same topic, it's important to ask, why is it that they present it in the way they do? What are they trying to get across? How, when we compare Matthew, Mark, and Luke, what are the theological distinctives of each of the gospels that stand out and are emphasized? Either the other gospels don't, or at least to a degree that the other gospels don't. And so that's how I'm going to approach the gospels as we start to move through Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

At times we'll look at specific texts, but I'm more interested in focusing on what is the unique theological themes that you find Matthew, Mark, or Luke emphasizing in the way they organize their gospels, in the way they emphasize certain things, in the way they portray Jesus, etc.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson presenting his New Testament History and Literature, lecture 6, Genre and the Synoptics.