

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 6, Genre and Synoptics Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 6, Genre and Synoptics, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture explores the literary genres present in the New Testament, focusing on narratives like the Gospels and Acts, as well as letters and apocalyptic literature. The lecture emphasizes understanding these genres within their first-century context. **A key discussion point is the Synoptic Problem, which examines the relationships and similarities between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.** The lecture addresses the historical reliability of the Gospels, considering whether they accurately portray Jesus' life and teachings or reflect early church theology. **Various theories are presented, including the common view that Mark was written first and used by Matthew and Luke, along with the concept of a source called "Q" to account for material unique to Matthew and Luke.** The lecture aims to equip students to critically examine the Gospels, identifying each Gospel's distinctive theological themes.

2. 21 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 6 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



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ession06.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 6, Genre and Synoptics

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on Genre and the Synoptics in New Testament Literature:

Briefing Document: Dr. Dave Mathewson's Lecture 6 - Genre and the Synoptics

Overview:

This lecture focuses on understanding the diverse literary genres within the New Testament, specifically narratives (Gospels and Acts), epistles (letters), and apocalypses (Revelation). A significant portion of the lecture is dedicated to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), exploring their similarities and differences, and the challenges of interpreting them as historical accounts. The lecture raises questions about the trustworthiness of the Gospels, the role of the early church in shaping the narratives, and the potential for understanding the Gospels through the lens of first-century literary conventions.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. **Importance of Literary Genre:** Understanding the literary genre is crucial for proper interpretation of New Testament texts. The New Testament contains literary forms that may differ from modern conventions, requiring an understanding of first-century modes of writing.
 - "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?"
1. **Narrative Genre (Gospels):**
 - The Gospels fit into the category of first-century Greco-Roman biographies but differ from modern biographies. They are not comprehensive blow-by-blow accounts but rather selective and written from a theological perspective.
 - "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."

- Gospel authors were selective about which events to include and how to record them, to communicate their theological point. Examples include the differing accounts of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke.
- When recording speeches, first-century writers often summarized the gist of what was said, rather than providing verbatim accounts. The Sermon on the Mount is cited as an example of a summary of Jesus' teaching.

1. **Epistolary Genre (Letters):**

- Letters were a common form of communication in the first century, used for various purposes. The book of Revelation is framed as a letter.
- Letters often functioned as a surrogate for the presence of the speaker, conveying authority and importance.
- "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."
- Paul's letters follow a common first-century format.

1. **Apocalyptic Genre (Revelation):**

- Apocalypse is a first-person autobiographical account of a visionary experience, communicated in highly symbolic language. Revelation is the primary example in the New Testament.
- John's Revelation was not unique, but followed a common method of writing in the first century.
- "Basically, an apocalypse was a first-person autobiographical account of a visionary experience...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."

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1. **Trustworthiness of the Gospels:**

- Raises the question of whether the Gospels provide accurate accounts of Jesus' life and teachings or are fictional/legendary accounts reflecting the early church's theology.
- Challenges C.S. Lewis's trilemma (liar, lunatic, or Lord) by introducing the possibility of the Gospels being legends.
- Critiques the view that the Gospels are primarily reflections of the church's faith, with little historical basis, and that the "real" Jesus is virtually unknowable.
- "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?"
- Argues against the idea that early Christianity tolerated a wide variety of conflicting views of Jesus. The New Testament demonstrates a concern for preserving truth.
- Points out the false dichotomy between history and theology. Just because the Gospels are theological documents does not mean they are historically inaccurate.
- Highlights the role of eyewitnesses in preserving accurate accounts of Jesus' life and teachings, citing Luke's reference to eyewitness accounts.
- Analogizes oral tradition to the game of telephone, suggesting that the presence of eyewitnesses acted as a "correction" mechanism to prevent significant distortions.

1. **The Synoptic Problem (Matthew, Mark, Luke):**

- The Synoptic Problem refers to the challenge of explaining the close similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- Explores different theories to explain the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels:
- Independent writing (attributed to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or access to a common oral tradition).

- Literary dependence (one or more Gospels using others as sources).
- Augustine's view: Matthew written first, Mark used Matthew, Luke used both Mark and Matthew.
- The dominant view: Mark written first, Matthew and Luke used Mark independently, and Matthew and Luke also used "Q" (a hypothetical source containing material found in both Matthew and Luke but not in Mark).
- "Mark was the first gospel written and Matthew and Luke both used Mark as their basis...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."
- Reasons for seeing Mark as the first Gospel:
- Matthew and Luke often smooth over potentially awkward or misunderstood passages in Mark.
- Most of Mark's Gospel is found in both Matthew and Luke.
- When the Gospels are parallel, Matthew and Luke almost never disagree with Mark.
- Emphasizes the importance of noticing how the Gospels differ from each other and what each emphasizes, to understand the theological distinctives of each Gospel.

Key Quote:

"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."

Recommended Resource:

- *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* by Craig Blomberg (revised edition).

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathewson's lecture provides a valuable overview of the literary genres in the New Testament, with a particular focus on the Synoptic Gospels. It raises important questions about the interpretation of the Gospels as historical documents and the potential for understanding them within their first-century context. The lecture encourages critical analysis of the Gospels, emphasizing both their similarities and differences, and highlighting the need to consider the theological distinctives of each Gospel writer.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 6, Genre and Synoptics

New Testament Genres and Synoptic Gospels: A Study Guide

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the primary difference between first-century Greco-Roman biographies (and thus, the Gospels) and modern-day biographies, according to the lecture?
2. Why did the early church allow four different Gospels to stand independently instead of combining them into one grand narrative?
3. In what ways could first-century epistles function as a substitute for the speaker?
4. What is the primary characteristic of the apocalypse genre as exemplified by the Book of Revelation?
5. What was C.S. Lewis's trilemma, and what fourth possibility does the lecture add to it?
6. According to scholars discussed in the lecture, what is the risk of interpreting the Gospels as entirely based on the faith of the church?
7. What are two reasons the lecturer believes that the New Testament shows that the early church did NOT tolerate a variety of perspectives and had an interest in a correct view of Christianity/Jesus?
8. Describe the "telephone game" analogy and how Craig Blomberg reframes it to argue for the reliability of the Gospels.
9. Define the Synoptic Problem and explain why it is significant for understanding the Gospels.
10. What is Q and why is it relevant to a discussion of the synoptic problem?

Quiz Answer Key

1. First-century biographies were far more selective and written from a particular theological perspective, aiming to convey a specific point rather than providing a detailed, blow-by-blow account of a person's life. They focused on summarizing the meaning and gist of events rather than capturing every detail verbatim.

2. The early church allowed four Gospels to stand because each Gospel author had a unique theological point or "spin" on the Gospel story that they wanted to get across. They were selective in what they included and how they recorded events to emphasize their particular perspective.
3. First-century epistles could function as a surrogate for the presence of the speaker. If someone had something important to say but could not be physically present, a letter would act as a substitute, carrying the same authority as if the speaker were addressing them in person.
4. The primary characteristic of the apocalypse genre is a first-person autobiographical account of a visionary experience, often communicated in highly symbolic language with strange beasts and images. The aim is to understand the meaning of these symbols in their original, first-century context.
5. C.S. Lewis's trilemma stated that Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord. The lecture adds a fourth possibility: that the Gospels could be legends, fictional accounts not to be taken seriously, which must be addressed before considering Lewis's options.
6. Interpreting the Gospels as entirely based on the faith of the church risks overlooking the historical kernel of Jesus' actual life and teachings, reducing him to just a man who taught nice things and was put to death, while attributing his divinity solely to later theological developments.
7. The New Testament documents demonstrate a concern for preserving the truth against falsehood and were written in response to deviant views of Christ or the Christian life. This demonstrates that the early church did have an interest in orthodoxy.
8. The "telephone game" analogy suggests information becomes distorted and unreliable as it's passed along. Blomberg reframes it by suggesting that with frequent "check-ins" from eyewitnesses who can correct inaccuracies, the information remains largely accurate, similar to how the Gospels were preserved.
9. The Synoptic Problem refers to the question of how to explain the striking similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, not only in content and order but also in wording. This is significant because it raises questions about the literary relationship between the Gospels and how they were composed.

10. Q is a hypothetical source, derived from the German word "Quelle" meaning source, that refers to material found in both Matthew and Luke but not in Mark, such as the Sermon on the Mount. It is relevant to the Synoptic Problem as it helps explain the shared content between Matthew and Luke beyond what they might have derived from Mark.

Essay Questions

Consider and prepare to discuss the following essay questions:

1. Discuss the implications of understanding the Gospels as selective, theologically driven narratives rather than purely objective historical accounts. How does this impact our interpretation of the events and teachings of Jesus?
2. Explore the various literary genres present in the New Testament and explain how understanding these genres is crucial for accurate interpretation. Provide specific examples of how misinterpreting a genre can lead to misunderstandings of the text.
3. Evaluate the arguments for and against the historical reliability of the Gospels. What evidence supports the trustworthiness of the Gospels, and what challenges do they face?
4. Analyze the Synoptic Problem and discuss the various solutions proposed to explain the similarities and differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each solution?
5. How does the historical and cultural context of the first century influence our understanding of the Gospels and the early Christian communities? Provide specific examples to support your answer.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Genre:** A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter.
- **Narrative:** A spoken or written account of connected events; a story.
- **Epistle:** A letter, especially a formal or didactic one; in the New Testament, often referring to letters written by apostles.
- **Apocalypse:** A literary genre in which a revelation is given, often through visionary experiences, using symbolic language and imagery.
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share similar content, style, and structure.
- **Synoptic Problem:** The question of how to explain the similarities and differences between the Synoptic Gospels.
- **Oral Tradition:** The transmission of information or narratives by word of mouth rather than in writing.
- **Q (Quelle):** A hypothetical source of sayings and teachings of Jesus, thought to have been used by Matthew and Luke but not Mark.
- **Historical Reliability:** The degree to which a historical document can be trusted to accurately represent past events.
- **Theology:** The study of the nature of God and religious belief.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 6, Genre and Synoptics, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source:

FAQ on New Testament Literature: Genre and the Synoptics

1. What are the main literary genres found in the New Testament, and why is understanding genre important?

The main literary genres in the New Testament are narrative (Gospels and Acts), epistles (letters), and apocalypse (primarily Revelation). Understanding the literary genre is crucial because it helps us interpret the text according to the conventions and expectations of the first-century writers and readers. Literary forms in the ancient world may or may not correspond to literary forms that are common today, and can greatly affect how we read and interpret the text.

2. How do first-century Greco-Roman biographies, like the Gospels, differ from modern biographies?

First-century biographies, including the Gospels, are generally more selective and less concerned with providing an exhaustive, blow-by-blow account of a person's life. They focus more on conveying a specific theological point or perspective. Authors selected events and presented them in a way that supported their message, rather than providing an objective, comprehensive life story. It was also more common to summarize speeches than to deliver a word-for-word transcription of a historical event.

3. Why are there four Gospels, and what does this tell us about their purpose?

The early church preserved four distinct Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) because each author had a unique theological perspective and desired to highlight different aspects of Jesus' life, ministry, and teachings. The Gospels are not meant to be identical, but rather complementary accounts that enrich our understanding of Jesus.

4. How did letters (epistles) function in the first century, and what is their significance in the New Testament?

Letters were a common means of communication in the first century, used for various purposes, including business, personal messages, and even philosophical treatises. In the New Testament, letters served as a surrogate for the author's presence, conveying apostolic authority and addressing specific issues within the early church communities.

They adhered to a common format and were taken with the same seriousness as if the author were present in person.

5. What is the literary genre of the Book of Revelation, and how should that affect our interpretation of it?

The Book of Revelation is an apocalypse, a first-person autobiographical account of a visionary experience, communicated in highly symbolic language. Understanding this genre is essential to avoid misinterpretations and abuses of the text. We should focus on understanding the meaning of the symbols and images within the context of the first-century audience, rather than imposing modern interpretations.

6. How reliable are the Gospels as historical accounts of Jesus' life and teachings?

While the Gospels are theological documents written from particular perspectives, there is good reason to believe they provide historically reliable accounts. Eyewitnesses were present and could have corrected inaccuracies and kept the tradition in check. There are substantial agreements between the Gospels, pointing to a stable, reliable tradition. It is helpful to consider how the Gospels may summarize or draw out the significance of Jesus' message and deeds.

7. What is the "Synoptic Problem," and what are some of the proposed solutions?

The "Synoptic Problem" refers to the striking similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke in terms of content, order, and even wording. Proposed solutions include: * Independent writing due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (but this does not explain the discrepancies) * Access to a common oral tradition * Literary dependence, where one or more Gospels used another as a source.

The most common theory is that Mark was written first, and Matthew and Luke both used Mark as a source, along with another source known as "Q" which has sayings of Jesus that is not in the Gospel of Mark.

8. If Matthew, Mark, and Luke are so similar, what should we focus on when studying them?

Instead of being overly concerned with resolving every discrepancy or harmonizing every detail, we should focus on the unique theological themes and emphases of each Gospel. By comparing and contrasting the accounts, we can gain a richer and more nuanced understanding of Jesus' message and significance. We should notice what it is each of the gospels seems to emphasize over against the others.