

Lecture 4: Markan Priority
Early Christian Gospels
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As we have seen, the first three canonical gospels exhibit a complex web of interrelationships, with a preponderance of agreement between them in passages they share, but also with frequent differences that have to be accounted for. The evidence suggests that agreements are best explained on the supposition that there is some sort of *literary interdependence*. And the consensus within scholarship is of “Markan priority,” that Mark’s gospel was written first and was used as a source by Matt and Luke, thereby explaining the agreements.

Last session I presented four of the strongest arguments for Markan priority: first, there are stylistic infelicities that are smoothed out in Matthew and Luke, such as Mark’s repeated use of “and” and his verbosity; second are conceptual infelicities that are resolved in Matthew and/or Luke; third, while either Matthew or Luke sometimes agrees with Mark against the other, seldom do they agree with each other against Mark; and finally, in terms of the narrative order, Mark’s order is the stable sequence, with Matthew or Luke independently varying from it, suggesting that their narrative framework derives from Mark.

However, while Markan priority is widely accepted as the best solution to the Synoptic problem, there are still those who find Griesbach’s solution convincing. You’ll recall that Griesbach, echoing Augustine and in agreement with Owen, held that Matthew was composed first as part of the mission to Jews, while Luke was composed from it as a tool in Paul’s mission to Gentiles. Mark constitutes a condensation, drawing together the material common to the two previously composed gospels, in large part of bridge the divide between Jews and Gentiles embodied in the differences between Matthew and Luke. This explanation has come to be called “The Two-Gospel Hypothesis,” inasmuch as it posits the pivotal importance of Matthew and Luke, with Mark creating a synthesis of them.

The primary argument of the so-called “neo-Griesbachians,” led by William Farmer, is that the proponents of Markan priority have skewed the data by assuming that conclusion in their presentation of their case. That’s particularly true in talking about the pattern of verbal agreements. Granted that Matthew or Luke frequently agree with Mark against the other, and only rarely agree together against Mark, but that’s exactly what you would expect if Mark composed his gospel based on Matthew and Luke: Mark would often follow both, and yet sometimes would be forced to agree with one or the other, but would also sometimes differ slightly from both. His synthesis, because it is a synthesis, could not always agree with both, although at times he tries, as in this report (that Stein also pointed out) of Jesus healing those ill one evening. While it may be correct to say that Matthew sides with Mark against Luke by introducing the story with “that evening,” and that Luke agrees with Mark against Matthew by introducing it with the sun setting, it prejudices the case to assert that Matthew and Luke each settled on one phrase from Mark’s introduction. It is equally possible that Mark conflated their phrases, creating this compound introduction.

However, the “neo-Griesbachians” draw attention especially to what are called the “minor agreements” between Matthew and Luke against Mark. E.g. you may recall from last time that in the account of the Pharisees objecting to the disciples’ picking grain on the sabbath, alongside the various agreements of Matthew with Mark, and Luke with Mark, there was also a striking agreement of Matthew and Luke *against* Mark, in that both of them explicitly note that the disciples *ate* the grain they picked. This is a so-called minor agreement.

Similarly, in the passage in which Jesus heals the paralytic brought to him by friends, while there are striking agreements between Mark and Luke against Matthew, we should not overlook two agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark. First, Matthew and Luke speak of the man lying on a “bed” rather than a “mat.” Second, while Mark reports that the healed man “went out before all of them,” Matthew and Luke specify that “he went to his home.” Perhaps, then, these differences, while small, are not as “minor” as the label “minor agreements” implies. Perhaps they’re the tip of the iceberg.

In fact, there is at least one agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark that isn’t *at all* minor: Mark 14:65 and parallels, where Jesus is being mocked by the Roman soldiers: “Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, ‘Prophesy!’” -- Of course, there is noticeable agreement here: Mark and Matthew agree that the soldiers spit on Jesus, while Mark and Luke agree that they blindfolded him. Then all three agree that the soldiers mockingly commanded Jesus to “prophesy.” Thus far we find the typical pattern of agreements and disagreements in the triple tradition. But what’s most remarkable about this passage is the subsequent question found in Matthew and Luke, but absent from Mark: “Who struck you?” The phrasing of that question in Matthew and Luke is identical in the Greek text, making it impossible to sweep this aside as merely coincidental.

Thus, when you take the evidence out of a framework that prejudices its interpretation in favor of Markan priority, it points in an entirely different direction. These agreements are more favorable to the assumption that Mark was the *last* gospel written, and that it relied on Matthew and Luke.

Similar objections apply to arguments from narrative order. While it is undeniable that Mark’s sequence is the stable factor, this description of the data prejudices the argument towards Markan priority. Another way to frame the issue would be to say simply that Mark constitutes the *middle ground* between Matthew and Luke.

E.g. to say that Mark 6 provides the “stable order” from which Matthew and Luke deviate is to state the case from the perspective of Markan priority: it assumes that Matt and Luke used Mark. Stated more neutrally, Mark is the common denominator. The explanation for why this is so has to be established; it can not simply be assumed.

In this case, it is just as viable an inference to say that Mark chose to follow primarily Matthew’s order, but preferred Luke’s placement of the dispatching of the disciples and their subsequent report to Jesus, creating a nice set of brackets around the comment about Herod’s reaction to Jesus. That is at least as plausible an explanation of these relationships.

In fact, an alternative summary about the narrative order in the triple tradition is as follows: 1) Wherever the order in Matthew and Luke are the same, Mark has the same order. 2) Where the orders of Matthew and Luke disagree, Mark goes with one or the other. Accordingly, labeling Mark the stable core from which Matthew and Luke depart is to turn the facts inside out, skewing them in favor of Markan priority.

As for the stylistic infelicities proponents of Markan priority highlight, judgments about “infelicities” are far too subjective a basis for a hypothesis. One person’s “infelicity” is another person’s stylistic trait. Perhaps, for instance, Mark had a bent for expanding the narrative, knowing that he was writing an abridgement, and thus had more space in his scroll.

And when it comes to conceptual infelicities, we have to be on guard against assuming that what might have proved problematic to the church in later centuries, as Christian dogma developed, would have been objectionable to these first century Evangelists. Yes, Jesus response to being called “good teacher,” affirming that only God is good would have raised eyebrows in

some quarters once belief in Jesus' sinless perfection became a staple of Christian faith; and yes, Matthew's different rendition of the conversation accords with later sensitivity to this issue, but that doesn't mean that *Matthew* necessarily perceived it as a problem; perhaps he simply preferred his reformulation. In fact, Luke seems not to have been troubled by the statement, for he reproduces it. We cannot make pronouncements about what would have disturbed readers of Mark based on *later* beliefs or suppositions.

For these reasons, then, the pillars of the argument for Markan priority prove insubstantial, in the eyes of the neo-Griesbachians. The issue of agreement – whether of words, phrases, or of narrative order – is, at best equivocal, while good arguments can be adduced that Mark's order is due to his eclectic use of Matthew and Mark. Both sorts of infelicities cited are in the eyes of the beholder and are thus too subjective to support a hypothesis. ////

This is, admittedly, a formidable set of objections. And rehabilitating the argument for Markan priority is not simple, but neither is it impossible. Here are the counter-arguments that I and others see as prevailing in favor of Markan priority.

First, the Two-Gospel Hypothesis is correct to point out that “infelicities” are in the mind of the beholder, as is any sort of judgment about style. And perhaps “infelicities” (or even Stein's phrase “hard sayings”) is not the best way to describe what we find in Mark. There is something more substantial beneath these labels than “infelicities” suggests, especially when it comes to Mark's characteristic piling up of clauses connected with “and.” First, I want to *quantify* this Markan distinctive, and then I'll offer an observation on it.

If we survey each of the Synoptics for how many times they use “and” followed by a finite verb (except for the verb “to be,” given that clauses like “and there were” are hardly exceptional) and then we compare that number to the number of finite verbs that occur in each gospel (again, setting aside the verb “to be”), we find the following: In the gospel of Matthew there are 1,977 finite verbs (i.e. verbs inflected for subject), out of which 417 are used in the phrase type “and” + verb, for a percentage of 21.2. In Luke, 2,136 finite verbs appear, with 580 of them used in “and” + verb constructions, or 27.15%.

So what about Mark? It contains 1,345 finite verbs, with a whopping 495 of them – more than in the entire and longer book of Matthew – for 36.8% of the total.

How do these percentages compare with other works composed in Greek? The book of Romans, for example, uses finite verbs preceded by “and” only 8.49% of the time. 2 Maccabees, a Jewish Hellenistic work from the latter part of the 2nd century B.C.E., uses “and” + finite verb in only 9.39% cases, while 4 Maccabees, from the first century, uses this construction with only 8.66% of its finite verbs. Returning to the NT, the book of Hebrews uses this construction with only 8.59% of its finite verbs.

Obviously, there's quite a difference between the eight-and-a-half to nine-and-a-half% rates in these compositions compared to the Synoptics, but that stands to reason, since the Synoptics convey traditions of Jesus' words, which were spoken in Aramaic, a Semitic language, in which the characteristic conjunction is unadorned “and.”

What's noteworthy is that Mark's preference for this construction “and” + verb goes palpably beyond both Matthew and Luke. Remember, according to the Two-Gospel Hypothesis, Mark fashioned his gospel by drawing on Matthew and Luke. If that's the case, then why does Mark *add* this construction in his conflation of Matthew and Luke?

One possibility is that Mark is *affecting* Semitic style to create a greater sense of “authenticity” for his work, but that's doubtful. In fact, if any gospel could be charged with *affecting* Semitic style, it's the gospel of Luke, which uses a sophisticated Greek style influenced

by the sort of translation idiom we find in parts of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). And yet, Luke has in place of “and” in such circumstances conjunctions like “then” or “so that” to create a smoother, more natural Greek. So even though Luke tends to compose in a Semiticized Greek, Mark still outstrips him in his use of “and.”

And here another consideration that Stein alerts you to is instructive. As we’ll see, various features in Mark reveal that he wrote for Gentiles. Not least of those are his translations of Aramaic phrases, as in Mark 5:41, which reports Jesus raising a girl from the dead with the words: “He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” He provides a translation for his Greek-speaking audience, but retains the Aramaic.

When we turn to the parallels in Matthew and Luke, neither of them carries the Aramaic words. Of course, that raises the question of where Mark got these words, if he was working from Matthew and Luke. More importantly, as Stein argues, why would he insert them for his audience, when he felt compelled to translate them?

Accordingly, if Mark didn’t inherit his Aramaic words from Matthew and Luke nor the semiticized repetition of “and,” then quite likely Mark stands in closer proximity to early translations of Jesus’ words into Greek that bore marks of the Aramaic and even retained some phrases in it. And that would support Markan priority.

What of the observation about Markan verbosity: is it merely a subjective judgment or something substantial? Obviously, I agree with Stein that it is substantial.

The surplus of words in Mark involves more than simply a haphazard use of more words than necessary. There are recurring types of expansions Mark uses that betoken a style of writing. Especially prominent are what a scholar named Frans Neiryck has labeled “dual expressions.” E.g. Mark is fond of pairing two verbs with “and,” as in Mark 1:35: “In the morning, while it was still very dark, he departed *and* went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” Notice that Mark links with “and” two verbs that mean virtually the same thing: “he departed *and* went out.”

Matthew lacks a parallel to this, but when we compare Luke’s parallel, we read, “At daybreak, departing, he went into a deserted place.” Again we find two verbs, but Luke transforms Mark’s finite verb into a participle (“departing”) so that he isn’t forced to follow it with “and,” and then he selects a finite verb with a different shade of meaning: “went,” not “went *out*.” It’s important to note here that, in Greek, Mark’s preposition “out” is incorporated into the verb, forming a compound verb, whereas Luke’s “into” is separate from the verb “went.” Mark’s use of paired synonymous verbs is a less refined Greek construction. What’s more, if he worked from Luke, he didn’t get this from him.

Another example of Mark’s use of paired finite verbs is in Mark 1.15, which summarizes John the Baptist’s appeal to the crowds: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent *and* believe in the good news.”

Luke doesn’t preserve this summary, but when we compare the parallel in Matthew we find these words attributed to John: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Matthew lacks the twin imperatives, as well as (and this is something I didn’t point out before) Mark’s paired statements, “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near.” Once again, we cannot attribute Mark’s dual verbs to following Matthew. And as Frans Neiryck has shown, Mark’s Gospel is peppered with dual expressions of this sort.

This phenomenon has special application, of course, to a case we examined a few minutes ago, where Matthew reads “¹⁶That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick.” Luke, on the

other hand, introduces this scene as follows: “⁴⁰As the sun set, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them.” Significantly, as you’ll recall, Mark has both formulae: “³²That evening [à la Matthew], when the sun set [à la Luke], they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.” Of course, the Two Gospel Hypothesis advances this as evidence that Mark synthesized Matthew and Luke. However, if such paired expressions are typical of Mark, while Matthew and Luke regularly lack them, then the scales weigh more heavily in perceiving Mark as original, with Matthew and Luke resolving the pairs here by (coincidentally) choosing the opposite expressions.

With this case, of course, we broach the issue of the significance of the minor agreements, which we’ll consider on their own in a moment. But the fact that paired expressions in Mark have import for considering the minor agreements is precisely the point: we’re not talking about some sort of whimsical “subjective” judgment when we consider Mark’s verbosity, but a palpable characteristic that, in fact, points to Markan priority.

Let’s consider, also and briefly, the issue of “*conceptual infelicity*.” Certainly the Two-Gospel Hypothesis is right to warn against assuming what might have motivated changes by a gospel author based on later scruples, whether theological or literary. Having given that it’s due, however, we should at least note that in both instances Matthew has what *came* to be regarded as a less objectionable image, while Luke either does not have the parallel (in the first case [upper left]) or leaves it unchanged (lower right). And even if these problems become more acute in the light of later-developed dogma, there is evidence that such dogma had very early roots.

That is especially evident in the case of the question of Jesus’ flawless character, since already the book of Hebrews, written around the same time as Matthew, assures readers, “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, *yet without sin*.” Here already is belief in Jesus’ flawless character, so that positing Matthew’s sensitivity to this issue in reading Mark is hardly anachronistic.

As for the so-called “minor agreements” between Matthew and Luke against Mark, the vast majority of these are attributable to modifications Matthew and Luke might reasonably have made on their own. Recall, for instance, that both Matthew and Luke insert a word for “often” in their parallels to Mark 2.18, and yet each of them uses a different Greek word, making it unlikely that one worked off the other. Similarly, even though both replaces Mark’s obscure word for “mat” in Mark 2, they use different forms of the root.

Or consider Matthew’s and Luke’s specification that the disciples *ate* the heads of grain they plucked. There is no obvious reason Mark would have deleted this, if he were relying on Matthew and Luke, but plenty of reason that Matthew and Luke might have added it to fill out the sense. The disciples weren’t mindless plucking heads of grain, as Jesus’ subsequent defense shows by referring to an incident when David and his friends were hungry and ate bread the Torah reserves for priests. The comparison suggests that the disciples picked grain in order to eat it. Matthew and Luke make that clear, and could have done so independently.

The vast majority of the so-called “minor” agreements are of this sort: changes to fill out the meaning or provide some modification whose motivation can be explained easily.

More vexing, however, is the soldiers’ question “Who was it who struck you?” in Matt’s and Luke’s stories of Jesus’ abuse. And yet, let’s make a couple of observations. First, the question makes the most sense connected to the report the soldiers blindfolded Jesus; that’s why he must “prophesy” to identify who has struck him. And yet, the blindfolding is found in only Mark and

Luke; Matthew lacks it. In this light, two explanations seem possible. One is that Mark originally had the question, but it fell out of early forms of the manuscripts as they were copied (our earliest copies of even fragments of the gospels aren't until the second century). A second possibility is that the question is native to Luke's gospel, from which an early scribe copied it into Matthew. Either of these options, while not provable, seem more likely than that Mark omitted it while copying from Matthew and Luke. I'll save a third possible explanation of this for next time, but neither would it provide grounds for Mark having omitted the question as he synthesized Matthew and Luke.

As for agreement in order, first, I'll isolate two problems in this matter for the Two-Gospel Hypothesis, and then I'll talk more generally about what I consider the fundamental problem with the Two-Gospel Hypothesis when it comes to agreement in order.

There is a well-known and important exception to the patterns the Two-Gospel Hypothesis asserts summarize the relationships of order, namely: when Matthew and Luke agree, Mark agrees with them; when Matthew and Luke disagree, Mark follows one of them. That anomaly appears in an episode in the triple tradition known as "the cleansing of the temple," which narrates an incident the Synoptics place shortly before Jesus' arrest when Jesus entered the temple and cast out those exchanging the foreign currency of pilgrims to Passover for the temple currency, so that the visitors could buy the lambs required for the sacrifice rather than having to haul their own animals along on a lengthy pilgrimage.

In each of the Synoptics the string of events leading to that confrontation in the temple begins with the "triumphal entry," when Jesus rides into Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowds, seated upon a donkey his disciples have procured. The chain of events leading from there to the temple incident varies in the Synoptics. On the one hand, Matthew follows the pericope of the triumphal entry with a report that the news of Jesus' arrival for Passover spread throughout Jerusalem. Then, on the heels of that, comes Matthew's story of Jesus cleansing the temple.

In Luke, Jesus' triumphal entry is followed by a pericope that portrays Jesus surveying Jerusalem and weeping over her recalcitrance. From there Luke leads us immediately into the story of the cleansing of the temple.

In Mark, the story of Jesus' triumphal entry concludes with an aside about Jesus taking time to survey affairs in the temple. This prepares the reader for Jesus' upcoming action against the temple establishment. But before narrating that event, Mark tells of Jesus approaching Jerusalem from the village of Bethphage, where he had spent the night, and, out of rage, cursing a fig tree on which he found no fruit. While Luke lacks this story anywhere in his gospel, we find a parallel in Matthew, where it *follows* the story of Jesus cleansing the temple. In Mark and Luke, on the other hand, the story of the cleansing is followed by a report that Jerusalem's religious leaders began hatching a plot to destroy Jesus.

The problem for the Two-Gospel Hypothesis in this sequence is that Matthew and Luke disagree in their order, but Mark doesn't simply follow one or the other. First, he inserts at the end of the triumphal entry a foreshadowing of the cleansing of the temple, with Jesus surveying temple affairs. And then, rather than following Matthew's order by narrating the curse of the fig tree (lacking in Luke) *after* the temple incident, he places it *before* it. At the least, Mark is working quite differently than elsewhere: not simply following suit, but rearranging material according to his predilections. The question isn't finding a motive for Mark's rearrangement but explaining why he does this only here? Why does he here break with his *modus operandi*, as defined by the 2GH?

By contrast, the hypothesis of Markan priority has little difficulty explaining why Matthew and Luke diverge from Mark. Luke's omission is readily explicable as eliminating the harsh portrayal of Jesus in Mark's pericope, which reads: "¹²On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it."

What motivates Jesus to look for figs, Mark reports, is his hunger, making Jesus' curse of the fig tree seem self-serving. However, Mark's report adds insult to injury by explaining the lack of figs by telling us "it was not the season for figs," making Jesus' action appear irrational, as well. Luke simply eliminates this awkward portrayal, just as he drops Mark's report that Jesus could do no act of power in Nazareth.

Matthew, on the other hand, diminishes the problem by striking the note about figs being out-of-season: "In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' And the fig tree withered at once."

Moreover, Matthew places this incident not only after the confrontation in the temple (as we've noted), but also after another incident that has no parallel at this point in Mark or Luke. Matthew extends Jesus' day in the temple following the incident with this pericope: "¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became angry ¹⁶and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'" -- Only at the end of this scene does he leave Jerusalem to spend the night in Bethany.

Consequently, when Matthew introduces the report of the fig tree with, "In the morning, when he returned to the city..." he means the day after the temple incident, whereas Mark's "On the following day, when they came from Bethany..." refers to the morning *of* the temple confrontation.

The significance of this becomes apparent from Matthew's note that "the fig tree withered at once," over against Mark's "And his disciples heard it" and then saving the report of the withering of the fig tree for the next day. It's not just that Matthew joins together the report of Jesus' curse with the report of its effect, but that Matthew continues into the episode that Mark postpones to the next day: "²⁰When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither at once?'" ²¹Jesus answered them, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. ²²Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive."

In Matthew, the curse of the fig tree becomes a compact scene, entirely separate from the temple confrontation, that serves as a lesson about what is possible with faith, whereas in Mark it is a two-part story that enshrouds the temple incident. As we'll see, Mark is fond of this sort of structure, called "intercalation." But what argues that Matthew has taken Mark's order apart and recomposed it is both his elimination of the problematic note that figs were out of season and his more compact scene that focuses on an issue distinct from the temple incident, one entirely about the power of faith.

There is another striking anomaly for the 2GH in Mark 4, which begins with a parable about a man who sows seed on various types of soil, with varying responses. In vv. 21-25 Mark, followed by Luke, reports Jesus' statement about not hiding a light under a basket, together with a warning that things now hidden will one day be revealed. However, in vv. 26-29 Mark has a passage not present in either Matthew or Luke, either at this point or elsewhere. However, Matthew does not simply lack this parable, but has a different one, which we'll look at in a moment and which we find in neither Mark nor Luke. However, Matthew rejoins Mark's order after that, with a parable comparing the kingdom of God to a mustard seed that starts small when planted, but becomes a large tree. Luke has this parable, but not at this point; it stands later in his gospel, in chapter 13.

The point of interest here is the parable Mark relates in vv. 26-29: ²⁶He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

This parable is not only absent from Matt and Luke at this point in their narratives, they lack it *anywhere* in their gospels. Matthew does have at this point the parable of the tares, which is similar, but not the same: ²⁴"He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while every-body was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Matthew's parable shares with Mark's the theme of mysterious growth. But it seems more likely that Matthew substituted this parable from his own supply of Jesus' teaching (as we'll see he does elsewhere) than that Mark, working against the pattern urged by the 2GH, anomalously inserted a parable only he had. Why would Mark do that only here, if (as this case would suggest) he had access to traditions of Jesus' words besides those carried by Matthew and Luke. To suggest that this is the only independent tradition he knew is to beg the question.

These examples point to the larger and what is, in my estimation, the most fundamental objection to the 2GH. As you'll recall, this hypothesis argues that Matthew was written for the mission to Jews, Luke was written for Paul's mission to the Gentiles, and Mark synthesized what Matthew and Luke in hopes of unifying the church in dissension between its Palestinian Jewish base and Gentile congregations in the larger Greco-Roman world.

There are several good reasons to object to this scenario, even aside from the fact that it follows a typical Hegelian pattern of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Most important, while the tensions between traditional Jews and Gentiles within the church were real, there is no evidence to support taking that struggle as a lens for understanding the composition of the Synoptics. It is true that Matthew heavily emphasizes the Torah, portraying Jesus as a new Moses who expounds the Torah and decries any violation of it. However, it is hardly the case that Luke presents Jesus abrogating the Torah. What's more, it is difficult to make the case that everything in either Matthew and Luke that is not found in Mark would have been objectionable to one or the other

on these grounds. As a matter of fact, there is much that Matthew and Luke share that Mark, under this scenario, sets aside.

So even if on the surface it sounds reasonable to speak of Mark creating a synthesis of Matthew and Luke, the 2GH has provided no reasonable explanation for why he should have done so. In my view, then, the 2GH fails to establish itself, and Markan Priority, even with its problems, makes the stronger argument.

Even if we accept Markan priority as the best solution to the question of which Synoptic gospel served as the template for the other two, we have not completely solved the Synoptic problem because we have not yet accounted for where Matthew and Luke got the material they have in common that they did not derive from Mark.

The prevailing consensus on this broader question is known as “the two source hypothesis” (to be distinguished from the “two *gospel* hypothesis” we just examined). The two source hypothesis begins with the assumption of Markan priority: Mark is the primary source for Matthew and Luke. But given that the material Matthew and Luke hold in common apart from Mark often agrees verbatim, it seems likely they both had access to a source besides Mark. In the late 18th century, this hypothetical source came to bear the siglum “Q,” representing the German word “Quelle,” meaning “source.” It is because these two sources serve as the basis for Matthew and Luke that this solution to the Synoptic problem is known as “the two source hypothesis.”

In fact, however, two other sources are regularly posited in this solution in order to account for the considerable material Matthew has that is absent from both Mark and Luke, as well as the material Luke has that is absent from Mark and Matthew. These additional sources are simply labeled “M,” for Matthew’s unique material, and “L” for Luke’s. This general outline of the “Two-Source Hypothesis” we need to develop in more detail.

You might recall, from a couple of classes ago, this passage from Matthew 12 and Luke 6, which has no parallel in Mark, a phenomenon I referred to at the time as “the double tradition,” over against the triple tradition of material in Mark that was available to Matthew and Luke. The number of identical words betrays a *literary* link between Matthew and Luke in these cases. But of course, there are a number of ways this link could be conceived. The most straightforward path would be to posit that either Matthew expanded Mark and then Luke worked off of Matthew, or that Luke expanded Mark, and then Matthew worked off of him. In either case, you would have a logical explanation for why Matthew and Luke preserve the majority of Mark, but also have much material in common not found in Mark. For this reason, a large part of the rationale for Q is an argument *against* one of these two possibilities. The Q hypothesis answers the question, “Why couldn’t Luke have been derived from Matthew, or vice-versa?”

As we have already noted, Matthew and Luke typically follow Mark’s narrative order. Let’s say that the blocks colored blue in this chart represent all the stories in Mark. Matthew and Luke contain all these stories, and predominantly in the same order they occur in Mark. However, they also share stories not in Mark, interspersed among the stories they acquired from him. But strikingly, while these stories sometimes appear at corresponding points in their narratives, more often they stand at different points in their narratives.

The fact that each largely preserves the order of the stories found in Mark, but then they disagree in the placement of the other stories they have in common favors the Q hypothesis. If Matthew copied from Luke or Luke from Matthew, then it is peculiar that the order of their stories is the same *only* for the stories they share with Mark. Given that their narrative sequences

agree only for stories in the *triple* tradition suggests they both used Mark as their basic source and interspersed stories from their other common source, but independent of each other.

It is this hypothesis of Q and issues some have raised against it, that will be our focus of attention next session.