Now that we have a sense of the literary relationships among Matthew, Mark and Luke, I want to address briefly the question of how one goes about reading something called a Synoptic gospel. What sorts of reading skills do we need in hand to understand them.

On the one hand, the answer to that question can be rather straightforward: you read it like you would any other narrative work, looking for the plot, the characters, etc. This is known in the study of early Christian literature as “narrative criticism.” The word “criticism” here does not mean to judge harshly, but to think critically about the literature; in this case, to think critically about how the narrative is put together as a story.

And yet, we’ve already seen that these gospels are composed in a genre unfamiliar to us: namely, according to the conventions of Hellenistic biography. And so we need to be attentive to what it means to read these as that sort of biography, rather than with the expectations we bring to a modern biography. “Genre criticism” is the term for this tuning of our expectations to accord with the conventions the author used in composing his book.

Moreover, while one can read the synoptics profitably with this background, there are other tools we can bring to bear that can help clarify what the Matthew and Luke were doing in writing their gospels. In fact, we’ve already been heavily into one of them, called source criticism; that is, determining where the authors got their material. When we conclude that Matthew derived a story from Mark or Q, we’re practicing source criticism.

Another tool we’ve dabbled in without explicitly naming it is called “redaction criticism.” Redaction takes the identification of sources as its starting point. Once you identify, for example, that a passage in Matthew aligns more closely with Mark than with the parallel in Luke, although it shows some differences with both, the question becomes, why do these differences exist? And if in analyzing these differences you find that patterns are present, then the question moves from “why did the authors’ sources read differently” to “why did this particular author modify his source this way, while another took a different path?” I.e. the question comes to be about authors editing their sources.

The German word Redaktor, which means “editor,” has been adopted within scholarship as the term for an author who edits his sources, giving his own spin to the gospel story. The anglicized form “redactor” is the term you’ll find in English literature on the gospels. The word redaction, obviously, describes the activity of a redactor, especially as seen in the effects of his editing. Thus we can speak of the redaction of the book of Matthew and mean by that the shape given to the book by “Matthew” as a result of his work in editing the book to reflect his concerns.

As I say, we’ve already seen evidence of redaction, even if we haven’t named it as such. For instance, the conclusion that Matthew was responsible, in chapter 4 of his gospel, for transferring the phrase 40 days into the section on Jesus fasting, and expanding it to read “forty days and forty nights,” based on the resonance it created with Exodus 34.28, where Moses is said to have spent forty days and forty nights without food on the holy mountain – that is a redaction critical conclusion. As I argued, Matthew’s gospel shows a unique pattern of modifying stories in order to infuse them with parallels to Moses, so as to portray Jesus as a second Moses, the interpreter of the Torah, par excellence. That is precisely what redaction criticism is about. It helps us understand why each gospel is shaped the way that it is.

Of course, redaction criticism is possible only where we have some sense of the sources an author used and can thereby gauge how the author went about his work. Consequently, while
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redaction criticism is an important tool in working with Matthew and Luke, and even John, it is not very useful in Mark, where we know next to nothing about his sources. In Mark’s case we have to rely more on genre criticism and narrative criticism.

Today I want to put redaction criticism to work, applying it to the question of what we can infer from the synoptics about when each of them was written. How do we date them?

This necessarily involves a lot of detail, little of which I expect you to recall. In fact, I’ve already indicated what could appear on the exam from this lecture. In the long run, I am interested in you perceiving the types of features scholars have noted in synoptic passages that reveal an author’s historical setting. So unless you are simply interested in copying all of the detail, I suggest that you pay attention to what I display on the screen so as to understand the clues scholars have discovered and how they have reasoned from them. In fact, I will post this lecture to the web site so that you don't have to obsess over the detail.

The benchmark commonly used for dating Matthew, Mark, and Luke is whether they reveal knowledge of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The first century saw many prophets predicting the fall of Jerusalem, and there is little doubt that Jesus did. Thus, the issue is not whether a Gospel has Jesus forecasting Jerusalem’s fall. The issue is whether a Gospel betrays knowledge of Jerusalem's fall or its imminence.

A number of times in the Gospels Jesus warns of impending doom for Jerusalem. A case in point is Mark 13 [and parallels]. This is Jesus’ longest speech in Mark, who otherwise offers only snippets patched together in narrative form, making this lengthy discourse remarkable. Because of the importance of this passage for dating the Synoptics, and because Matthew and Luke depend on Mark for their versions of it, we'll explore Mark first, but I'll hold off on suggesting a date for Mark until after we've established dates for Matthew and Luke, who provide strong indications of their knowledge of the fall of Jerusalem.

This section begins with Jesus' declaring, while leaving the temple, that the temple buildings will one day lie in ruins, without one stone upon another. That prompts some of the disciples to ask what will presage this event. Jesus' answer encompasses more than just the destruction of the temple. In fact, he doesn't get around to answering their question about "when" these things will happen until v. 30: "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." But "all these things" refers to the various topics he's covered to this point: the arrival of false prophets, persecution of believers, and an attack against Judea that will force people to flee. That last threat he addresses in v. 14: "But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains." We’ll return to this verse in a moment, but for now let's note that Jesus places this towards the end of a series of difficulties he summarizes in v. 30 as "all these things."

Notice that Jesus does not so much tell them when this will occur, but how they should respond to the time of great troubles, most often admonishing the disciples to "take heed," "beware" or "not be alarmed": Note e.g. vv. 5-6: "5Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 6Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray." The problem suggested by the claim "I am he!" most likely is not someone claiming they are Jesus. Recent scholarship has determined that the phrase "I am he" was used by early Christian prophets, claiming to speak in Jesus' name Thus, this is a warning against being led astray by prophets falsely claiming to speak in Jesus' name.

Let's note next v. 7's warning: "7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines.
This is but the beginning of the birth pangs." The doubly stated warning that such wars mark only the beginning the final period of trouble is significant. Needless to say, "Wars and rumors of wars" could apply to virtually any period in history. And yet, certainly this saying doesn't anticipate that all wars are "the beginning of the end." Indeed, if the wars and rumors of wars presaging the end refers to centuries of warfare, it diminishes the effect of calling these "the beginning of the birth pangs," a common metaphor in that period for talking about the traumatic events ushering in the birth of the new age. Evidently, then, this phrase does not designate just any set of "wars and rumors of wars." It likely has in view a specific set of troubles, well known to the readers.

The next call to pay heed comes in v. 9: "As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them." In the succeeding verses Jesus warns that his followers will be roundly hated, even by family members, who will hand them over to trial for their allegiance to him. Embedded in this direction is another admonition, introduced with "do not worry": people who find themselves in such a situation should not spend time figuring out their defense, inasmuch as the Spirit will give them words when they appear at trial.

In the midst of these verses stands the awkward statement of v. 10: "And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations." Not only is this statement abrupt in a context warning about persecution, but the adverb "first" is vague. The good news is to be proclaimed to all nations before what? Before persecution sets in? That's what the position of this statement would suggest, but that seems unlikely. Being hauled before councils, governors and kings seems like something connected with spreading the gospel message, rather than something that occurs only after it has been widely proclaimed.

More likely, this is an additional statement about what must happen before the kingdom arrives. But why does this stand here, especially since up until this point in Mark Jesus has not breathed a word about the disciples carrying the good news anywhere? And notice that v. 11 gives instructions about what to do when faced with the situation described in v. 9. I.e., v. 10 has the appearance of an interloper in this context. Luke, in fact, omits this statement, while Matthew, as we shall see, transfers it to a less prominent spot.

Most likely, then, Mark supplied this sentence because of his interest in the Gospel among the Gentiles. And he inserts it immediately after Jesus warns his disciples they must appear before "governors and kings," a handy place to tag on a statement about preaching the gospel to the whole world, since "governors and kings" assumes the larger Roman world.

Let's move to the next admonition, found in v. 14: "But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains." That aside, "let the reader understand," is a way of saying, "I'm using code language, but you know what I'm talking about." The fact that this is addressed directly to the reader is significant, since it means that it is inserted as an aside by the writer.

The source of this code language is easy to track down. It's drawn from the book of Daniel, which refers 3x, as here in Daniel 9.27, to "an abomination that desolates." The phrase translated "the desolating sacrilege" in Mark 13.14 is just a slight variation on that. So there is no doubt where this code language is drawn from.

Daniel chapters 7-12 were written against the backdrop of the Hellenistic reform and the measures taken by Antiochus IV. During that era, orders were issued to halt the daily sacrifice, as reflected in the phrase "making sacrifice and offering cease." Moreover, erected in place of
the altar to Israel's God was an image of Zeus and an altar for sacrifices to him. That is what the phrase "an abomination that makes desolate" connotes in Daniel.

The question, then, is what does Mark 13.14 have in mind in using this code? Some have suggested it refers to Caligula's attempt to erect in the temple an image of Zeus (with his own head substituted for Zeus' head) early in the 40's. Possibly, although Caligula never succeeded in having that image erected; the Galileans prevented it from even reaching Jerusalem. And yet, this code language certainly anticipates some sort of dramatic foreign intervention and expects that the readers have a good idea what is in view.

The fact that when the readers see this they are to "head for the mountains" indicates that this will, in some way, be the last straw; it will mark the end for Jerusalem.

Notice the next warning issued: "And if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!' do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything." This warning is distinct from the earlier caution against people falsely claiming to speak on behalf of Jesus. In fact, Jesus isn't even mentioned here, and the threat is different: people claiming to be the Messiah.

While I'll postpone dating Mark until we've seen the more explicit indications of dates for Matthew and Luke, Mark's discourse serves as a baseline for dating, first, Matthew. On the one hand, his changes to Mark's discourse serve to heighten the sense of anticipation. E.g., whereas in Mark the disciples ask what will signal that Jesus' prediction of the temple's demolition is "about to be accomplished," in Matthew they ask, "what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Their interest bypasses a sign presaging the temple's destruction, focusing instead on Jesus' coming and the "end of the age."

Now, Mark's discourse also deals with the topic of the end of the age. After mentioning the "abomination that makes desolate" and warning against following Messianic claimants, Mark's Jesus summarizes his instruction with these words: "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." When, however, we compare to this Matthew's version, one difference stands out: the addition of the word "immediately," which ratchets up the tension a bit: "Immediately after the suffering of those days the son will be darkened...."

Notice also that after detailing the series of cosmic spectacles following a period of persecution and terror, Mark's Jesus says, "Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory." When we bring in Matthew's version, we find something striking added: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven...."

Recall the question that initiated this discourse in Matthew: "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Here is the answer, and most likely the language about the "sign of the Son of Man" is tantamount to what Matthew expresses earlier in words unique to his Gospel about the arrival of the Son of Man not being a private event; rather, it will be like the lightning, which flashes from east to west. That would explain his other inserted statement about all the tribes of the earth mourning as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. It is a cosmic event, visible to all the nations.

So for Matthew, the prime event on the horizon is the return of the Son of Man, which he expects to be visible 'round the world. Moreover, there is a sense of immediacy to this that strips away some of the cautions Mark raised, including his stress on a need for the gospel to be proclaimed world-wide. What leads Matthew to do this? Following that question will help us
establish a date for Matthew. But to do that, we need to join these observations with a couple of others.

There are two parables Matthew expands in ways that tell us something about when he wrote. The first parable is preserved only by Matthew and Luke, and is thus a Q passage. Luke’s version is (for reasons I think will become evident) likely closer to the original form of the parable in Q.

It is a story of a king sending invitations to a banquet. Luke and Matthew agree that the servant sent out to invite the guests was rebuffed. However, only Luke catalogs the excuses given: "The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.'"

We are then told that the slave reported these responses to his master, who was in no mood to accept such excuses: "Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

Matthew also reports that the invitation was rebuffed. However, rather than the master accepting "no" for an answer, he tries once more: "Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.'"

The servants fair no better than before, but this time the response of those invited has a familiar ring to it: "But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business." This parallels the series of excuses reported by Luke, but in general terms, with each making light of the invitation and having his own affairs to attend to.

And yet, Matthew adds an interesting wrinkle to his supplement to Q, reporting that some went beyond contempt by "seiz[ing] his slaves, mistreat[ing] them, and kill[ing] them."

What’s more, while Matthew’s version (like Luke’s) has the master inviting the lame, poor, and others to take the place of the originally invited guests, but not before expressing his anger more viciously than in Luke: "The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city."

By any standard this is a much more violent treatment of those who declined than in Luke, where they are simply replaced with other guests. But why? And where did the author of Matthew get the features he inserted into this story?

To answer that, let's turn, momentarily, to Matthew 21 and the parable of the wicked tenants, which Matthew inherited from Mark: 33There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 37Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' 39So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' 41They said to him, 'He will put those
wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Here we find the theme of repeatedly sending servants who are rebuffed or even killed that we saw Matthew introduce into the parable of the invitation to the banquet. The theme of sending out a second wave of messengers, and the idea that the servants were mistreated or even killed, both unique to Matthew's parable of the banquet are present here. We also find in this parable the theme of destroying those who mistreat the messengers, present also in Matthew's parable of the banquet invitations, even though it is absent from Luke's version. Most likely, Matthew has imported all these themes from this parable into his parable of the banquet.

Even though that doesn't account for all the wrinkles in Matthew's parable of the banquet invitation, it does reveal the source of features in Matthew's adaptation of that story. Let's return to parable of the banquet for a couple other observations.

We've already noticed that the host's anger in Matthew is expressed more drastically than in Luke and that this motif has been drawn from the parable of the wicked tenants. But another noteworthy difference is that in Luke the invitations are issued by the owner of a house. This isn't the equivalent of a modern day homeowner, but more so the owner of an estate, and thus wealthy enough to have servants to send out.

When we compare the story in Matthew, the one issuing invitations is no less than a king. This is not, however, something Matthew borrowed from the parable of the wicked tenants, where the one sending his servants is simply the owner of the land. So where did Matthew get the figure of the king?

On the road to answering that question, let's make one other observation. In comparison to the parable of the wicked tenets, where the landowner "puts those wretches to a miserable death," the king of this parable not only destroys the murderers of his servants, but also sets fire to their city by sending in his troops. The assumption that all the invited guests are from the same city that can be attacked is a significant wrinkle unique to Matthew, for it enables the king's wrath to be expended against a single city rather than merely individual guests.

The story of a king's wrath unleashed on a city of people who had spurned and murdered his messengers, and the idea of troops attacking and burning that city undoubtedly reflects the Roman assault on Jerusalem, in which the temple itself was burned - making this parable a good figurative representation of the final siege of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 C.E.

In that case we have an indication of an event far more specific than Mark's anticipation of the end of the temple; Matthew reflects knowledge of its destruction and how it was destroyed. And that's why Matthew is to be dated sometime after the Romans' sack of Jerusalem.

Indeed, putting all these pieces together - allusions to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, and the expectation that the return of the "Son of Man" could occur any day - one reaches the conclusion that Matthew was most likely written between 70-90 C.E.

Having looked at the dating of Matthew, let's turn to the question of Luke's date. What happens to Mark's apocalyptic discourse in Luke? In a nutshell, it lacks keen anticipation that the end is in sight. One mark of Luke's blunting of such anticipation is the unique twist he gives to the warning about not being led astray by people claiming to speak in Jesus' name. Here, again, is Mark's text: "Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come."

When we lay alongside that Luke's version, we notice two striking differences, the first of which
is that whereas Mark's Jesus warns generally about those using the formula, "I am he," Luke attributes more specific words to such speakers: "The time is near."

Similarly, in the following verses, while Mark cautions that wars are unremarkable events along the way to the end, Luke erects a much more substantial warning, saying that "the end will not follow immediately." More strongly than Mark, he rules out any expectation of the end in the near future. And in that, by the way, he differs from Matthew, who (as we've seen) heightens expectations.

Let's note also what happens in Luke's rendition of Mark 13.13, which promises, after warnings about upcoming persecutions, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." Mark gives the impression that such persecutions will be short-lived, lasting only until "the end," so that those holding out to "the end" will be rewarded. But Luke has decried anyone who says that the end is near, and so his version of this statement reads, "By your endurance you will gain your souls." All connections to "the end" are expunged by Luke.

Alongside this evidence of a diminished expectation is another interesting wrinkle in Luke's handling of this passage. Mark continues with the warning about the upcoming crisis in the temple: "But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains…"

Luke has that warning, as well, but with a couple of significant differences: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains…" Notice that Luke eliminates the notice about the "desolating sacrilege" and speaks simply of "Jerusalem surrounded by armies," which recalls Matthew's talk about the king sending troops against a city. Most likely, Luke's reference to troops is to the same event; indeed, this is about as explicit as one could get in referring to the Roman siege of Jerusalem in the latter years of the 60's C.E.

However, Luke has not simply abandoned the language about desolation, but has made it into a statement of what this siege will indicate: "its desolation has come near," a phrase also likely penned in the knowledge of what Jerusalem suffered.

In fact, Luke tips his hand even more directly in the verses immediately following this. First, let's note that after exhorting flight to the mountains and pronouncing woes on those who live in the days of these events, Mark's Jesus concludes, "For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days."

As before, when we place Luke's version alongside this, we find differences. First, whereas Mark describes the attack on Jerusalem as unparalleled "days of suffering," Luke describes them more dispassionately, designating them "days of vengeance," making clear that this attack constitutes some sort of retribution. And, even more notably, he speaks of this attack as "a fulfillment of all that is written," in keeping with Luke's portrayal of Jesus as a prophet and an interpreter of the prophets.

Luke does have a statement about the pathos of this event in which Jesus talks about great distress on the earth, as well as people falling "by the edge of the sword" and being taken captive. But most remarkably, at the end, he speaks of Jerusalem being "trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Here again, this statement, unique to Luke, tips the author's hand that Jerusalem has been captured by the Romans and that Luke foresees this state of affairs continuing for a while: "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled," another
way of expressing the notion of the divine plan. We could paraphrase this something like, "as long as God has planned for the Gentiles to trample it."

Scholars tend to date Luke around the same time as Matthew (75-90 C.E.), given its backward look at the destruction of the temple and its view of the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles as something ongoing.

Let's return to the Gospel of Mark to ask what can be discerned about a date for it. We already know, from literary evidence, that Mark was written before Matthew and Luke. But can we be more precise?

First, are there any indications Mark was familiar with the fall of Jerusalem, similar to those apparent in Matthew and Luke? Those who argue in the affirmative point, especially, to the beginning of Mark 13’s discourse, where Jesus says of the temple complex, "Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." However, compared to the sort of unmistakable allusions to events in 70 given by Matthew and Luke, this is, to my mind, unconvincing as evidence that Mark looked back on the temple's destruction. Indeed, I am unconvinced that Mark knew of the temple's destruction, but (rather) wrote during the lead up to the revolt that would lead to its end.

On the one hand, let's recall Mark's stipulation, inserted later in the chapter, that the gospel must be preached throughout the world. As I noted when we first looked at that, this aligns with Mark's concern for the gentile world. And his insertion of it here (and you'll recall that Matthew and Luke either move it or omit it) is due to the just-described scenario of "standing before governors and kings because of me," indicating experience of opposition not only in Judea, but also in the broader Roman society. In any case, Mark's insertion reveals his familiarity with the mission into the Gentile world spearheaded by Paul and his associates, a mission that began making significant inroads into the larger Roman world in the late 40's and the 50's. Consequently, Mark likely wrote no earlier than the mid-50's.

Let's also recall the character of the warning against being dismayed by "wars and rumors of wars." As we saw, that caution is best understood as pertaining to a particular crisis. Most likely that crisis signified, for early followers of Jesus, the social and political unrest that came to afflict Judea's region from 44 C.E. on, when, following the death of Agrippa I, Judea was ruled by Roman appointees who managed to alienate the people and bring them to the boiling point.

Finally, let's review the warning against Messianic claimants and prophets. Such voices arose at various times of unrest in first century Judea. They became especially common in the years preceding the final insurrection in the late 60's. Accordingly, when placed alongside the indication that Mark lived in the era when expansion of the mission into gentile areas was well advanced, this suggests a period toward the end of Judea's independence, when insurrection was brewing and messianic claimants were numerous. There is also the sense that the ever-present "wars and rumors of wars" would give way to an impending crisis that would make flight to the hills necessary.

Taken as a whole, these features suggest this passage reflects the situation of the 60's when turmoil in Jerusalem was reaching a fever pitch. Mark seems to caution those caught up in enthusiasm for the culmination of history not to expect it immediately, however. Even wars and rumors of wars should not make them think the end is imminent, especially since the good news must first be proclaimed to the nations. And yet, he considers it close enough that his audience needs to be advised to head for the hills when they see "the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be." Given this atmosphere, I would peg Mark some time in the mid 60's, before the full-scale revolt begins.
One thing this presupposes, of course, is that Matthew and Luke were written in different places. And that is already evident in Matthew’s assumption that his audience will have no trouble understanding Jewish customs, while Luke characteristically omits such features and gears his story to a Roman audience. So where were the three Synoptic Gospels likely composed? That’s a much harder question than “when,” but we do have some leads.

The Gospel of Mark, given its cruder style of Greek that nevertheless often retains much of the Semitic flavor of Jesus’ sayings, and given its focus on Galilee, was likely written in regions just north of Judea. The author evidently lived close enough to Judea to be drawn into the intrigues unfolding there in the years leading up to the Jewish revolt. Thus, many propose it was written either in the Galilee, or Syria or the Decapolis.

As for Matthew, 4.4 speaks of news about Jesus reaching Syria: “So his fame spread throughout all Syria.” That statement, found only in Matthew, may well hint at where Matthew was written. In support of that conclusion, Christian writings known to have been composed in Syria early in the 2nd century C.E. (viz. the Didache and letters of Ignatius) are the earliest pieces of Christian literature to use phrases found only in Matthew. So Syria, NE of Judea, was quite likely where Matthew was composed.

Luke’s Gospel, with its much more cosmopolitan leanings and its view of Judaism and the events of Jesus’ life from a Roman perspective, seems to have been composed somewhere further afield in the Empire. Indeed, the conclusion of Luke’s second volume, the book of Acts, finds Paul spending two years in Rome, awaiting trial, but free to proclaim the gospel as he waits. While it’s problematic to see that as evidence that the author of Luke-Acts lived in Rome, it nevertheless highlights that the author wrote from the perspective of the larger Roman Empire. Given the author’s use of rhetorical strategies popular in Greco-Roman literature, he was certainly well educated, and likely, therefore, not a member of the lower classes. Given the ways he smooths over Jewish customs, it’s unlikely that he was from anywhere near Judea. Most scholars suspect he lived somewhere in the western part of the Mediterranean, although that’s merely speculation.