At the conclusion of last session we began turning from the issue of Markan priority to another element of the synoptic problem: the question of how Matthew and Luke relate to each other. As I reported, the Two Source Hypothesis has become the general consensus view. This hypothesis takes Markan priority as its starting point, but, in addition, it infers that the material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark is best accounted for by positing another source, labeled Q, that Matthew and Luke both had at their disposal. So the two primary sources are Mark and Q, although one must also posit additional sources available to Matthew and Luke independently.

You might recall, from a few sessions ago, this passage from Matt 12 and Luke 6, which has no parallel in Mark, what I referred to as “the double tradition.” The number of identical words is far more extensive than in the instances where Matthew agrees with Luke against Mark in the triple tradition and seems to betray some type of a literary link between Matthew and Luke, although 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, we would have a logical explanation for why Matt 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 possibilities. The Q hypothesis answers the question, “Why couldn’t Luke have been derived from Matthew, or vice-versa?”

As Stein argues, it is not simply that Matthew and Luke’s words in the double tradition frequently agree – that could support a hypothesis that Matthew worked from Luke, or vice-versa – but that each makes modifications to words they draw from this common source, in which situations the other Evangelist preserves a more pristine form of a saying. But then it is difficult to explain where Luke (e.g.) would have gotten a more pristine form of Jesus’ sayings, if he had to derive it from Matthew’s more developed form. And if Luke were really concerned to preserve the more pristine form, then why did he, at times, make his own expansions and modifications to the sayings?

Similarly, how Matthew and Luke used Q differently is significant. As you know, Matt 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 Matthew and Luke 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.

And yet, as widely as Q-hypothesis is accepted, it faces (as Stein also reports) some difficulties, such as knowing what type of source (or collection of sources) Q was. While the large amount of verbatim agreement in double tradition points to a shared document, there are countervailing indications. E.g. Matthew 6 and Luke 12 share wording that seems to go back to a common source other than Mark, since Mark lacks this. And yet, there are some significant differences here, only some of which have ready solutions. E.g. Matthew’s unparalleled phrase “and his righteousness” was undoubtedly supplied by the First Evangelist, who (as we’ll see) favors the concept of “righteousness” and thus often interpolates it into Jesus’ words. It was likely his insertion of this phrase that led him to reformulate “his kingdom” into “the kingdom of God,” to avoid saying “his kingdom and his righteousness.”

On the other hand, it is difficult to find a reason that Matthew would have supplied the adverb “first,” which is lacking in Luke. And even more inexplicable is why Matthew and Luke vary so much in the concluding words, with Matthew’s Jesus admonishing his followers not to take tomorrow’s worries on today, while Luke’s Jesus reassures them that “it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Why do they diverge at this point?

A viable possibility is that, even if Matt and Luke worked from written copies of Q, thus accounting for the verbatim agreements, their written sources may have differed because Q was handed down orally in different ways before being committed to writing.

A striking evidence for this comes from Matthew 7 || Luke 11, where Matthew’s version reads, “9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

While the parallel in Luke is so similar as to be assured that Luke gained it from the same source as Matthew, nevertheless, his story has the phrase “if your child asks for a fish, will you give a snake?” as the first comparison Jesus draws, over
against Matthew 7, where it stands as the second example. Moreover, whereas Matthew’s other example is of a child asking for bread, but the parent giving a stone, Luke’s second example concerns a child asking for an egg, but the parent giving a scorpion.

This sort of variation supports the possibility that Q began life as a set of traditions handed down orally, for this sort of substitution of one example for another is the type of thing that happens in oral transmission. While Matthew and Luke may have had access to similar written collections of Jesus’ sayings, the edition each had access to differed due to variations that had developed in the oral telling of these stories.

Another difficulty the Q hypothesis faced, especially around the middle of the 20th century, had to do with the lack of a parallel for Q. Because at that time only narrative gospels were known, and the Q hypothesis posited that it was largely a collection of sayings, there was no evidence that anything like that sort of collection had ever existed. But then came the startling discoveries in 1945 at an Egyptian site named Nag Hammadi. Among the finds was a complete copy of the Gospel of Thomas, a Gospel consisting solely of Jesus’ sayings. Although no one alleges the Gospel of Thomas is “Q,” it does provide tangible evidence of a collection of Jesus’ words outside a narrative format.

In spite of the general consensus that Q existed helps explain the Synoptic problem, the solution that Matthew expanded Mark, and then Luke based his gospel on Matthew’s, thus making “Q” unnecessary, has its adherents. The clearest and most complete statement of this has been argued recently by Prof. Mark Goodacre in a book simply titled, The Case against Q,” in which he offers the following objections to the Q, that can be used in service of either the argument that Luke worked from Matthew or that Mathew used Luke as a source.

First are what he calls prima facie evidence for a direct literary relationship between Matthew and Luke. He points out that both Matthew and Luke seem to have reacted to Mark the same way. Both reduce Mark’s verbose narrative and produce a more natural style of Greek. Both gospels felt the need to prefix an account of Jesus’ birth rather than begin with John the Baptist, as Mark does. And both conclude with Jesus appearing to his disciples, something merely promised at the end of Mark. What’s more, but both of them supplement Mark’s report of Jesus’ teaching extensively, using much of the same material. And these Evangelists produces these similar works at approximately the same time, without any evidence that anyone else had the inkling to do so. Is this simply coincidence?

Goodacre’s second argument has to do with the so-called minor agreements, some of which aren’t so minor, such as their shared question we’ve noted, “Who is it that struck you?” Another instance is Mark 14.72 and parallels, where the following stands just after Peter has denied knowing Jesus: “Then Peter
remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.”

Matthew and Luke have this passage, with minor variations, but then share uniquely this final report: “And he went out and wept bitterly,” while Mark has simply, “And he broke down and wept.” It is difficult to ascribe this sentence to a common impulse to modify Mark in the same way, since they use even the same word order in Greek. Some sort of literary dependence seems to stand behind this agreement, although it provides no foundation for denying Markan Priority, since it is unclear why Mark, having had Matthew and Luke before him, would have substituted his more banal report.

These tantalizing cases of so-called “minor agreements” is related to more “extensive agreements” between Matthew and Luke in the triple tradition, as in the report of John the Baptist’s words, which in Mark read as follows: “He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

When we bring the parallels in Matthew and Luke alongside Mark, the high degree of overlap is clear. And yet, there is a surprising “minor” agreement at the end, where both Matthew and Luke assert that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This is hardly a matter of each Evangelist supplying an idea latent in the context.

Moreover, it is equally striking that while Matthew and Luke, like Mark, have John speaking of baptizing people with water, they both place that statement at the beginning of the unit, rather than near the end, as in Mark.

In that light, an otherwise minor agreement stands out. Whereas in Mark, John uses the perfect tense (“I have baptized you with water”) in both Matthew and Luke the present tense appears: “I baptize you with water.” This difference would be negligible if it weren’t for Matthew and Luke’s different order and their joint addition of “and fire” at the end.

Even more striking, however, is that while in Mark, John’s words conclude with the promise that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit, in Matthew and Luke his speech continues: “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” The degree of agreement between Matthew and Luke in this verse is just as profound as their agreement with Mark in the preceding verse. Needless to say, the Two-Source Hypothesis concludes that this is a Q passage. But what, then, do the unique patterns of agreement in the preceding verse indicate?

By any typical standard, this verse should be categorized as Markan material, and the Two-Source Hypothesis indeed categorizes it as such, though with a twist.
To account for the equally striking agreements in the double tradition, the 2SH posits that while both Matthew and Luke had before them Mark’s account, a summary of John’s message also appeared in their Q material, which they utilized as well. This phenomenon is known as a “Mark-Q overlap.” The majority of such “overlaps” congregate in chapters 3 & 4 of Matthew and of Luke. Needless to say, Goodacre and others who deny the existence of Q point to these as weaknesses in the hypothesis, arguing that positing that such cases constitute an overlap of Mark and Q is special pleading.

And it seems to me that even if the Two Source Hypothesis reasonably posits that Matt and Luke had access to collections of Jesus’ words with occasional differences because they came through separate lines of oral tradition, it begins to strain credibility to argue that both of them just happened to have relied more on their strain of Q rather than Mark at precisely the same points and that those identical points happened to concentrate in the initial stages of their work, just after their birth narratives. Is it possible that one Evangelist knew the other’s work and, if so, which knew which?

You’ll recall that Matthew and Luke tend to follow Mark’s order so much that even if one of them departs from it, the other typically follows Mark’s order. But where their narrative orders differ even more is in the placement of the so-called “Q” material. However, there is more of a system to these disagreements in order for the Q material than this graphic suggests. In fact, the majority of the Q material in Luke is concentrated in two places. His first bloc of intertwined “Q” and “L” material is found in Luke 6.20-8.3, just after Jesus chooses the 12, an account which, in Mark, concludes in 3.19.

The second, and larger, bloc of Q & L material is gathered in 9.51-18.14, a section called the “Lukans travels narrative,” which narrates Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem, using very little material drawn from Mark. This travel narrative interrupts Mark’s order at a spot that corresponds roughly to the beginning of Mark 10. I’ve already pointed out that double tradition material is also concentrated in the 3rd and 4th chapters of Matthew and Luke. Aside from these, there is only one other place Q material appears in Luke: 19.11-27. So Luke’s Q material is clustered in these blocs, largely isolated from Markan material.

Before comparing the placement of Q material in the Gospel of Matthew, we need to notice that Matthew arranges Jesus’ teaching differently than Luke. Rather than intermixing Jesus’ teaching with accounts of healings or exorcisms, as does Luke, Matthew organizes his teachings into five major discourses, the first of which is the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7. The second discourse is a collection of diverse sayings in 9:37-10.42.

The third discourse, Matthew 13, is composed entirely of parables, while the fourth, in chapter 18, gives directions for church order, and the fifth, in chapters
24-25, is called the “eschatological discourse” because in it Jesus speaks about the fall of the Jerusalem and the return of the Son of Man for judgment.

However, just as striking as the collection of Jesus’ teaching into these five units is the way Matthew has constructed the units. The Sermon on the Mount contains a few fragments taken from Mark, but the bulk of it is Q material, mixed in with some of the material distinctive to Matthew. The most intriguing feature of this bloc, the Sermon on the Mount, is that Matthew has positioned at nearly the same spot Luke placed his “Sermon on the Plain.” We’ll return to this correspondence in a moment.

First, I want to point out the similarity in Matt’s construction of the final four discourses. Whereas the Sermon on the Mount is predominantly a mixture of Q and M material, Matthew structures his final four discourses around Markan material, interspersing within it Q material and M material. His use of Markan material as the framework in which he inter-weaves Q material distinguishes this discourse from the Sermon on the Mount.

Similarly, when Jesus inveighs against the Pharisees for all of chapter 23, the substratum of this tirade is based on Mark 12:38-40, which Matthew expands by interweaving with it Q material and his own special material.

I know there is a lot of data here, so I’ll reduce it to some basic observations. First, Luke tends to interrupt the Markan narrative order abruptly with blocs of largely Q & L material, with (at most) an occasional snippet or reminiscence of Markan material. By contrast, Matthew typically takes a Markan passage as his basic building block, expanding it with Q & L to create a larger discourse, so that in Matthew Markan material provides the framework of the discourses. The exception to this, of course, is Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, which consists largely of Q and M and exhibits the same order we find in Luke’s Sermon on the Plain. But most important to recall, in this regard, is that both Matthew and Luke place their sermons at the same relative spot vis-à-vis Mark’s narrative.

The fact that the sermons in Matthew and Luke follow the same basic order could readily be explained by positing that Q already had its own “sermon” at this point, and that both Matthew and Luke utilized it. What cannot be explained so readily on the basis of the Two Source Hypothesis is why Matthew and Luke each just happened to place it at the same point in Mark’s order. A more natural explanation would be that either Luke worked off of Matthew or Matthew worked off of Luke. But which is it?

There are two chief battlegrounds in the debate. The first has to do, as you might guess, with Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount compared to Luke’s Sermon on the Plain. In a nutshell, the argument comes down to why Luke would have deconstructed Matthew’s sermon on the Mount into something more paltry. Indeed, the metaphor sometimes used is that if Luke’s Sermon on the Plain has
been derived from Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, then Luke has “unscrambled
the egg with a vengeance.” Not only is Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount longer
1532), but while all of Luke’s Sermon appears in Matthew, the reverse is not true.
In fact, Matthew incorporates Q sayings that Luke utilizes elsewhere, and,
significantly, he uses material from the Gospel of Mark.

If I bring the verses of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount alongside the chapters
of Luke’s gospel, you can see that all of Luke’s sermon (in 6:20-8:3) appears in
Matthew (as marked in blue). And yet, much of Matthew’s sermon derives from Q
sayings (identified in red) that are found in other contexts in Luke; and if we look
at where they reside in Luke, it is noteworthy that all of them are within the Lukan
Travel Narrative, where Luke has his largest collection of non-Markan material.
The Sermon on the mount also contains material from Matthew’s own source (3
marked in green) and, just as significant, it contains four unique groups of material
from Mark (in black), and one Markan passage it shares with Luke 7:1-5, the only

This is the reason those who argue for Luke working from Matthew are
frequently charged with “unscrambling the egg with a vengeance.” After all,
which is easier to conceive: that Matthew took over Luke’s sermon, keeping it in
the same place but expanding it with material he found elsewhere in Luke and
Mark, as well as a few pieces from his own source; or that Luke took up Matthew’s
sermon, purged it of most Markan elements and then redistributed pieces of what
we call “Q” throughout his largest collection of (mostly) non-Markan material?
One would have to present rather weighty reasons for why Luke transferred this
material around like this, and while attempts have been made to explain why Luke
might have preferred this or that saying in another spot, they tend to be ad hoc
arguments constructed under the a priori that Luke used Matthew. More
important, they tend to speculate about what might have motivated Matthew
without adducing evidence.

The other battlefield, if I can draw again on that metaphor, concerns Matthew’s
compendiums of Jesus’ teaching, organized around a unified theme, over against
Luke’s large Travel narrative as a repository of non-Markan material. To show
you again the contrast, Matthew’s thematic compendiums are a striking contrast to
Luke’s repository, so that the question again becomes one of which is easier to
conceive: Matthew grouping the sayings he found in various places into thematic
discourses, or Luke extracting sayings from Matthew’s thematic essays and
assembling them in a large bloc that lacks the thematic treatment of Matthew?
Certainly it is possible that that occurred, but again, attempts to explain why Luke
would have done so have been speculative and ad hoc.
Equally, outside these major discourses, when Jesus inveighs against the Pharisees for all of chapter 23, the basic substratum of this tirade is based on Mark 12:38-40, which he expands by interweaving with it Q material and his own special material.

I know there is a lot of data here, so I’ll reduce it to some basic observations. First, Luke tends to interrupt the Markan narrative order abruptly with blocs of non-Markan (Q & L) material, exclusively so in his “Sermon on the Plain,” while his other bloc has an occasional snippet (or even just a reminiscence) of Markan material; Markan material, where it occurs, plays a deeply subservient role. By contrast, Matthew typically takes a Markan passage as his starting point, expanding it with non-Markan material to create a larger discourse; in Matthew, Markan material provides the framework for his discourses. The exception to this, of course, is Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, which consists largely of Q and M material, and follows the same order we find in Luke’s Sermon on the Plain. But most important to recall, in this regard, is that both Matthew and Luke locate their sermons after chapter 1, v. 39 of Mark’s narrative; they place their sermons at the same spot in Mark’s narrative.

The fact that the sermons in Matthew and Luke follow the same basic order could readily be explained by positing that Q already had its own “sermon” at this point, and that both Matthew and Luke utilized it. What cannot be explained so readily on the basis of the Q hypothesis is why each of them just happened to place it at the same point in Mark’s narrative order. To believe that was simply a coincidence, one must first be committed to the Q hypothesis, because that is plausible only if you’re already convinced in the existence of Q and therefore explain this peculiarity in light of that conviction, just as advocates of the Q hypothesis explain the unusual agreements of Matthew and Luke in chapters 3-4 in terms of “Mark-Q Overlap.” A more natural solution, however, would be to argue that either Luke worked off of Matthew or Matthew worked off of Luke. But which is it?

There are two chief battlegrounds in the debate. The first has to do, as you might guess, with Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount compared to Luke’s Sermon on the Plain. In a nutshell, the argument comes down to why Luke would have deconstructed Matthew’s sermon on the Mount into something more paltry. Indeed, the metaphor sometimes used is that if Luke’s Sermon on the Plain has been derived from Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, then Luke has “unscrambled the egg with a vengeance.” Not only is Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount longer than Luke’s Sermon on the Plain by 460 words (1992 words in Matthew to Luke’s 1532), but while all of Luke’s Sermon appears in Matthew, the reverse is not true. In fact, Matthew incorporates Q sayings that Luke utilizes elsewhere, and, significantly, he uses material from the Gospel of Mark. If I bring the verses of
Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount alongside the chapters of Luke’s gospel, you can see that all of Luke’s sermon (in 6:20-8:3) appears in Matthew (as marked in blue). And yet, much of Matthew’s sermon derives from Q sayings (identified in red) that are found in other contexts in Luke; and if we look at where they reside in Luke, it is noteworthy that all of them are within the Lukan Travel Narrative, where Luke has his largest collection of non-Markan material. The Sermon on the mount also contains material from Matthew’s own source (3 marked in green) and, just as significant, it contains four unique groups of material from Mark (in black), and one Markan passage it shares with Luke 7:1-5, the only Markan material in Luke’s sermon.

While this hypothesis provided a solution to a vexing problem, it also spawned certain difficulties. Not least of those was that because we do not have a copy of Q, it is difficult to know what sort of source it was. Was it written or oral? Recent scholarship suggests that it may have been both, that it may have begun as a collection of Jesus’ sayings that was passed down orally, but eventually came to be written, but in more than one version.

Prime evidence for this is some of the differences in wording between Q passages in Matt and Luke. It’s unlikely all such differences can be accounted for simply by positing that each evangelist modified Q.

E.g. in the passage we’re exploring, Matthew’s addition of “and his righteousness” accords with Matthew’s special interest in the topic of “righteousness.” And so that is likely a modification Matthew made to this Q saying. On the other hand, one is hard pressed to explain why Luke would have deleted the adverb “first” in “seek first the kingdom” or why Matthew would have added it. More likely this evidences Matthew and Luke knowing different versions of Q.

The most striking difference in these passages, however, comes with Jesus’ summation as reported by Matthew over against Luke. While in both Jesus admonishes hearers not to be disturbed, Matthew continues the theme of not worrying, while Luke continues the theme of the kingdom, assuring readers that the Father has purposed to give it to them. In fact, neither of these conclusions seems terribly fitting. In the case of Matthew, the advice is not to worry about tomorrow because it will have its own worries; i.e. worry only about today. And yet, the preceding instruction has been about not worrying at all! Luke, on the other hand, has Jesus reassuring the audience of the certainty of the kingdom, even though uncertainty about receiving the kingdom has not been an issue in Jesus’ discourse on worrying about what one needs. Reassurance about receiving the kingdom is a peculiar conclusion for a discourse whose focus has been on receiving one’s present needs.
Most likely what has happened is that in relating this discourse in preaching, different speakers used different sayings to cap off the unit. The edition of Q received by Matthew had attached to it the ending used by one narrator, while the edition used by Luke contained the conclusion another had used.

Another example comes from a parallel between Matthew 7 and Luke 11. Matthew’s version reads, “9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

While the parallel in Luke is so similar as to be assured that Luke gained it from the same source as Matthew, nevertheless, his story has the phrase “if your child asks for a fish, will you give a snake?” as the first comparison Jesus draws, over against Matthew 7, where it stands as the second example. Moreover, whereas Matthew’s other example is of a child asking for bread, but the parent giving a stone, Luke’s second example concerns a child asking for an egg, but the parent giving a scorpion.

Again, this sort of variation supports the hypothesis that Q was, at least originally, a set of traditions handed down orally. Apparently, Matthew and Luke likely had access to a written collection of Jesus’ sayings, but the written edition each had access to differed due to variations that had developed in the oral telling of these stories.

When we turn to Matthew, on the other hand, we notice that he retains Mark’s talk of the soldiers spitting on and striking Jesus. However, like Luke, he makes the demand that Jesus prophesy a distinct clause. But instead of Mark’s and Luke’s blindfolding of Jesus, Matthew portrays the soldiers slapping him, an insult reminiscent of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” That may account for why Matthew modified this element of the account in this way. In Matthew, this part of the scene is a matter of taunting Jesus to do what he is reputed to do regularly.

While Luke’s version also presents the soldiers taunting Jesus, his taunt gives the question, “Who is it that struck you” a real function by retaining Mark’s report of Jesus being blind-folded. While Matthew preserves it, it retains only a vestige of the function it has in Luke. Obviously, this points to Matthew’s familiarity with Luke in portraying this scene.

Needless to say, this hypothesis offers a solution to other agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark, although their circumstances do not indicate as clearly as this case that Luke was the source for Matthew and not vice-versa.

Equally, this hypothesis provides a different way to look at the so-called Mark-Q over-laps, as in this passage introducing Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness,
where both the Markan base and some sort of relationship between Matthew and Luke are evident. As I pointed out, categorizing such cases as “Mark-Q Overlaps” amounts to special pleading, since – in view of the significant number of such passages that exist – it is a way of supporting a theory that otherwise tries to account for double tradition material in a triple tradition context. I.e. it is less contorted logic, in such cases, to admit that Matthew or Luke worked from the other than to argue that in these few cases they used Mark plus a parallel account in Q.

In fact, based on the hypothesis that Matthew used Luke, there are some hints of his refining of Luke, as in his more compact “he fasted,” over against Luke’s “He ate nothing,” as well as in his concise “afterwards,” over against Luke’s more cumbersome, “when they were over.” Of course, such low-level stylistic differences can hardly prove that Matthew worked off of Luke, even if these changes make sense under that hypothesis.

Of greater significance is Matthew’s transfer of the time period of “forty days” from the specification of how long Jesus was in the wilderness, down into the statement about fasting, to specify how long Jesus fasted. And, of course, he expands that statement from simply forty days into forty days and forty nights. As we’ll see, Matthew portrays Jesus as a second Moses, and so he likes to work in allusions to Moses wherever he can. In this case he is doubtless thinking of Exodus 34:28, part of the story of Moses on the mountain, receiving the Torah: “He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water.” The association of forty days and forty nights with fasting is his deliberate reminiscence of the traditions about Moses, applied to Jesus.

On the assumption that either Luke or Matthew worked off the other, it is more reasonable to suppose that Matthew worked off of Luke, since Luke retains Mark’s placement of forty days and forty nights, while Matthew is the one to change it.

However, let’s notice that even though the double tradition carries the narrative of the temptations, there are differences in wording, some rather extensive, as you’ll notice by the stretches of black words in Luke, especially. What’s more striking, though, is that Matthew and Luke have the second and third temptations in different orders.

In fact, you might well recall the Q passage from Matthew 7 and Luke 11 we looked at earlier, where Matthew’s second example – of a child asking for a fish and their parent giving a snake – stands first in Luke, while Matthew’s first example – of asking for bread and giving a stone is replaced in Luke by asking for an egg and giving a scorpion. As I said, this is perhaps due to the Q source having been transmitted in different forms orally. And that might also account for the transposition we find in the parallel passages of Matthew 4 and Luke 4.
The more problematic issue is the resolution of triple tradition passages such as this one and the account of John the Baptist by labeling them “Mark-Q Overlap.” While this might make good sense from the standpoint of the Two Source hypothesis, looked at otherwise, it is a case of special pleading – that is, the way you account for strong agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark in triple tradition material is to posit their use of a common source, even though that source is detected only on the basis of double tradition material, i.e. passages found only in Matthew and Luke.

What, then, is the option? Rather than shunting the problems of the agreements between Matthew and Luke aside, perhaps we should find in them a key to a different resolution of the issue of sources. Obviously Matthew and Luke have drawn on more sources than just Mark.

In fact, Luke himself, in his dedicatory address to Theophilus, speaks of the variety of sources he had available: ¹Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.”

This is an important statement about how Luke composed his gospel that we’ll return to again later. For the moment, I want to point out Luke’s acknowledgement that “many have undertaken to set down an orderly account.” His is not the first account he knows of, nor even the second. His vague “many” keeps us from knowing just how many such accounts Luke knew, but it suggests they were considerable.

Notice that he then compares these written accounts with another form of tradition: “just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.” The phrase “servants of the word” is used in early Christian literature to designate those who proclaimed the gospel orally. I.e. besides written accounts, Luke was familiar with oral accounts of Jesus’ work. This sort of reliance on written and oral accounts appears not to have been unusual in the early church, as attested by these words of Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis, who lived during the first half of the second century: “If by chance someone who had been a follower of the elders should come my way, I inquired about the words of the elders – what Andrew or Peter said, or Philip, or Thomas or James, or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples…. For I did not think that information from books would profit me as much as information from a living and abiding voice.” What’s startling here is that even into the second century, while Papias acknowledges the availability of books, he voices his preference for “a living and abiding voice.” Oral tradition did not die out once Matthew, Mark, Luke and John had been composed; it remained a vital source.