Review and Preview

We are continuing our Synoptic Gospels course here. We have so far looked at three major topics here: the historical Jesus, the Jewish background, and introduction of Jesus and narratives with the samples of the visit of the wise men. We are ready to go on to section four now: authorship and date of the Synoptic Gospels. And we will also throw in here at the end characteristics of the Synoptic Gospels as well. We want to sketch the historical evidence for the Synoptic Gospels being written by their traditional authors, Matthew, Mark and Luke, and all before 70 AD. We suggest that Matthew was written first, also traditional, [but] that the order of Mark and Luke is uncertain. Traditionally, Mark is next, though we favor Luke in the late 50s and Mark in the early 60s, shortly after Matthew was translated into Greek.

So let’s go have a look at these things. We will start with the authorship of the Synoptics and go through each one of those and look first at internal evidence then at external evidence, and then we will come back up to date.

Authorship of the Synoptics: Matthew

So, authorship of the Synoptics: Matthew’s authorship. Internal evidence, well except for the title, (and we, by the way, do not have a copy of Matthew with any other person listed in the title) the text is anonymous; that is, the writer never indicates when he is alluding to himself in an identifiable manner. We don’t know if the title was put on the autograph by the author or not. If you are familiar with the titles, we will mention them now and again. The titles of the King James are: the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Gospel of Saint Mark, or Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Gospel according to Saint Mark, etc. The earliest titles we have from the papyri are: The Gospel according to Matthew, The Gospel according to Mark, and The Gospel according to Luke. In the earliest parchments
some of those are shortened even to just “according to,” where “Gospel” is understood. Given that Matthew wrote it, it’s interesting that we are still on the internal evidence.

It’s interesting that in his apostle list, Matthew 10: 2-4, he calls himself a tax collector, which was not exactly a popular profession in New Testament Palestine. The tax collectors have never been super popular with the tax payers anyway, anytime in history, but in the Roman Empire where you had areas that had been conquered in one way or another—although Palestine at this point was not too fiercely conquered—the inhabits did not appreciate paying taxes to Rome. The Roman collection method at this point led to a great deal of corruption with over collecting and things of that sort. So that tax collectors were viewed as traitors and crooks and various other sorts of things. The Mark, Luke and Acts apostle lists omit this detail about Matthew being a tax collector. This perhaps suggests humility in Matthew and may also suggest a probable reason for all the Gospels being anonymous, namely, to keep the focus on Jesus. That’s all we know about internal evidence of the Gospel [of] Matthew. So consistently the titles of all the Gospels traditionally have these particular names.

External evidence: we are going to walk through the naming [of] various writers and saying a little bit about them as well. The earliest writer we’ve got that makes a statement of this sort is a fellow named Papias, and he’s writing perhaps around 130 AD. In his work, The Exposition of the Oracles, the Lord, we have this remark: “Then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew dialect, but everyone interpreted them as he was able.” The term “the oracles” is the Greek *ta logia* and is rather regularly used for “revelations from God”; so it is a rather strong term. “In the Hebrew dialect”: the word “dialect” is the actual word we get our word from, *dialecto*. There is a possible range of meanings of it, but the Hebrew Language is certainly within that range. The original of Papias’ *The Exposition of the Oracles*[of] the Lord is not extant. The extracts of it are sighted by several ancient and medieval authors, and the whole work was apparently still extant in the Middle Ages. Our citation comes from Eusebius’ *Church History* written about 325, give or take a bit, [in] Book 3, chapter 39, section 16.
What’s meant here by the oracles: was this “The Gospel”? Liberals, or those who hold the two document theory—we’ll look at that later in our discussion of the synoptic problem—the oracles are the Q source, and evangelicals have often said the same thing as well. However, Papias later uses “oracle” to refer to Mark. Everyone agrees that he is referring to the Gospel there. Irenaeus gives the same tradition regarding its origin, but explicitly identifies as the Gospel Matthew.

What is meant by the Hebrew dialect? This could refer to [the] Hebrew or Aramaic language, which was also called “Hebrew” in antiquity. This would imply that the original Matthew was in Hebrew or Aramaic and was translated later into Greek.

Some take dialect to mean Greek written in the Hebraistic style. This theory does not fit Papias’ comment well, as it is hard to see how a simple stylistic difference would make Matthew so difficult to interpret. The idea of a language foreign to a Greek audience is more in keeping with Papias’ remark. Recently, George Howard at the University of Georgia has argued that a rather poorly preserved text of the original Hebrew of Matthew has come down to us in a medieval, Jewish polemical, anti-Christian text called “Evan Bohan” (see George Howard’s work, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text*, published by Mercer University Press in 1987).

Irenaeus is our next author that we hear from in this regard. He is writing about maybe 50 years after Papias, around 180 AD, and [in] his work *Against Heresies* he says, “Now Matthew published also a book of the Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church.” This comes from *Against Heresies*, Book 3, chapter 1, section 2, which survives us only in the Latin, [for] the whole of the *Against Heresies*, but pieces are quoted here and there; and the Greek of Irenaeus is quoted [by] Eusebius [in] *Church History*, Book 5, chapter 2, section 8.

Note that Irenaeus calls Matthew’s work a “Gospel” and puts it in the Hebrew dialect and gives it a date: “while Peter and Paul were in Rome.” We know Paul was in Rome in the early 60s A.D, and so presumably that is the time period being referred to.
A third witness to the authorship of Matthew is that of Pantinus, writing about the same time as Irenaeus, so around 180 AD. We have his information only indirectly in Eusebius. Eusebius says in Church History, (book 5, chapter 10, section 3) [that] “Pantinus also was one of them and is said to have gone to India, where the story goes that he found the Gospel according to Matthew which had preceded his arrival among certain people there that have learned of Christ, when Bartholomew, one of the Apostles, had preached to them and that he had left the writing of Matthew in Hebrew letters, which was also preserved to the time indicated.” Pantinus was a Christian from Alexandria, Egypt, who was head of the catechetical school there ahead of Clement and Origen. Notice this is indirect information: “The story goes that,” so I don’t know what to make of that. It is not nearly as strong as the others. Pantinus notes that Matthew is written in Hebrew letters; that could still be Aramaic or Hebrew, but couldn’t very well be Greek. The text is said to have been preserved still as of the late second century. The remark about India is not far-fetched, as there was travel between India and the Roman world at this time.

Our fourth testimony in this regard is Clement of Alexandria. He was writing about twenty years later, around 200 AD. Clement was head of the Catechetical School after Pantinus. Catechetical School doesn’t tell you a whole lot about what this organization was, but we don’t have an exactly equivalent term. Catechetical school sounds like a Sunday school class and a church. Well, it was kind of partly that, but it was also what we might call a seminary, so it really covered a whole range of studies for Christians who were from the early new converts up to fairly advanced. Clement of Alexandria was head of [the] Catechetical School after Pantinus. He left Alexandria during the persecution in 203 and then died sometime between 210 and 217 AD.

Here’s Clement's quote. This again is a citation by Eusebius, “again in the same books and is referring to Clement’s outlines. Clement gives a tradition of the early presbyters concerning the order of the Gospels in the following manner. He said that those Gospels which contained the genealogies were written first, but the Gospel according to Mark had this occasion.” What have we got there? It is the tradition of the
presbyters. So Clement means that the information he has comes from leaders ahead of his time, so that would presumably go back to Pantinus or so, or maybe earlier than that. He explicitly states that Matthew and Luke were written first, so even before Mark. That’s going to be actually the suggested order we line up with here when we pull everything together.

A fifth witness regarding the Gospel of Matthew is Origen, and he overlaps Clement very slightly, but is writing perhaps here around 240 AD, so a full generation afterwards. Origen was Clement’s successor in Egypt. He later went to Caesarea after some disagreements with the officials in the church in Alexandria. There he built up a large library, which we think was the largest Christian library in antiquity, which was eventually inherited by Eusebius; so [it] became the basis for a great deal of his material in church history. In Origen’s Commentary on Matthew, Origen says this: (again this is Eusebius citing Origen. It is third person.) “In the first of the books in the Gospel according to Matthew observing the ecclesiastical canon, he [that is Origen] testifies that he knows only four Gospels, writing somewhat as follows, as he has earned by tradition concerning the four Gospels, which alone are undisputed in the church of God under heaven, that first there was written was the Gospel according to Matthew, the onetime Publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ who published it in the Hebrew language [and here uses Gramicon letters] for those from Judaism who believed.” I will come back and quote more of Origen’s statements when we get to Mark, Luke and John, etc.

Question about the order here: Is Origen giving Chronological order here? “It is the first of the books,” says Eusebius, “observing the ecclesiastical canon.” So is this first written chronologically, or first written in canonical order? I don’t know. Language there translated his letters, as I said Gramicon, and this is clearly the same dialect. Well, that is the five earliest writers, if you like.

The next two witnesses are important more for their access to written documents, which have not survived today, than they are likely to have access to reliable oral tradition; already by Origen we’re out 200 years after the ministry of Jesus.
Eusebius is the major historian of the ancient church, and Jerome is one of his best scholars, so six [i.e, the sixth witness] is a testimony here from Caesarea, writing about 325, that we are now 300 years out of the ministry of Jesus. Eusebius here was bishop of Caesarea. If you remember, that is over on the Palestine coast, and this is after the end of the Roman persecution. So this had not been a Jewish territory for a long time now. But he had access to the library of Origen. Eusebius says in his Church History (Book 3, chapter 24, sections 5 and 6): “Yet of all the disciples of the Lord, only Matthew and John have left us memoirs, and they as it is reported had recourse to writing only under the pressure of necessity. From Matthew, who preached earlier to Hebrews when he was about to go to others also, committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue, compensated for his writing as a lack of his presence to those from whom he went away.”

One interesting comment in here is the use of the term “memoirs.” “Only the disciples Matthew and John left us memoirs.” It is an ancient genre, a genre for famous people thinking over events in their own lives and writing them up. Matthew and John, he says according to his quotation here, had not planned to write, but when they saw the need arise as they were leaving Palestine, they did so.

Now we move to Jerome, and he’s writing another couple generations after Eusebius, about 400, in his Lives of Illustrious Men. Matthew was the fifth of the illustrious men. So this is The Lives of Illustrious Men 5. “Matthew, who is also called Levi and who changed from a publican [tax collector] to an apostle, was the first one in Judea to write a gospel of Christ in Hebrew letters and words for those who from the circumcision who believed, who translated afterward into Greek is not sufficiently certain.”

So that is kind of quick tour of the seven testimonies, and we have no contradictory testimonies to these from antiquity, and they allow us to give the summary on the authorship of Matthew. First, that Matthew wrote the Gospel ascribed to him is the unanimous opinion of tradition, but perhaps not independently of the titles on the extant manuscripts. This is consistent with the title and content of the first Gospel. No
other names are associated with it. The Early church knew of fake gospels and rejected them.

Second, Matthew’s Gospel was the first written is also given several times in the tradition. This is frequently disputed today as most liberals and many conservatives think Matthew’s Gospel uses Mark.

Third, Matthew’s Gospel was written in Hebrew, or perhaps Aramaic, is a regular feature of the tradition. This too is often disputed today because the extant Greek Gospel does not look like translation Greek from a Semitic language. By “translation Greek” we mean a translation in which a lot of the Hebrew syntax and vocabulary range is carried over into Greek. The Septuagint, for example, is translation Greek in much of its text, though it varies from book to book in that regard, and, of course, it could be that the translation Greek tried to give it in a more fluent Greek style. Some of the Old Testament translations into Greek were concerned about style, for instance Symmachus and Theodocian used a Greek style, whereas Aquila gave very literal translation Greek even more so than the Septuagint, which is a kind of intermediate between those. If we try to think of English examples, the NASB is something like “translation English” and, of course, the English of an interlinear is even more like translation English, whereas the NIV or such is a good English style.

Who made the translation? Well, we don’t know. Perhaps Matthew made a free translation at a later time. We don’t know for sure if it was a translation, although I think the testimony we looked at points that way, nor who made it. How much effect on inspiration would it have if Matthew, as we have it, was a translation? Well, of course, no problem if Matthew translated it. We perhaps would be more concerned if it was done by somebody besides an Apostle or an Apostle’s trusted associate. After all, Mark and Luke are responsible for two of the Gospels. However, the church has been without the Bible for long periods of church history. The western church had only Latin through the Middle Ages, and even today most Americans don’t know what the biblical language is at all. Most Christians through much of history have not had the Bible and the original languages.
What languages were used in Palestine at New Testament times? Well Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek were all used in the Bar Kokhba materials. You remember Bar Kokhba is the one who led the Rebellion of 132-135AD in our Jewish backgrounds. And there were Bar Kokhba materials that have been found recently in some of the caves there in Israel. Latin, Greek and Hebrew, or Aramaic, were used in the sign over the cross. We don’t know how many people were multilingual. Since several of Jesus’ New Testament statements are in transliterated Aramaic: *eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani, talitha cum* and such. This was probably Jesus’s native language.

**Mark’s Authorship**

Well, that’s a fast tour of the authorship of Matthew. Look secondly at Mark’s authorship—internal evidence like Matthew—except for the book title Mark is anonymous in its text. Some have suggested that the style seems to fit the personality of Peter, and we’ll see in a moment there’s a tradition that Peter is a source of Mark’s gospel. So, yes I think it was Westcott that suggested that the style of Peter is impressionable rather that reflective, emotional rather than logical, and gives many details including Jesus’s emotions and looks and gestures, Peter’s own thoughts, and this would suggest a close contact with Peter. But Luke 9:33 also gives Peter’s response at the transfiguration, so that’s not quite unique to the Gospel of Mark. The outline of Mark is close to that of Peter’s talk at Cornelius’s house in Acts 10. Both start with John’s baptism rather than Jesus’s birth or preexistence like the other Gospels.

The standpoint of the narrative of Mark is consistent with Peter as author. What do we mean by the standpoint of the narrative? Well, we don’t mean that the author refers to himself in the first person, rather that he structures the narrative so that a reader tends to identify with him or his group, and we see that rather like the way the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke seem to be written from Joseph’s or Mary’s view point. To take a modern sample, if you’ve read the Harry Potter series, with only a few exceptions, they are all written from the standpoint of Harry. That is, the reader knows what Harry knows but doesn’t know what Dumbledore knows or what any of the other characters,
Hermione, knows, or something of that sort, unless they say something to Harry, and then the reader knows it. So that would be kind of what’s going on in that direction. For example, if we compare Mark 5:37 and Luke 9:23, raising Jairus’s daughter, Matthew tells little of what happened in the house. Mark gives much more detail: gives the age of the girl, Jesus’ remark to give her some food, and the people put out of the room. This is consistent with the idea that Matthew remains outside and got a few details later, while Peter went in and saw all the action, which is, in fact, what we are told happened.

Another item that we can probably put under external evidence that might relate to authorship is Mark 14:51: the young man that loses his sheet at the arrest of Jesus. That makes the best sense as a brief sketch of Mark himself. [This] makes best sense as a brief sketch of Mark himself, otherwise it’s strange to introduce someone with no explanation, especially when they have no connection with the narrative. I was thinking of Alfred Hitchcock movies where he always has a little vignette of himself stuck in the movie somewhere. You’re inside a store or something, and there’s kind of a pan across to the front window, and here’s this guy looking in the window, and then he wanders away or something like that. [That] would be an example of what we perhaps have in mind here. So that’s the internal evidence regarding Mark in authorship. It looks like it might reflect Peter’s personality, and then maybe this little sketch might be Mark himself.

External evidence for the authorship of Mark: we’ve got an even more extensive statement by Papias than we did for Matthew. Papias is writing about 130 AD, and he says this: “And this the Presbyter used to say: Mark indeed, since he was the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, but not in order the things either said or done by the LORD, as much as he remembered. For he neither heard the LORD nor followed him, but afterwards, as I’ve said, Peter, who fitted his discourses to the needs of his hearers, but not as if making a narrative of the LORD’s sayings. Consequently, Mark is writing some things just as he remembered [and] erred in nothing. For he was careful of one thing—not to omit anything of the things he had heard, nor to falsify anything in them.” That’s Expositions of the Oracles of the LORD here cited from Eusebius’ Church History; Book 3, chapter 39, section 15. This is the most complete statement from Papias regarding any
Gospel. The brackets I have in my printed text here, I have after Presbyter, “[apostle John?]” and “the things either said or done by the LORD as much as he” and then in brackets “[Peter, Mark remembered]” etc… are either explanatory material added by the translator to clarify statements, or they’re my comments. Papias is citing information which goes back before him. The Presbyter or Elder is most likely the author of 2nd and 3rd John who calls himself The Elder. There’s some argument over who that is, but my guess is it’s the apostle John.

Irenaeus [Greek Name] does note that Papias had studied under the apostle John. There’s a problem here of where the quotation from the elder ends and where the comment of Papias picks up, but my suggestion is it goes here, “not in order, the things either said or done by the LORD as much as he remembered…” and then we begin to get after that point not the Elder’s statement which Papias remembered, but now Papias’s explanation: “For he neither heard the LORD nor followed him, but afterwards, as I’ve said, heard and followed Peter…” etc. I think that’s a good suggestion for the break because the next sentences he says are in the first person.

   Mark is here called “the interpreter of Peter,” and that might refer to a language that Peter did not know. Peter probably knew Greek as he wrote 1 and 2 Peter, but perhaps Mark translated it into Latin. However, Mark could be called an interpreter of Peter just because he wrote Peter’s memoirs for him, so that could be straightforward. The phrase “accurately, but not in order…” is a little strange since many feel that the chronology, or order of events, in Mark is quite good. This might, however, refer to Mark’s original note taking. That is Peter did not give the data in chronological order, but rather, as Papias himself said here, “fitted it to the need of his hearers…” as he gave the messages in various Christian churches. In this case Mark’s compilation is in order, but the data given to him by Peter was not in order.

   How about, “as much as he remembered…?” That probably also refers to Peter but not to Mark. “Accurate first occurrence…” is within the direct quote from The Elder; we suggest John. Probably Papias is following what we might think of as rabbinic usage here. The student memorizes exactly a teacher’s statement, the Mishnah we might say,
and then gives an explanation of that statement, the Gemara. So the quotation up [is] there before our asterisk, which would read this way: “Mark indeed, since he was the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, but not in order the things either said or done by the LORD, as much as he remembered.” That would be the Elder’s statement, and then the remarks after that would be Papias’s explanation.

Well, that’s our first testimony regarding Mark. The second comes from a source that we didn’t mention in connection with Matthew, and that’s Justin Martyr. He is writing just ten or twenty years after Papias, 140 to 150 AD. We have two works preserved from him, his *Dialogue with Trypho*, which took place apparently shortly after the Bar Kokhba War, so perhaps to 140; and then his *First Apology*, which might be rather later than that. After speaking several times in the *Dialogue with Trypho* of the memoirs the Apostles called Gospels, and having just mentioned Peter, Justin said it is written in his memoirs that he changed Peter’s name as well as the sons of Zebedee, Boanerges. Well, if you look up Boanerges, you’ll realize it’s an allusion to Mark 3:16-17 and occurs nowhere else. So the natural reading of it is: it’s written in Peter’s memoirs that he, Christ, changed Peter’s name as well as the names of the son of Zebedee, Boanerges. The assumption that “his memoirs” refer to Peter as author and not to Christ is, I think, reasonable because Justin never refers to them as Christ’s memoirs, but always to the memoirs of the apostles.

A third testimony regarding Mark is Irenaeus writing now about a generation after Justin Martyr, 180 AD. We’ve already looked at the beginning of this statement, but I’ll pick that up again. “Matthew published while Peter and Paul were preaching a Gospel in Rome and founding the Church. After their Departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also handed down to us in writing the things preached by Peter.” The ambiguous element in this particular quotation is the word “departure;” it’s “exodus,” okay? And “exodus” is used rather commonly in Greek for two different things, physical departure, and as a euphemism for departure from this life. So, is Irenaeus speaking of after the death of Peter and Paul, or after they left Rome? Both of those constructions are common. So you will not get the answer for that by just looking at a lexicon, if you like.
Fourth testimony is from Clement [of] Alexandria. We’re looking at the same citation of Clement and outlines that we were looking at a little bit earlier where he said that the Gospels with the genealogies were written first. And then he goes on to say in that sentence, “The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion when Peter had preached the word publicly in Rome and had declared the Gospel by that Spirit. Those who were present—there were many—sought out Mark since he had followed him and remembered the things that had [been] spoken, to write out the things that had been said. When he had done this, he gave the Gospel to those who asked him. When Peter learned of it later, he neither obstructed nor commended it.” Its outline is cited Eusebius’ *Church History*, Book 6, Chapter 14, Section 5.

Note that in this citation by Clement, Peter is still alive when the Gospel is written because he reacts to it afterwards. Peter is not sure what to do with the writing; his puzzlement somewhat resembles what he experienced when the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles in Cornelius’ house, not to mention the time Jesus was transfigured with Elijah and Moses, and he wasn’t quite sure what to do, suggesting building tabernacles or something. Peter, as you recall, is one who is fast with the mouth, and not always fast with thinking it through. Outspoken, I think, we call that.

The fifth testimony is Tertullian. Tertullian is in the Latin part of [the] Roman Empire, North Africa, and he is writing around 200 AD. He says in his work *Against Marcion*, chapter 4, Book 2, Book 4, chapter 2, or chapter 4, section 2: “So then of Apostles, John and Mathew instill us with faith of Apostolic men. Luke and Mark renew it.” This is Tertullian referring to the order of writing here.

Well, I doubt it; I suspect he only has in mind the strength of the witnesses regarding their proximity to Jesus. So Apostles are people who spend three years with Jesus, [like] John and Mathew. “Apostolic men” are people who spent years with Apostles, Luke and Mark; I think that’s probably what he is saying there.

Origen is writing at about 255 AD. “We had already seen first the Gospel of Mathew was written, etc.” This continues in the same sentence. “Then, secondly, was written the Gospel according to Mark who made it as Peter instructed him, whom also he,
[who is Peter] acknowledges his son in the Catholic Epistles in these words saying: ‘the church in Babylon elect together with you and Mark, my son, salute you’” (1 Peter 5:13). Well, “secondly Mark” would most naturally refer to chronological order, but perhaps in the context only the canonical order you remember there was a remark about recording the ecclesiastical canon back in the previous sentence.

Summary on authorship: First, that Mark wrote the Gospel ascribed to him is [the] unanimous opinion of tradition as is the belief that it gives us Peter’s preaching. Mark’s authorship is supported by extant manuscript titles. There is less argument over Mark’s authorship compared to Mathew or John. There is, however, considerably more resistance in liberal circles to the idea that he gives us Peter’s preaching.

Secondly, these traditions are consistent with the nature of the Gospel itself in a somewhat stronger more obvious way than was the case for Mathew. The linkage to Peter is not explicit to the manuscripts but is consistent with the tone of the Gospel as seen above under our internal evidence, and also the little vignette of Mark 14:51 and 52.

Thirdly, some see a contradiction in the tradition regarding the date of Mark and the time of writing relative to Luke. Irenaeus is interpreted as saying that Mark wrote after Peter’s death. Clement of Alexandria clearly implies that Mark wrote before Peter’s death. Contradiction, however, is not necessary here as Irenaeus may be referring to Peter and Paul leaving Rome alive, [a] literal “exodus,” rather than to their death, [a] figurative “exodus.” It appears that Paul at least did leave Rome after his first imprisonment according to Acts 28 and tradition.

Another alleged contraction relates to the order of Mark and Luke. Many traditions give the order Mathew, Mark, Luke, John, but Clement says that the Gospels with the genealogies, Mathew, Luke, were written first. So we would have something like Mathew, Luke, then Mark and John. We will need to come back and look at that when we look at the date of the Gospels.

That brings us to consider Luke’s authorship, and again internal and external evidence. Well, internal evidence: except for its title, the Gospel text is anonymous. However, the prologue of Acts links Acts to Luke, and internal features in Acts suggest
that the author of Acts was a companion of Paul, either Luke or Jesus Justice by trying to eliminate people who are or aren’t around at the right times. The prologues of both Luke and Acts mentions Theophilus. Acts’ prologue refers to a previous account, which is clearly the Gospel we call Luke. Also related to internal evidence: the vocabularies of Luke and Acts are similar and indicate a well-educated author with an unusual knowledge of medical terms. The classic work on this is William Clark Hobart, *The Medical Language of Saint Luke*, where this evidence is organized and presented for you. Well, that’s the internal evidence on Luke’s authorship.

External evidence: We have fewer early references to Luke than we do for Mathew and Mark. Perhaps no one saw fit to report Papias’ comments on this Gospel if he made any; [but] since we don’t have Papias in its entirety but only scattered quotations, we really don’t know. The earliest source we have—actually, two of them about tied for the earliest—is what we call the Muratorian Canon written apparently late in the second century; so, say, 180 AD approximately, and written apparently in Italy. The Muratorian Canon is a list of books belonging to the New Testament, which is why it is called a canon; that was the term used for a list at that time, but named for its discoverer, Muritori, in 1740 rather than its author. They discovered pieces. It’s a fragment with the end and the beginning missing In the manuscript we’ve got possible evidence that some of the middle was missing in one of its ancestors. We cannot tell that here. It survives in a single 8th century manuscript, which one scholar describes: “Written in barbarous Latin by a careless and ignorant scribe.” I am not qualified to respond to those sorts of things.

It’s clearly a translation of a Greek original, that it’s a Latin translation Greek, “Translation Latin” I guess we call that. From internal evidence it dates back to the late second century. It was written in or near Rome, which it calls “The City.” It refers to one of the early Popes as “in our own times,” so suggests that the author’s life overlaps with his; its Pious, the early second century Pope. It refers to Hermas, which is the brother of Pious, who is apparently Bishop of Rome in the author’s own lifetime. The canon starts out this way: “But he was present among them and so he put.”
The third book of the Gospel is “According to Luke.” “Luke is a physician after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken him with him as a companion of his traveling after he made his investigation wrote his own name. But neither did he see the Lord in the flesh and thus as he was able to investigate so he also begins to tell the story from the nativity of John.” As only Luke begins with the birth of John the Baptist, the correct Gospel is in view. No other known Gospel, including Apocrypha ones, begins with John’s nativity. Mark as a traveling companion fits with the testimony of Acts. So that’s the Muratorian Canon.

Second, Irenaeus from around the same time, (The Muratorian Canon we think from Italy somewhere), Irenaeus is writing from France, but grew up in Asia Minor. We’ll jump into his sentence again, which we already looked at. “Now Mathew published while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel while in Rome and founding a church. After their departure Mark, the disciple and interpreter Peter, handed down the writings and things preached by Peter. Luke, also a follower of Paul, also put down a Gospel preached by that one, and then afterwards John.” So that’s what Irenaeus has to say there. Irenaeus seems to be giving the general chronological order of writing, but there is one little interesting quirk in it. He puts Luke third but he doesn’t quite say that Luke is written third. After Peter and Paul’s departure, Mark handed down to us right … etc., and then Luke also put down in a book, then afterwards John.” So Mark is clearly put after Mathew, and John is put after Luke; but Luke is just put “Luke also,” so it might be intended to be chronological, which is certainly reasonable, but it doesn’t quite say so explicitly.

Third testimony is Clement of Alexandria writing here about 208 from Egypt. And this is Eusebius again [quoting Clement]. Again in the same books Clement gives a tradition from the early presbyters concerning the order [of] the Gospels in the following manner. He said, “The Gospels which contained the genealogies were written first, but the Gospel according to Mark had this occasion.” So notice: the chronological order of Clement seems different than Irenaeus in that Luke precedes Mark.
Two last testimonies regarding Luke: Tertullian writing about 215 from North Africa—that same quote that we had before. “So then of Apostles John and Matthew instill us in faith the apostolic men Luke and Mark renew it,” for Luke’s Gospel men are used to describe Paul.

And finally Origen, writing from about 225 in Egypt: “And thirdly, that According to Luke [is] the Gospel praised by Paul for whom they did for the Gentiles.” The remark about “the Gospel praised by Paul” is probably referring to 2 Corinthians 8:18, but most commentators doubt that this is what Paul had in mind. Where it says, “According to my gospel,” most writers today think he is referring to his message rather than a written work about Jesus.

Lastly, Eusebius writing about 330, in his Church History, Book 3, chapter 4, sections 6-7. “Luke in regard to race being of those of Antioch, but by profession a physician. Since he had been very much with Paul and had no mean association with the rest of the apostles, left us examples of the therapy of souls, which he acquired from them into inspired works. The Gospel which he testifies that he also wrote according to what those handed down to him who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word, all of whom he also says he had followed even from the beginning. And the Acts of the Apostles, which he composed from what he had learned; not by hearing, but with his eyes. But men say that Paul was accustomed to refer to his Gospel whenever writing as if it were about some Gospel of his own.” Eusebius may be drawing inferences from New Testament passages as “my gospel” probably refers to both messages. Many of Paul's references to "my gospel" probably predate the writing of Luke.

That's our quick tour there. Summary and authorship here: that Luke was a follower of Paul and a physician, wrote the Gospel ascribed to him, though we have no remarks quite so early as from Papias from Matthew and Mark. By 200 AD we have information from all of the geographical areas of early Christianity agreeing that Luke is the author. This implies that the titles were at work for a long time, or that early Christians had access to common knowledge. That the author was a physician and that he traveled with Paul is consistent with the internal vocabulary of the third Gospel and with
its linkage to Acts. Thus, based on internal evidence, Luke is most likely to be the author. The Gospel is frequently mention third, perhaps preserving a tradition regarding the order of authorship. Alternatively, this could be an early binding, or canon, order. [In the] Muratorian Canon that Irenaeus and Origen all cite, Luke as third. If Luke is really written third and after Paul's death, then Clement is in error, and some internal problems developed regarding the date of Acts.

**Date of the Gospels**

So we turn to consider the date of these Gospels. So we've looked at the authorship, and it’s interesting, I think in retrospect, to point out that we have no titles on any of the surviving manuscripts given to other authors. So ask yourself: Would these be the authors that people would actually have gravitated to? I think the answer would be well, John maybe; but Mark and Luke, not; and Matthew, not a major character among the Apostles, [yet] this is really the major thing he’s noted for. So my suggestion is this really does go back to real knowledge. It is seen in the lack of disagreement on these things.

**Date of Matthew**

Let’s look at the date of the Synoptic Gospels: the date of Matthew’s Gospel, the date of Mark’s Gospel and the date of Luke’s Gospel. And we’re going to look at internal evidence and external evidence. So date of Matthew’s Gospel: internal evidence is of very little help here. Two remarks suggest that the Gospel was not written immediately after the Resurrection like in the 30s, and that is Matthew 28:8: “The place is called the field of blood to this day.” This suggests there is some space between the event in which Judas hung himself and the event of writing the Gospel. Then Matthew 28:15 regarding the claim of the soldiers that the body was stolen: “This is widely spread among the Jews to this day.” So, both imply [a] significant time interval between the event and the writing, but they don’t say how much.
Liberals tend to date Matthew after 70 AD, partly to place it after Mark, which they date just before 70, and partly to postdate Jesus’ predictions. We have in Matthew 21:41 the parable of the tenant farmers who kill the son, which implies the destruction of the nation Israel for killing Jesus. So they allege that after 70 AD the story was made up to fit what happened. But, of course, if Jesus knows the future, that’s not really a strong argument.

And then Matthew 22:7, in the wedding banquet, the Jews refused to come and beat on his servants, so the king destroyed the murderers and set their city on fire. If it’s Jerusalem, then it is written after 70 AD is the argument.

And then Matthew 23:38, “Your house is being left you desolate,” either Jerusalem their house or the temple their house [is] destroyed, so after 70 AD.

Then Matthew 24: The Olivet Discourse describes the fall of Jerusalem. So it also must be written afterwards. Liberals say Mark could be written just before the fall of Jerusalem since that Gospel does not include these details as clearly. Obviously, this is not problem for believers, since all of these are in predictive contexts and Jesus can predict the future.

External evidence on the date of Matthew: Matthew was obviously written before the earliest surviving manuscripts. The papyri P64 and P67—which were actually the same papyrus, got numbered differently before it was realized by looking at the manuscripts that they were the same—and P77 represent two manuscripts from about 200 AD. So the Gospel had to be written before the year 200 AD. Well, probably nobody has denied that except for a few early atheists who felt that it was all written by monks in the Middle Ages.

The Epistle of Barnabas, probably written around 132 AD, cites Matthew 22:14: “Many are called but few are chosen,” by saying “As the scripture says,” but doesn’t say Matthew. People say Matthew was written by then pseudo-Barnabas who misremembered the quote as an Old Testament Scripture.; that Barnabas, like Christians at the time, viewed Matthew as Scripture. Traditionally, authorship would require that it be written within Matthew’s lifetime, but we don’t know how long he lived—probably no
later than 100 AD. The information that we do have from tradition is that John outlived everybody else, and that he lived just into the time of Trajan. So generally it is given at around 100 AD. So Matthew probably died no later than 100 AD, and probably much earlier. This is obviously limited by Matthew’s age. Since Matthew was an adult with some authority, he was a tax collector by about 30 AD, it is presumed that he was probably at least 30 and maybe older than that by 30 AD. So it is doubtful he was living after 100 AD.

Thus the traditions imply that Matthew was written in the first century. Allusions in the Apostolic Fathers like Clement, about 95 AD, agree with this. Irenaeus’ tradition is dated 61 or 68 AD, “While Peter and Paul were in Rome preaching the gospel.” Several other traditions make Matthew’s Gospel the first one written, so it might conceivably be even earlier. Luke, as we’ll suggest below, was probably written in the late 50s, so Matthew’s date would thus be somewhat earlier than that.

Some various proposals for Matthew’s date: these range from AD 37—and whoever made the note in the old Scofield Reference Bible—and 125 AD is the latest I’ve run into by my teacher Robert Kraft, a liberal at the University of Pennsylvania. 37 is probably too early for the “to this day” references; 125 AD seems to be far too skeptical of historical sources. It doesn’t explain why Christians and even heretics accepted it and even used only the four Gospels.

My suggestion for the date looks like this – it’s got some speculation to it– and that is that Irenaeus is slightly mistaken on the Peter and Paul thing, and suggests that Matthew wrote a Hebrew gospel in the 40s or perhaps the early 50s before he left Jerusalem. Now when Paul visits Jerusalem, he found Peter and John there. Matthew later made a Greek addition in the 60s for wider use, thus Irenaeus … the language, but mistakes his publication in Greek for its original Hebrew composition. There is no way to prove that; it’s just proposed.

Papias’ statement implies that for some time Matthew was the only written gospel available, and it was in demand even in its Hebrew form as apparently no Greek translations had been made yet; and that seems to fit that. This model is proposed to fit
the tradition of Matthew being the first Gospel written with the evidence of the pre-60 date of Luke. We will come back to that when we get to the date of Luke.

**Date of Mark**

Mark’s Gospel, internal evidence: nothing direct, liberals like to date by post-dating predictions so they tend to put it late. A solution that synoptic problem will have a varying year depending on whether we see Mark written before or after Matthew and Luke. External evidence, see the various fathers we sight from above, based on the account of surviving manuscripts and citations by the church fathers, Mark was considerably less popular then Matthew in the early church. That is of some interest particularly because it’s got the tradition that Peter is the source behind it and would probably make best sense if Matthew had already been circulating for a while.

There are several dating schemes for Mark. First what we might call the concordant dating scheme, that is a conflict minimizing scheme, and that interprets the testimony of the church fathers in such a way as to put the date of Mark in the 60s before the death of Peter. You remember Clement dates the gospel during Peter’s life time. Irenaeus is referring to Peter leaving Rome and not to his death is his type of interpretation. So Peter is in Rome but leaves Rome for some reason. In that sense then we can date Mark between Paul’s arrival in Rome, narrated in Acts and looks like about 61 to 63 AD and 68 AD when the persecution ended with Nero’s death. Some scholars on the other hand, reject Clement of Alexandria’s testimony and interpret Irenaeus remark so as to date Gospel after death of Peter. This a common liberal view with Mark dead after 68 perhaps with Mark dated after 68, in the early 70s. Some extreme liberals date Mark as late as 115 AD. Thirdly, many conservative reject all tradition and put Mark back in the 50s so that mark can predate Mathew and Luke. This view throws out a lot of data and you have work to maintain a conservative version of the Two Document Theory. This will be discussed under our topic the synoptic problem. Clearly, people are willing to ignore data so their view of the Synoptic Problem can be discussed as plausible, the concordant view seems to fit the data best and is favored by me. However, it must reject
the Two Document Theory which puts Mark before Matthew.

**Date of Luke**

That brings us to the date of Luke’s gospel. Internal evidence: you can argue with this internal evidence or not, but clearly Acts 1:1 presupposes Luke. So the Gospel must be written before Acts. The prologues are connected since Acts refers to the previous account. Luke ends with the ascension and Acts picks up from there and continues. Both are addressed to the same person Theophilus. Liberals feel like Luke 21:20 refers to the Jewish war, so they date Luke after AD 70 as predicted in Luke 21:20. In 66 AD, the city was surrounded by armies but the Roman general got scared and retreated. This allowed people to flee the city as Jesus had warned them to do. Lots of Christians did, before the Romans came back again the second time in 68 AD and leveled Jerusalem as in verse 24. Only non-believer’s feel the need to post-date prophecies. No such approach is noted for believers. Of course, Luke could have been written after AD 70 if other evidence indicates. Luke would write before the prophecy was fulfilled and that as the internal evidence.

External evidence: Acts as we discussed in our course. Acts seems to date from end Paul’s first Roman imprisonment 63 to 64 AD and that’s because the date of Acts seems to proceed the Roman fire of 64 AD. It lacks an antagonism between Christianity and Roman government. Once Nero put the blame for the fire on Christians, Christianity became an illegal cult until after 300 AD. Acts gives us no hint that Christianity is illegal. Acts also gives us no hint of the death of Paul, that also is a tradition, and Nero is still alive so that is no later than 68 AD. Paul has been in Rome for two years under house arrest when the book of Acts ends. Liberals to try to explain this by saying everyone knows what happened to Paul so there is no need to include his death, but house arrest is a strange way to end a book if he’s dead. Some, including some conservatives, think Luke planned on writing a third book as a sequel to Acts but for some reason wasn’t able to do so. This argument is based on taking Acts 1:1 “the first account, I wrote” etc., the word is *proton* for “first” meaning the first of several, assuming Luke would have used
protaron if he meant the first of two. Well, the word used in Acts 1:1 can mean “first of two” in Hellenistic Greek even though this is not in classic Greek. We have no particular reason to believe that Luke is writing in classical Greek, even though his Greek is better than some other Greek writers in the period. If our suggestion is right, Luke brings the reader up to date at the end of Acts. He is written just two years after Paul arrives in Rome.

Secondly, that Luke would be dated slightly earlier than Acts is seen from internal evidence above especially if Paul’s two year imprisonment in Caesarea that is before his trip and ship wreck heading for Rome. Especially if Paul’s two year imprisonment in Caesarea gave Luke the opportunity for researching and writing the Gospel. Now if Luke wrote the Gospel before the voyage to Rome, that would avoid the problem of Luke losing his notes in the shipwreck, though he might have saved them even so. In that case Luke might have started to circulate in the east about the time of Paul’s voyage and not begin to circulate in the west tell much later. A date of about 60 AD seems to buck the tradition that puts Mark in the 60s but earlier than Luke. I suggest that tradition is partly mistaken or that Mark and Luke are just simultaneous and reach different parts of the empire at different times. That Mark arrived first in some places, say the west, and Luke first in some places, say the east. Mark is traditionally written in Rome, the west. Clement in Egypt, the east, puts Luke ahead of Mark chronically. Irenaeus’ testimony looks chronological, but note he is the one that says “Luke also” and puts it after Mark and before John. Note that he does not give a specific time of sequence for Luke, he doesn’t say afterword. He may not seem to be chronological here or he may be mistaken because the sources got the two gospels at a different order than Egypt did. Then we date Luke 58 to 60 AD before Acts at 63 to 64 AD.

So a summary of the dates of the synoptic gospels: My notes here have a little chart, but I give a big broad span for Matthew from early as early 40s to something like the mid-50s. Luke the late 50s, and Mark the early to middle 60s. So I think that is probably a good place to stop.
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