Exercise 3. Tools: Using a Synopsis
Method: Redaction Criticism
(in-class, then homework)

The Synopsis

What a Synopsis Is

A synopsis aligns parallel versions of a text with each other so that you may more easily compare and contrast the versions, analyze their literary similarities, and examine how a later editor (also known as a redactor) changed his source text.

The synopsis we are using in class is Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, second edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), which uses the second edition of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) for its English text. This particular synopsis focuses on the four canonical gospels. You will find that John's gospel may sometimes have a parallel account of a similar event, but it rarely shares the same wording with the other three gospels. In contrast, Mark, Matthew and Luke often have almost identical wording when they report the same story, suggesting that there is a closer literary relationship between them. This is why these three gospels are called the "synoptic gospels," because you can "see them together" (= synoptic in Greek). They tell the story of Jesus in largely the same way.

One interesting set of parallels that you won't find in this synopsis are to the apocryphal and Gnostic gospels, as well as citations of gospel passages in the early Church writings. All of these provide interesting variants to well-known stories in the canonical gospels.[23]

How Your Synopsis Is Organized

Now if each of the four gospels presented their parallel versions of stories in the same order, it would be a pretty easy thing to lay out a synopsis. You could just march through the story of Jesus once, presenting the parallel versions alongside each other as you went. The gospels would do the synchronizing for you.

But the gospels don't present their stories in the same order; this is one of the ways that later authors choose to change or redact their base text. For example, the synoptic gospels tell the story of Jesus driving the money changers from the Temple just as he enters Jerusalem for that last, fateful Passover (his only trip to the city as an adult); in fact, it precipitates his arrest. In contrast, John's gospel tells that story in chapter 3 during the first of three trips Jesus makes to Jerusalem; it has nothing to do with his arrest two years later (in John, the raising of Lazarus precipitates Jesus' arrest).

The lack of synchronization between the gospel versions presents a challenge to the editor of a synopsis. The editor wants to present every parallel that occurs, but also wants to present each gospel in its internal order so that you can always find things easily.

The way your synopsis solves this problem is to do both things simultaneously. Let's say that Matthew has a story early in his gospel that Mark places midway in his gospel and Luke places toward the end. The synopsis will present all three gospels in parallel columns toward the beginning, when we reach that point in Matthew. Later in the book, when we reach the right point in Mark, it will re-present the passage. Finally, toward the end of the book, when we reach the right point in Luke, you'll find the passage again.

With gospel passages repeating, and each gospel's passages occurring in such a non-linear fashion, how are you to know where you are in any given gospel as you use the text? If you're looking for Mark chapter 6, how will you find it?

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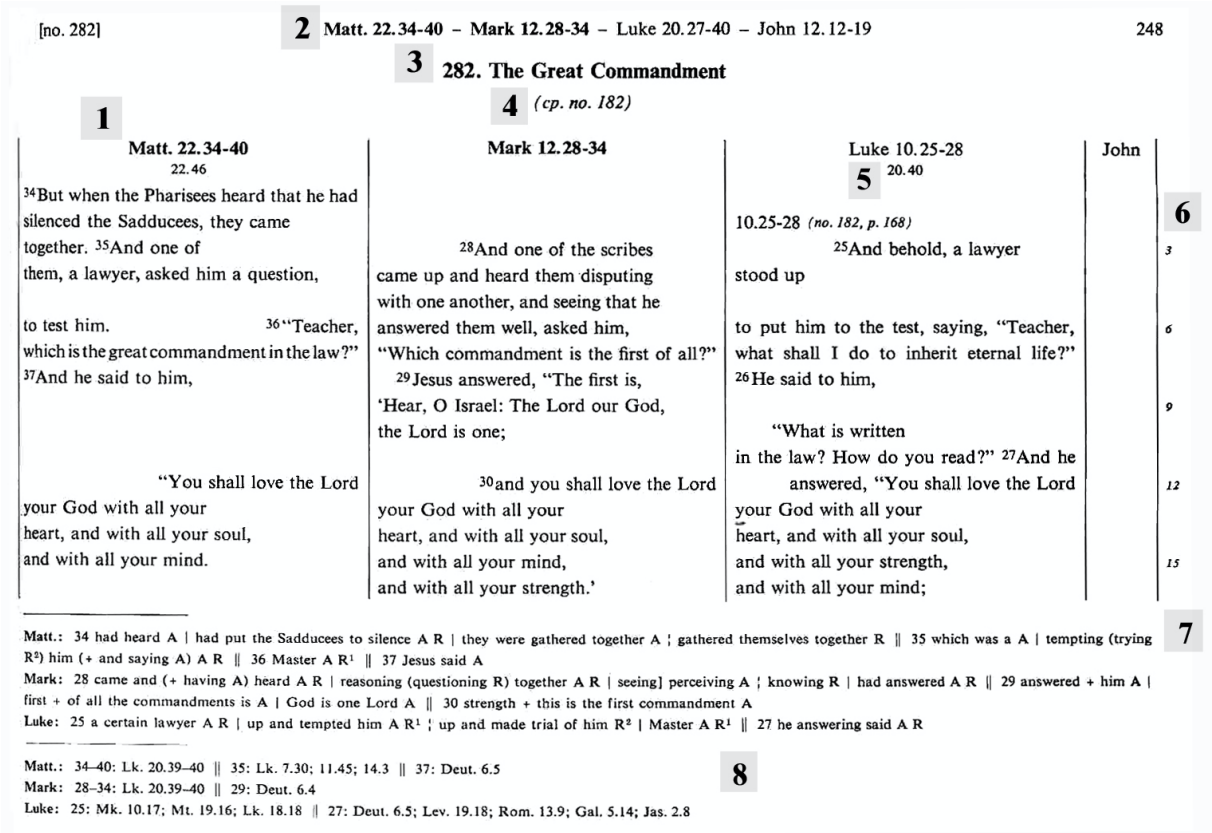
[23] A handy reference that does contain some of this material, and cross-references parallel passages in its marginal apparatus, is Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*, rev. and exp. (Sonoma, California: Polebridge, 1996; original 1992). Despite its name, that book isn't a complete anthology of all the Christian gospels we've found, but it does have all the earliest ones.

The synopsis uses a couple of conventions to help you. First, if the column header with book ch.vs is in bold text, you know that you're at that point in the absolute sequence of the book. Look at the example below. Matthew 22:34-40 is bold (see #1). This means that you will find all passages from Matthew 1:1–22:33 before this page of the synopsis, and all passages from Matthew 22:41–28:20 after it. Second, the header at the top of the page tells you where you are (#2). It's a floating header, referring to the absolute sequence point you're at in all four gospels rather than the passages on this particular page. If one or more of the header entries is bold, it means that the bold passage is on the page. In the illustration below, both Matthew and Mark are bold, meaning that we're at that fixed point in each gospel. Third, each synopsis has a unique number: this one is 282 (#3 below). Because Luke presents the great commandment at a different point in his sequence, you'll find this same passage repeated in synopsis #182 (the cross-reference is marked "cp" for "compare" at #4).



[no. 282] **2** **Matt. 22.34-40** – **Mark 12.28-34** – Luke 20.27-40 – John 12.12-19 248

3 **282. The Great Commandment**

4 *(cp. no. 182)*

1

Matt. 22.34-40	**Mark 12.28-34**	Luke 10.25-28	John
22.46		**5** 20.40	
34But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. 35And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question,		10.25-28 *(no. 182, p. 168)* 25And behold, a lawyer stood up	**6** 3
to test him. 36"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37And he said to him,	28And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" 29Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one;	to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" 27And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind;	6 9 12 15
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.	30and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'		

7

Matt.: 34 had heard A | had put the Sadducees to silence A R | they were gathered together A ¦ gathered themselves together R ‖ 35 which was a A | tempting (trying R^3) him (+ and saying A) A R ‖ 36 Master A R^1 ‖ 37 Jesus said A
Mark: 28 came and (+ having A) heard A R | reasoning (questioning R) together A R | seeing] perceiving A ¦ knowing R | had answered A R ‖ 29 answered + him A | first + of all the commandments is A | God is one Lord A ‖ 30 strength + this is the first commandment A
Luke: 25 a certain lawyer A R | up and tempted him A R^1 ¦ up and made trial of him R^2 | Master A R^1 ‖ 27 he answering said A R

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Matt.: 34–40: Lk. 20.39–40 ‖ 35: Lk. 7.30; 11.45; 14.3 ‖ 37: Deut. 6.5
Mark: 28–34: Lk. 20.39–40 ‖ 29: Deut. 6.4
Luke: 25: Mk. 10.17; Mt. 19.16; Lk. 18.18 ‖ 27: Deut. 6.5; Lev. 19.18; Rom. 13.9; Gal. 5.14; Jas. 2.8

There are some indices at the back of the synopsis to help you navigate more easily. On pages 341–355 is the Index of the Gospel Parallels. This index is arranged topically, so that you can find the story you want and then look to see the ch.vs references in each gospel, along with the synopsis number and the page in the synopsis where the parallel is presented. Once again, topics are repeated more than once, depending on the gospels' sequences. And once again, bold entries help you keep track of the absolute sequence in a given gospel. You'll also see ch.vs references in very small fonts. These are passages that are related but not identical to the pericope in question. Notice that this cross-referencing system is used in the passage above as well, in the column header (#5). Sometimes, the related material is reproduced in tiny print within the column as well. Again, this smaller font means that the passage is similar, but not considered identical and dependent.

The final index that can help you find a passage quickly is the Index of New Testament Passages. This one is arranged by gospel, chapter and verse, so that if you know this information, you can find

your passage quickly using either the synopsis number or the page number. Here too you'll find the bold face for absolute sequence and the small font for related passages.

There are two other conventions the synopsis uses to help you study the passage. The first is tiny line numbers along the left and right margins so that there's an absolute reference point we can refer to when working on the passage together in class (#6). The second is the critical apparatus below each passage. There are two different apparatuses. The top one alerts you to the variants in the chief English language versions this synopsis collates (#7), such as A (Authorized [King James] Version of 1611) or R (English Revised Version of 1881 + American Standard Version of 1901). The sigla or abbreviations are all explained on p. XII of the Introduction. The lower apparatus provides cross-references to other biblical passages across the Jewish and Christian scriptures for the gospel verses (#8).

Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism is the study of the theological perspective of a biblical text evident in its collection, arrangement, editing and modification of sources. A redactor's editorial activity is easiest to discern when we have several parallel versions of the same story, as we do in the four gospels.

The redaction critic first must decide which gospel was written first, since this establishes who redacted whom. Most contemporary redaction critics presume the Two-Source Hypothesis, which states that Mark was written first and Matthew and Luke used two sources, Mark and Q, when compiling their own gospels.

The next step is to select which later editor you would like to study, Matthew or Luke, and then select a synoptic pericope to examine. You would then examine how Matthew or Luke changed their source text Mark, looking for major and minor differences (additions, deletions, changed vocabulary and grammar). Finally, you would generate a hypothesis to account for why Matthew or Luke changed Mark in the way they did. Could the change be to clean up the grammar or roughness of Mark? Could it be to address concerns or experiences of the redactor's audience, or some alternative theological point of view? Could it be because events have occurred in the meantime that have altered the interpretation of Jesus' action or teaching?

You can see why the synopsis is a key tool for the redaction critic. It does a good deal of the work for you, presenting the parallel passages so that you can determine quickly how a later editor changed the source text.

Bibliography

Hagner, Donald A. and Stephen E. Young. "The Historical-Critical Method and the Gospel of Matthew." In *Methods for Matthew* (ed. Mark Allan Powell; Methods in Biblical Interpretation; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 11-43, esp. 27-29.

Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-criticism*. London: S.P.C.K., 1969.

Murphy, Catherine M. *John the Baptist: Prophet of Purity for a New Age*, Interfaces. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 2003. (esp. pp. 1-84)

Perrin, Norman. *What is Redaction Criticism?*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, New Testament Series. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969.

Rothschild, Clare K. "Historical Criticism." In *Methods for Luke* (ed. Joel B. Green; Methods in Biblical Interpretation; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 9-41.

Directions for Homework

Select a pericope other than the one you chose for the in-class exercise. This time, you can pick a case where there is text in Mark-Matthew-Luke, or a case where there is shared text in just Mark-Matthew, or Mark-Luke. Avoid cases where only Matthew-Luke exist, since both depend on the hypothetical source Q whose text is not firmly established (so it would be hard to tell how Matthew or Luke changed it).

Identify the base text, presuming the Two-Source Hypothesis. Choose one later redactor of that base text, if it's a case of Triple Tradition; otherwise, there will only *be* one later redactor. Let me be clear here: even if all four columns are populated with parallel material, you will be analyzing and discussion ONLY Mark (base text) and one of Mark's redactors (EITHER Matthew OR Luke).

Examine the text in the two relevant columns (ignore text in any column that is not your base text or your redactor). Use different types or colors of underlining, boxing text, highlighting, or any other technique to identify similarities and differences between the two passages.

Type up your answers to the following questions, in the format specified on the course Web site Style Sheet. On the paper, answer the following questions (you needn't number your answers; just write your response in paragraphs for one flowing, three-page essay):

1. Identify your passage, and which version is your base text.
2. Indicate which part of the Two-Source Hypothesis you're relying on to explain the literary relationship between the two versions.
3. Summarize what both versions of the passage share.
4. Describe briefly the differences you find between the passages, from greatest to least significant, using enough detail to prompt your memory if you report your findings to the class.
5. Select the most significant difference. Presuming the Two-Source Hypothesis, generate a few ideas why your redactor might have changed the source text in the way that he did.