

**Reasons to Trust the  
Synoptic Gospels**

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**Definition**

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- Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke
- “Synoptic” from Greek for “see together”—they can be viewed side-by-side
- 230 places of “triple tradition”

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**The Apparent Difficulty**

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- Each gospel often records a slightly different version of a given event—labeled “The Synoptic Problem” by liberal theologians
- Assumptions:
  - Dependence on oral tradition
  - Dependence on earlier gospels
  - Agreement in gospels means they depended on each other

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There is NO Problem, Yet...

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- To solve the “problem”—theologians invented “source criticism”—a way of judging the Scriptures based on the assumption of previous sources.
- ...that the gospels are a reconstruction of fragments and lost documents *which are more accurate than the gospels*
- **NOTE: Luke 1:1-4**—Yes, to sources, but NO to inspiration

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Source Criticism

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- Two-Source Theory—18<sup>th</sup> century
  - “Markan Priority”—assumption that Mark was written first
  - Imaginary document called “Q” (for “Quelle” [“source”])
  - Since Matthew and Luke have material not in Mark, they must have used “Q” as well.

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Source Criticism

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- Four-Source Theory—
  - Same as Two-Source, but including two more imaginary documents: “M” and “L”
- **WHY** does this matter to us? The **MAJORITY** of scholarly commentaries on the gospels hold to Q, M, and L as real documents

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**Problems with Source Criticism**

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- Assumes existence of imaginary documents
- Ignores church history
- Assumes that so-called “contradictions” must be explained away
- Ignores idea of harmony of the gospels
- Assumes a low view of Scripture

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**DETOUR: Sample “Synoptic Problem” which Assumes a Low View of Scripture**

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- John 12:1-8 (not a synoptic gospel but illustrates the issue)
- Same account in Mark 14 and Matthew 26
- Compare to Luke 7:36-50
- Source Criticism Explanation: the gospels are not totally coordinated with each other
- Logical explanation: two different events

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**More Problems with Source Criticism**

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- Completely ignores the inspiration of/by the Holy Spirit
  - Assumes the incapability of the HS to give us inspired documents
- Completely ignores fact of eyewitness accounts
- Often operates under assumption of pseudonym authorship of gospels

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### The Huge Implications of Source Criticism

- We don't have the actual words of Jesus
- We don't have the actual theology of Jesus
- The gospels are second-hand accounts *not* historically reliable but with *some* truth contained in them.
- Evangelical seminaries vs. the average church member
- Goal of Source Criticism: examine the history behind the gospels rather than the gospels themselves as historical

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### Why We Can Trust the Synoptic Gospels

- They were inspired by the Holy Spirit—2 Peter 1:20-21
- 2 Timothy 3:15-17
- They can be harmonized
- They were written *independently* of one another
- They are eyewitness accounts of multiple witnesses
- God providentially preserved what He desired to preserve—Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25
- Each gospel has a different emphasis
- Logically, they must be trusted or discarded
- Cannot deny the life-changing power of the gospels to save

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