

DATE: September 21, 2020  
To: Professor Dr. Glen Shellrude  
From: Joseph Browne Course: Reading the New Testament  
Subject: Robert Stein, *The Synoptic Gospels* & Wright's Chapter# 3

There are a number of note-worthy as well as thought-producing points which were presented in Stein's article on the Synoptic Gospels. It was interesting to read of the number of similarities between Matthew, Mark and Luke. The similarities were in various categories. There exist similarities in terms of the wording which are utilized; the order of events as presented and discussed, in parenthetical material as well as in biblical quotations. The similarities repeatedly occur and reinforce the opinion that there is some level of sharing as to the content of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

It was interesting to see that there have been different attempts to explain the similarities. One explanation is that they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The difficulty with this explanation is the inherent differences between the four gospels. The second explanation which was presented is that factual historical records are provided by Matthew, Mark and Luke. The challenge with this explanation is not in the commonality of historical information which they share with the readers but in the differences in order of events and wording which are utilized at times. The third explanation was initially presented by von Herder and later enhanced by Gieseler, in terms of oral tradition being shared between Matthew, Mark and Luke. The problem with this explanation is that there must also have been or needed to be a literary relationship as well.

The Griesbach Hypothesis provides an explanation of literary relationship. With Matthew as the first written, Luke utilizing Matthew as his source and finally Mark tapping into both Matthew and Luke. Two strengths of this hypothesis are as follows: alignment with early tradition of Matthew being first, and the triple tradition paralleling of scripture between Matthew, Mark and

Luke. The challenges with this hypothesis are that others favored the priority of Mark as the source for Matthew and Luke and then claiming that Luke used Matthew. The two-documents hypothesis of Mark and Q is a more plausible explanation as sources for Matthew and Luke.

As Stein sought to explain in his article about the source of information in regards to the Synoptic gospels, Wright in his chapter#3 discussed that Biblical text has meaning. One perspective is to seek to determine or understand what is meant by the author. By deciphering the author's intent as well as possible reaction by original readers. Some of the problems with pursuing meaning by the author's perspective could be differences in language and culture between author and readers. The term intentional fallacy was a noted term and it provides the discussion position that the intent of the author cannot be premise for determining meaning.

Exploring the text was the second perspective in determining meaning. One school of thought is along the line of narrative criticism which embodies elements that contribute to the story being shared to the reader. The noted advantage of this method is that the New Testament is largely comprised of stories which are shared with the readers. This can be an effective tool in sermons or teaching lessons. The other school of thought which was presented is that of rhetorical criticism where there is partnership with prior rhetorical practices. The application within the New Testament would be to tie the scripture to events or practices noted in the Old Testament.

The third perspective of decipher meaning is via the reader. This view aligns itself with the concept that the readers create the meaning in the text and this was not done in the text on its own or by the author. Readers come to a conclusion as to what it means to them and not to others. There is basically no right or wrong reading conclusion to the meaning. In my opinion, adhering to this reader perspective on meaning is allowing a wide margin for individual interpretation of the truth and application.