



Q. What is the document Q supposed to be?

Josh McDowell Ministry

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A. One of the most popular theories in New Testament study is that the Gospel of Mark was written first, and that both Matthew and Luke were based upon Mark and another source called "Q" which no longer exists. "Q" comes from the German word "quelle" meaning source, and it supposedly contained matters in Matthew and Luke that are not found in Mark.

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The idea of a "Q" source is a relatively recent development in New Testament study. In modern times, Matthew, Mark, and Luke have been referred to as the "synoptic Gospels," since they take a similar view of the life of Christ.

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Many presuppose that the extensive agreements between these Gospels indicate some type of literary collaboration, and for the last century New Testament scholars have been attempting to explain this phenomenon. One factor that complicates matters is that there are many instances in which one Gospel describes matters differently from either one or both of the other Gospels.

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The quest for a solution as to how these similarities and dissimilarities occurred is known as the "synoptic problem," while "source criticism" is the field of study devoted to solving the problem.

The early church was not too concerned with this problem, assuming that the Gospel writers recorded their information from personal memory and firsthand reports as opposed to the need of copying each other or a common written source.

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Matthew was the first Gospel to have been composed, according to the testimony of Eusebius, an early church writer. Eusebius relates that Matthew wrote down his Gospel as he was about to leave the land of Palestine. His account was largely drawn from his own experience as a disciple of Christ. Clement of Alexandria says that Mark based his Gospel on the reminiscence of Peter, while Luke testifies that his work was drawn from a number of sources (Luke 1:1-4).

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Even though there was almost universal testimony among the early scholars as to the priority of Matthew, the 19th century saw the emergence of the theory of Mark being written first, or "Markan priority." Most books written on the synoptic problem today assert this theory. Thus the need arises for the two-source theory, Mark and "Q," to explain the material found in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark.

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There is good reason to question this theory that Matthew and Luke used "Q" in the Gospel of Mark as sources. First, no such Document Q has ever been found. Second, there is no agreement of exactly what sayings should be in "Q." Third, there is no historical testimony for the existence of a Q-type document by any historian or writer. And fourth, as pointed out, the weight of historical evidence does not point to Mark as being the first Gospel written, which is imperative for this theory.

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Josh McDowell Ministry
P.O. Box 131000
Dallas
TX 75313-1000
U.S.A.

Tel: +1 972 907 1000

www.josh.org