

Textual Clues to the Chronology of Matthew 8:2-13:58

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Introduction

The three harmonies by John A. Broadus (1893), A.T. Robertson (1922), and Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry (1978) rearrange the events of Matthew 8:2-13:58 in favor of the ordering of events seen in Mark and Luke. What is the reasoning behind this rearrangement? Why was Matthew's account divided into smaller sections? Why are these sections ordered according to Mark and Luke? Why did Matthew arrange these sections in a non-chronological manner?

We will start, not from these three harmonies, but from scratch to build the reasoning for the arrangement of these verses in Matthew. Then we will see the placements these harmonists actually made.

The Reasoning behind This Rearrangement

Q1. Why was Matthew's account divided into smaller sections?

When attempting to produce a harmonization of the gospels it quickly becomes evident that Matthew 8:2-13:58 varies significantly from the order of events seen in Mark and Luke. (John has no parallels for these verses.) There are essentially two orders, the one seen in Matthew and the one seen in both Mark and Luke. There is an important observation to be made at this point. All the verses in question can be grouped into thirteen smaller sections within which the synoptic gospels *all* agree as to order. These sections may be only a few verses or may span a couple of chapters. There is no reason to question the order of events *within* these sections as the synoptic gospels themselves are the best evidence for that order.

These thirteen sections, ordered according to Matthew's gospel are as follows:

8:2-4
8:5-13
8:14-18

8:19-22
 8:23-34
 9:1-17
 9:18-34
 9:35-11:1
 11:2-19
 11:20-30
 12:1-21
 12:22-13:53
 13:54-58

Note: An underlined verse number indicates it is the last verse in the chapter.

Q2. Why are these sections ordered according to Mark and Luke?

There are three possible options concerning the chronological order of these sections.

Option 1: Matthew, Mark, and Luke are *all* Non-chronological

Option 2: Matthew is chronological, Mark & Luke are non-chronological

Option 3: Matthew is non-chronological, Mark & Luke are chronological

Which is the best option? Which is best supported by the information we have from the text? To arrive at an answer we must examine the connective wording of the synoptic gospels both leaving and entering these sections.

Option 1: Matthew, Mark, and Luke are *all* Non-chronological

Option 1 *may* be possible, but there is *absolutely* no textual evidence which would *force* this conclusion. Although the connective wording in English, depending upon your translation, may appear to support this option in some verses, that support vanishes when the Greek text is consulted.

Option 2: Matthew is chronological, Mark & Luke are non-chronological

Option 2 is *not* possible because it can be clearly demonstrated that Matthew's ordering of the sections is not entirely chronological. Matthew 8:23 begins one of these sections and reads:

^{NIV} Matthew 8:23 Then (Καὶ) he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.

We first need to clearly define a term that is variously defined among harmonists. That term is "parallel." I will use this term to refer to verses in the

gospels that should be placed together chronologically. Mark's parallel introducing this section begins:

^{NIV} Mark 4:35 That day when evening came (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ὀψίας γενομένης), he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."

"That day" is a reference to Mark's immediately preceding section, Mark 3:20-4:34, which itself has the parallel of Matthew 12:22-13:53. Therefore, the connective wording of Mark 4:35 would force Matthew 12:22-13:53 to fall chronologically *before* Matthew 8:23-34. As Matthew's ordering of events cannot then be chronological, Option 2 is not valid.

Option 3: Matthew is non-chronological, Mark & Luke are chronological

"Option 3" poses no difficulties whatsoever with the connective wording between these sections. In addition it is most consistent with Luke 1:1-4.

^{NASB95} Luke 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order (ἀκριβῶς καθέξῃς σοι γράψαι), most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Since Option 1 has no proof supporting it and Option 2 cannot be true, it is best to adopt Option 3 and understand Matthew to have a non-chronological order for these sections, while Mark and Luke have a chronological one. Matthew's sections, now arranged according to Option 3, would be as follows:

8:14-18
 8:2-4
 9:1-17
 12:1-21
 8:5-13
 11:2-19
 12:22-13:53
 8:23-34
 9:18-34
 13:54-58
 9:35-11:1
 8:19-22
 11:20-30

A Second Factor to Option 3

The Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5:1-8:1 is understood almost universally by harmonists today to be parallel to the Sermon on the Plain found in Luke 6:17-49. Placing these two sermons as parallel in a harmony requires at one of them to be moved from its place in its respective gospel. As Option 3 holds Matthew' gospel to have a non-chronological ordering of sections in 8:2-13:58, it is not a hard stretch to include Matthew 5:1-8:1 as a fourteenth non-chronological section. The Sermon on the Mount can then be moved from its order in Matthew and placed as parallel to the Sermon on the Plain.

Another factor would seem to support this. Matthew 9:9 records the initial calling of Matthew, one of the Twelve.

^{ESV} Matthew 9:9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

Matthew's calling must logically precede the choosing of the Twelve. Luke's narrative introducing the Sermon on the Plain has Jesus going up on a mountainside, choosing the twelve (Luke 6:12-16), then descending to preach the sermon as He stood on a level place (Luke 6:17-49). If the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain are indeed parallel, then the Twelve were chosen before Matthew 5. Moving Matthew 5:1-8:1 from it's order in Matthew to be parallel with Luke's Sermon on the Plain would place that sermon after Matthew's calling in Matthew 9:9.

Following Option 3 the Sermon on the Plain falls between the sections of Matthew 12:1-21 and Matthew 8:5-13, so the Sermon on the Mount is placed there. Matthew's fourteen sections would now be as follows:

8:14-18
 8:2-4
 9:1-17
 12:1-21
 5:1-8:1
 8:5-13
 11:2-19
 12:22-13:53
 8:23-34
 9:18-34
 13:54-58
 9:35-11:1
 8:19-22
 11:20-30

This *is* the commonly held harmonization pattern for Matthew 5:1-13:58 found in the three harmonies by Broadus, Robertson, and Thomas and Gundry. There are some small variations between them but this is essentially their order.

Now, let's see the exact placements these harmonists made. The following are abbreviated outlines for their harmonies.

Broadus, John A. A Harmony of the Gospels.
New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893.

PART IV. OUR LORD'S GREAT MINISTRY IN GALILEE.

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
4:13-17	1:14b-15	4:14b-31a	4:46- <u>54</u>
4:18-22	1:16-20	5:1-11	
	1:21-28	4:31b-37	
8:14-17	1:29-34	4:38-41	
4:23-25	1:35-39	4:42- <u>44</u>	
8:2-4	1:40- <u>45</u>	5:12-16	
9:2-17	2:1-22	5:17- <u>39</u>	
9:18-34	5:22- <u>43</u>	8:41- <u>56</u>	
			5:1- <u>47</u>
12:1-21	2:23-3:12	6:1-11	
	3:13-19	6:12-16	
5:1-7:29		6:17- <u>49</u>	
8:1, 5-13		7:1-10	
		7:11-17	
11:2-30		7:18-35	
		7:36- <u>50</u>	
12:22-13:53	3:20-4:34	8:1-21	
8:18, 23-34	4:35-5:20	8:22-39	
9:1; 13:54-58	5:21; 6:1-6a	8:40	
9:35 - 11:1	6:6b-13	9:1-6	
14:1-12	6:14-29	9:7-9	

PART V. SEASON OF RETIREMENT INTO DISTRICTS AROUND GALILEE.

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
14:13-18: <u>35</u>	6:30-9: <u>50</u>	9:10-50	6:1-7:1
8:19-22		9:57- <u>62</u>	
		9:51-56	7:2-10

**Robertson, A.T. A Harmony of the Gospels.
San Francisco: Harper, 1950.**

PART VII: THE GREAT GALILEAN MINISTRY

The Rejection at Nazareth and the New Home in Capernaum

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
4:13-17	1:14b-15	4:14b-31a	4:46- <u>54</u>
4:18-22	1:16-20	5:1-11	
	1:21-28	4:31b-37	
8:14-17	1:29-34	4:38-41	

The First Tour of Galilee with the Four Fishermen and the Call of Matthew (Levi) on the return with the Growing Fame of Jesus

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
4:23-25	1:35-39	4:42- <u>44</u>	
8:2-4	1:40- <u>45</u>	5:12-16	
9:1-17	2:1-22	5:17- <u>39</u>	

The Sabbath Controversy in Jerusalem and in Galilee

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
			5:1- <u>47</u>
12:1-14	2:23-3:6	6:1-11	

The Choice of the Twelve and the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
12:15-21	3:7-12		
	3:13-19a	6:12-16	
5:1-8:1		6:17- <u>49</u>	

The Spread of Christ's Influence and the Inquiry from John in Prison

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
8:5-13		7:1-10	
		7:11-17	
11:2-19		7:18-35	
11:20-30			
		7:36- <u>50</u>	

The Second Tour of Galilee (now with the Twelve) and the Intense Hostility of the Pharisees

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
12:22-50	3:19b- <u>35</u>	8:1-3; 8:19-21	

The First Great Group of Parables with the Visit to Gerasa (Kherasa) and to Nazareth (final one)

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
13:1-53	4:1-34	8:4-18	
8:18, 23-27	4:35- <u>41</u>	8:22-25	
8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	
9:18-34	5:21- <u>43</u>	8:40- <u>56</u>	
13:54-58	6:1-6a		

The Third Tour of Galilee (following the Twelve) and the Effect on Herod Antipas

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
9:35 - 11:1	6:6b-13	9:1-6	
14:1-12	6:14-29	9:7-9	

PART VIII: THE SPECIAL TRAINING OF THE TWELVE IN DISTRICTS AROUND GALILEE

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
14:13-18: <u>35</u>	6:30-9: <u>50</u>	9:10-50	6:1-7:1
8:19-22		9:57- <u>62</u>	
		9:51-56	7:2-10

Thomas, Robert L and Stanley N. Gundry.
A Harmony of the Gospels. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978.

PART SIX: THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST IN GALILEE

Opposition at Home and a New Headquarters

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
4:13-17	1:14b-15	4:14b-31a	4:46- <u>54</u>

Disciples Called and Ministry Throughout Galilee

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
4:18-22	1:16-28	4:31b-37	
8:14-17	1:29-34	4:38-41	
4:23-24	1:35-39	4:42- <u>44</u>	
		5:1-11	
8:2-4	1:40- <u>45</u>	5:12-16	
9:1-17	2:1-22	5:17- <u>39</u>	

Sabbath Controversies and Withdrawal

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
			5:1- <u>47</u>
12:1-21; 4:25	2:23-3:12	6:1-11	

Appointment of the Twelve and Sermon on the Mount

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
	3:13-19	6:12-16	
5:1-7:29		6:17- <u>49</u>	

Growing Fame and Emphasis on Repentance

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
8:1, 5-13		7:1-10	
		7:11-17	
11:2-19		7:18-35	
11:20-30			
		7:36- <u>50</u>	

First Public Rejection by Jewish Leaders

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
12:22-<u>50</u>	3:20- <u>35</u>	8:1-21	

Parabolic Mysteries about the Kingdom

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
13:1-52	4:1-34	8:4-18	

Continuing Opposition

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
13:53; 8:18, 23-34	4:35-5:20	8:22-39	
9:18-34	5:21- <u>43</u>	8:40- <u>56</u>	
13:54-58	6:1-6a		

Final Galilean Campaign

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
9:35-11:1	6:6b-13	9:1-6	
14:1-12	6:14-30	9:7-10a	

PART SEVEN: THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST AROUND GALILEE

Lesson on the Bread of Life

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
14:13- <u>36</u>	6:31- <u>56</u>	9:10b-17	6:1- <u>71</u>

Lesson on the Leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
15:1-16:12	7:1-8:26		7:1

Lesson of Messiahship Learned and Confirmed

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
16:13-17:13	8:27-9:13	9:18-9:36b	

Lessons on Responsibility to Others

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
17:14-18: <u>35</u>	9:14- <u>50</u>	9:37-50	

Journey to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths)

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		9:51-56	7:2-10
8:19-22		9:57- <u>62</u>	

Q3. Why did Matthew arrange these sections in a non-chronological manner?

Firstly, Matthew's non-chronological order does not call into question inerrancy or infallibility. Matthew does not state that his order is chronological, nor does his connective wording between these sections mandate a chronological order.

Secondly, it is unlikely that Matthew's non-chronological order of these sections is thematic. If it were it would be expected that much more of his gospel would not match the chronology of the other three, but this is just not the case. Outside of these sections almost all of the rest of Matthew matches their chronology.

There is another possibility. Consider how we tell stories of events that are years past. We may get the details correct, but we may be unsure of the exact order of those events, particularly when they occurred chronologically close to one another. It is a viable possibility that Matthew wrote this portion of his gospel much like we tell stories today. His details were correct but his order was not chronological.

What Difference Does This Make?

Does this make any real difference in the way we understand the chronology of the Gospels? *If* the common chronology of Christ's life popularized by these three harmonies above is correct then it won't. It would help us to understand *why* that chronology was adopted, but it wouldn't change the outcome.

But what if the common chronology is not correct? Would it make any real difference then? The answer is, "Absolutely!" The chronology we follow helps us interpret verses with meanings consistent with their contexts. We then apply these Scriptures to our lives based on our interpretations. If our harmonization pattern is incorrect, our interpretations may be incorrect and our applications may be misguided. The chronology we follow also has implications for theology, the length of Christ's public ministry, and the date of His birth.

A Critical Flaw

There is a critical and almost universal flaw in current and past harmonies. Their introductions, footnotes, and appendices *do not* include the necessary logic for all the chronology they record. A couple of the areas of insufficient logic are in major areas. (I don't say this lightly. I own and have read each of the forty-six harmonies in my bibliography, and have seen several others.)

Take for instance the logic presented above for Matthew's ordering of the thirteen sections in 8:2-13:58. Not one of the three harmonies cited includes this logic. In fact, I am unaware of any currently published harmony that does. That logic is rendered invisible to the reader. We are asked to accept the

chronological arrangement of the harmonist without being able to evaluate his support.

In the case of these thirteen sections of Matthew I *am* convinced that there really is good logical support for the non-chronological arrangement of Matthew. So, the reasoning behind that conclusion would not make a real difference as to outcome. But when it comes to the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain it is a different story. There is textual evidence that they are not parallel.¹ If this is the case it has huge differences as to interpretation and application.

Broadus has one footnote and an appendix which argue that these sermons are indeed parallel, but the support he presents is a far from conclusive. Robertson, Broadus' son-in-law, did not author his own harmony, but merely edited that of Broadus. His footnote and an appendix are almost a word-for-word quote of those by his father-in-law. Thomas and Gundry include a very brief footnote on this, but no appendix. The logic they present is simply insufficient to evaluate the placement of these sermons. The reader is asked to accept the harmonists' conclusions on only weak logic. This is only one example of this critical flaw in harmonies. There are others.²

Harmonists are somewhat isolated in their discipline. It is really their role to establish the best chronological pattern for the gospels. The individual writing a commentary on any one of the four gospels focuses on that gospel, not on working carefully through the chronology of all four. Editors of study bibles, which include a brief harmony of the life of Christ, rely on the work of some widely accepted harmonist. Even authors of articles may find it difficult to contest the chronology of accepted harmonies because niggling doubts arise over not having a broad enough awareness of all the chronological issues in a whole harmony.

Years are required to carefully think through from scratch each chronological puzzle that a harmony presents. Examining the work of previous harmonists before reasoning through placements oneself has the unfortunate consequence of perpetuating certain placements without sufficient logic for them. And yet, this is where most harmonists start.

I will leave you with an abbreviated outline of my placements for the first thirteen sections of Matthew.

¹ Robert A. Singer, *Sermon on the Mount and Sermon on the Plain, Identical or Distinct* (Evangelical Theological Society 57th Annual Meeting; November 16, 2005, 4:10 PM).

² Robert A. Singer, *Rethinking the Harmonization of Luke 9:18-19:28 with John 7:1-11:54* (Evangelical Theological Society 55th Annual Meeting; November 19, 2003, 8:30 AM).

**Singer, Robert A. A New Harmonization of the Gospels,
Rethinking the Common Approach,
D.Min. product, Western Seminary, 1997**

CHAPTER 5 - FOUR DISCIPLES ARE CALLED
AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Peter, Andrew, James, and John Are Called

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
4:18-22	1:16-20		

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
4:23-8:1			

In Capernaum Immediately after the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
	1:21-28	4:31-37	
8:14-18	1:29-39	4:38- <u>44</u>	

CHAPTER 6 - JESUS PREACHED THROUGHOUT GALILEE

Preaching from a Boat on the Sea of Galilee and Fishers of Men

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		5:1-11	

In One of the Towns

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
8:2-4	1:40- <u>45</u>	5:12-16	

Paralytic through Roof at Capernaum

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
9:1-17	2:1-22	5:17- <u>39</u>	

Two Sabbaths

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
12:1-21	2:23-3:12	6:1-11	

The Twelve Chosen and the Sermon on the Plain

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
	3:13-19	6:12- <u>49</u>	

Centurion's Servant Healed at Capernaum

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
8:5-13		7:1-10	

Widow's Son at Nain Raised

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		7:11-17	

Jesus Answers John the Baptist and Speaks about Him

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
11:2-19		7:18-35	

Woman with Alabaster Jar of Perfume in Pharisee's House

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		7:36- <u>50</u>	

CHAPTER 7 - EVENTS SURROUNDING CONFRONTATION IN A HOUSE

Confrontation in a House

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
12:22-<u>50</u>	3:20- <u>35</u>	8:1-3, 19-21	

Parables by the Lake

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
13:1-35	4:1-34	8:4-18	

Return to the House

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
13:36-53			

The Gerasenes

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
8:23-<u>34</u>	4:35-5:20	8:22-39	

When Jesus Returned

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
9:18-34	5:21- <u>43</u>	8:40- <u>56</u>	

Nazareth

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
13:54-58	6:1-6a		

CHAPTER 8 - EVENTS SURROUNDING ANOTHER PASSOVER

One Miracle at an Unnamed Feast in Jerusalem

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
9:35-11:1	6:6b-13	9:1-6	
14:1- <u>36</u>	6:14- <u>56</u>	9:7-17	6:1-71

Some Events Following This Passover

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
15:1-16:12	7:1-8:26		

CHAPTER 9 - THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES
THE FEAST OF DEDICATION
AND THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
			7:1-11:54

CHAPTER 10 - JESUS' EARTHLY MINISTRY BEGINS TO CLOSE

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
16:13-19:2	8:27-10:1	9:18-50	

CHAPTER 11 - LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

The Journey Begins

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		9:51-56	
8:19-22		9:57- 62	
		10:1-12	
11:20-30		10:13-22	
		10:23-24	

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