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## Towards Solving the Synoptic Problem for African Biblical Exegesis

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### ABSTRACT

Doing biblical exegesis, say in Africa, is not easy; selected text must be interpreted to carry the same meaning as the author meant, whiles making it relevant to the new environment the gospel finds itself. The situation becomes challenging when the selected text is part of the range of texts with Synoptic Problem. This problem has lingered on years in biblical studies. Propounded by J. J. Griesbach, the Synoptic Problem is a way of referring to questions and possible explanations about the seeming differences and peculiarities of the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—due to their writing styles (word order, word used, and grammatical variations, or dissimilar tenacities) of telling the gospel story. After reviewing solutions propounded by scholars, it was realised that each had a shortfall, including B. H. Streeter's Four-Source Theory. For while at one point each tries to address the problem, at the other end they seem to create another challenge; making it difficult for proper biblical exegesis. Improving on B. H. Streeter's Four-Source Theory, it is proposed that the "Four-Source Theory with Lukan priority over Matthew" be accepted in solving the Synoptic Problem. This is to help African biblical exegetes to conduct exegesis on parallel passages that are different in settings, vocabulary, among others; thereby, enabling them to understand the text in their context as written by the original author.

**Mots clés:** Synoptic Gospels, Synoptic Problem, Four Source Theory, African Biblical Exegesis.

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### 1. Introduction

Africans, in particular, and the world in general, are met with four in-a-row books that give account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ anytime they open the New Testament from the first pages. Despite the fact that it may, at first sight, appear to be a bit outlandish that four separate accounts of the life of Jesus Christ would be included into the canon of Scripture. The inclusion of these accounts in themselves does not present a problem. The [Synoptic] problem arises when those accounts are compared with one another. This makes it relatively easy to come across some similarities, differences and peculiarities in the various accounts. The narrative would have been different if there

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was only one gospel. Thus, say, if the Bible had the Gospel according to Luke only, there would be no such thing as the “Synoptic problem.”

“Synoptic Problem” has been among the topics that have been treated (and still being treated) by scholars. According to Goodacre (2005), this problem will continue to exist, for it exerts a fascination and an importance in biblical studies. This assertion is true because people (users and students of the Bible) are studying to make the word of God meaningful to their hearers who are in a new environment, say Africa, other than the original hearers. This view is corroborated by Moo and Carson (2005) who state that the Synoptic Problem cannot be avoided.

Goodacre (2005) defines Synoptic Problem as “the study of the similarities and differences of the Synoptic Gospels in an attempt to explain their literary relationship.” The term talks about the commonalities, dissimilarities and peculiarities that are apparent in the first three New Testament books, referred to as Synoptic Gospels. Thus, it shows how the three books have similar literary uses (Carson & Moo, 2005). Reinhardt (2016) avers that these commonalities, dissimilarities and peculiarities pose some significant problems and challenges to the evangelical theology and affect the exposition of these very important New Testament books. Adding on, these dissimilarities and peculiarities make it difficult for Bible users, say Africans, to know which among the three gospels is “authentic” and must be used or relied on for exegesis.

Some of these apparent challenges stem from the fact that the evangelists chronicled the biblical events with different arrangements and narrations. Such chronological difference is making observant Christians wonder why there is more than one gospel if the evangelists are writing about the events and activities of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This has led to a search of solutions for the problem, in view of its intricate nature.

The general belief that the “study of the Synoptic Problem is complex, irrelevant, and boring” (Goodacre, 2002), is keeping people away from painstakingly looking for solutions to this problem. But, finding a solution is very critical and significant, since “one’s solution to the Synoptic Problem will influence one’s exegesis, redaction criticism, and form criticism of the gospels as well as affect the quest for the historical Jesus, early church history, and even the text of the gospels” (Carlson, 2003). Thereby, allowing Bible users and biblical scholars in Africa to interpret Scriptures without much difficulties.

It is from this backdrop that this paper is written from an African perspective, to help solve the Synoptic Problem for African biblical exegesis.

The paper reflects on what African biblical exegesis is all about, explains the meaning of Synoptic Problem and discusses contributing factors for the problem. It goes on to review the available solutions provided by scholars to help readers appreciate works of other scholars and to serve as a stepping stone for proposing a new solution to the problem for African biblical exegesis so African scholars can undertake a biblical exegesis void of ambiguity.

## 2. Methodology

This research work employed the gold standard among reviews (Davis *et al.*, 2014). It involves systematic reviews of literature on subject areas such as the Bible, books from biblical scholars, journal articles and Bible commentaries. According to Liberati *et al* (2009), a systematic review can be explained as a research method and process for identifying and critically appraising relevant research, as well as for collecting and analysing data from the said research. The purpose of this methodology is to find all empirical evidence that fits the pre-specified inclusion criteria to answer a particular research question or hypothesis. It concludes by providing reliable findings.

Biblical exegesis was also employed in this work. In explaining biblical exegesis, Fee (1993) reveals that it is the historical investigation into the meaning of the biblical text. In other words, biblical exegesis talks about undergoing a painstaking exercise to historically investigate the Bible with the objective of coming out with an exact and useful interpretation.

## 3. African biblical exegesis

The word exegesis comes from the Greek word *ek* (“out of”) and the verb *hegeomai* (“lead”); meaning to “lead out” or “show the way”, but is used metaphorically to mean “relate,” “tell,”

“report,” or “describe”. The general idea of the term is to draw the meaning from a passage of Scripture.

Biblical exegesis talks about undergoing a painstaking exercise to historically investigate the Bible with the objective of coming out with an exact and useful interpretation. According to Kuwornu-Adjaottor (2014), it answers the question: What did the biblical author mean? What led him or her to say what he or she said, and why did he or she say that at that point in time? It is an exercise to discover the original intended meaning of the passage in order to hear the message as the original recipients heard it then. The approach looks at the historical and the literary contexts of the text with the purpose of interpreting different texts by analysing critically the language from which translation of the text was made and the historical context in which the text was written.

Adamo (2015) defines African biblical hermeneutics as “a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical tradition and African world-views, cultures and life experiences, with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural, ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the business of biblical interpretation.” Thus, African biblical hermeneutics is using African lenses to interpret the Judeo-Christian scriptures to make it become relevant in the African soil for Africans to understand God’s word in their culture and worldview. In this case, the cultures and worldview of the original authors would be stripped off and clothed with that of the African. This makes African biblical hermeneutics contextual, for interpretation is always done in a particular context (Adamo, 2014). In hermeneutics lies exegesis where biblical word, text, and or an event in the past time and culture of the author is given a second look by the exegete to make it become existentially meaningful in their present situation taking into consideration their language, culture, and worldview (Asamoah, 2020).

It must be admitted that it becomes very difficult to do exegesis for a text in parallel passages with a Synoptic Problem. This makes African biblical exegetes face the challenge of doing exegesis without indistinctness. What then is the Synoptic Problem and how can it be resolved so that Africans can engage in a more accurate biblical exegesis to help their audience to understand God’s word without ambiguity.

#### **4. The synoptic problem**

The word “synoptic” comes from two Greek terms, *syn* meaning “togetherness” and *optic* meaning “seen” or “seeing”; hence synoptic meaning “seeing together” (Freed, 1991). It is from this backdrop that “Synoptic Gospels” was propounded by Johann Jakob Griesbach, a German biblical scholar at the end of the eighteenth century (Griesbach, 1776). As a term, it is applied to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, for these books describe the ministry of Jesus from a common view point.

The word “problem” connotes difficulty or trouble; hence, its association with other words in a sentence or phrase sends such signals to a person’s understanding. But this is not so with “Synoptic Problem.” According to Enns (2008), the Synoptic Problem is basically “... the relationship of the three to one another.” For Bratcher (2018), it is a way of referring to “questions and possible explanations about the literary relationships between the first three New Testament Gospels”—Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The evangelists give parallel accounts of the life of Jesus that are basically the same, but with slight differences. According to Westcott (1895, in Moody, 2008), 93% of Mark, 58% of Matthew, and 41% of Luke are found among the gospels, while 7% of Mark, 4% of Matthew, and 59% of Luke are peculiar to the writers. This shows agreements and peculiarity found among the Synoptic Gospels (Hiebert, 1975). A clear example of this is the account of the calling of Levi which is referred by Matthew as “Matthew” (9:9-13), but mentioned as “Levi” by both Mark (2:13-17) and Luke (5:27-32).

#### **5. Contributing factors to the synoptic problem**

The following are some factors accounting for the development of the Synoptic Problem;

Each of the writers had their style of writing and to a particular audience—Matthew to Jews, Mark and Luke to Gentiles. In an attempt to make the gospel message accessible to their audience, additional details were added to buttress their points. An example is the quotation from Hosea (6:6) added by Matthew (9:13) which is not identified in its parallel passages. This makes Redaction critics to

assume that some portions have been altered or edited to suit the reading community of the evangelist.

Another event where a Synoptic Problem is evidenced happens to be the occasional sayings of Jesus chronicled in Aramaic, while the parallel passages recorded them in Hebrew. An example is found in Jesus' quotation while on the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1, NKJV), which is recorded in Aramaic (*Eloi, Eloi, lemasabachthani?*) in Mark (15:34) but in Hebrew (*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*) in Matthew (27:46). There are times when the authors use different but synonymous Greek words in their passages.

Again, the differences in minor historical details also creates the Synoptic Problem. An illustration of this is the story of the healing of the blind man Bartimaeus. According to Luke (18:35-43) the event happens as Jesus and the disciples were entering Jericho, while to Matthew (20:29-34) and Mark (10:46-52), the event happens as Jesus and the disciples were leaving Jericho. With the description of the personality, Matthew gives a description of two unnamed blind men (20:30), Luke talks about a single unnamed blind man (18:35), while in Mark he is called Bartimaeus son of Timaeus (10:46). Again, all the writers describe the hostility of the crowd to the subject matter, but Mark goes further to show us the encouragement the crowd gave to the blind man (or men). While Jesus gives a call to the two men in the book of Matthew, this is not so in the other passages. Jesus, in Mark and Luke, orders for the crowd to lead the blind man to him.

There are instances where the basic order of events is patterned along similar lines in the Synoptic Gospels but some sayings of Jesus appear in a different environment draws the attention of critics to the Synoptic Problem. For example, the sayings of Jesus are presented in a large block of teaching material delivered when Jesus went on to the mountain in Matthew. This has led to the adoption of the title "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5:1-7:27) for that particular message. This is not so in Luke's gospel, for he identifies the setting where Jesus delivered the message as a levelled plain in the midst of the disciples and multitude of crowds (Luke 6:17-49). This makes Jesus' message to be referred to as "Sermon on the Plain." Why is one sermon given two descriptions?

Parables, teachings, and or particular events in the first three gospels are identified in different points in the narrative or in different literary contexts. This makes it difficult to identify the event which happened earlier. An example is the story of Jesus' rejection at the synagogue in Nazareth, his birthplace, and his choosing of the disciples. With the former, Luke reports this as one of the first events of his public ministry (Luke 4:16-30), while Mark inserted it much later, about halfway through his Galilean ministry (Mark 6:1-6). In the latter, Mark places Jesus calling of the disciples before his Capernaum preaching (Mark 1:16-20), while Luke places it after (Luke 5:1-11).

There are variations in the order in which the Synoptic Gospels are structured when a meticulous investigation is conducted into how the authors constructed their thought on particular issues. An example of this is the five chapters of Mark's material which is also conveyed in Matthew and Luke. While Luke conscientiously follows the order of Mark, Matthew puts the material in suggestively different ways. Mark 1:21-45 (Matt. 7:28-8:15; Luke 4:31-5:16); Mark 2:1-22 (Matt. 9:1-17; Lk. 5:17-39); Mark 2:23-3:12 (Matt. 12:1-16; Luke 6:1-11,17-19); Mark 3:13-1 (Matt. 10:1-4; Luke 6:12-16); Mark 3:20-35 (Matt. 12:22-37; Luke 6:43-45); Mark 4:1-34 (Matt. 13:1-34; Luke 8:4-18); Mark 4:35-5:20 (Matt. 8:18-34; Luke 8:22-39); and Mark 5:21-43 (Matt. 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56).

Individual peculiarities also lead to the Synoptic Problem. This is particularly so in the cases of Matthew and Luke. For instance, the birth narratives of the first and third Gospels are quite different and bear very little relationship to each other. Luke has a long section, commonly known as the "travel" narratives (9:51—18:14) which largely comprises his own material. Matthew alone records the stories of Peter's walking on the water and coin in the fish's mouth.

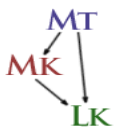
Aside the aforementioned examples, there are more obvious variances in many parallel accounts. Bratcher (2018) asserts that these amount to not only differences in words, but also differences in how the story is used, details included or omitted, how a passage is related to the Old Testament, even in how the event itself is presented or how the writers understood the event.



## 6. Solving the synoptic problem: Available solutions

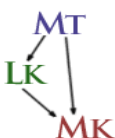
How can these problems be resolved? There are many solutions that have been proposed by scholars to address the Synoptic Problem. Major among the lot are discussed below.

**The Traditional Theory.** This theory which is also known among scholars as Augustinian hypothesis appreciates Matthew to be the first gospel to be written, followed by Mark, then Luke. According to this theory, the resemblance among the three gospels is as a result of the reliance of Mark on Matthew, then Luke on both Matthew and Mark which were in existence. Proponents to this view hold Matthean priority. They include church fathers such as Augustine, Irenaeus, and Origen. According to them, because Matthew wrote his material first, Mark gleaned portions of the records in an appropriate manner that could suit his community. Luke who wrote his later also depended on the materials of the extant write ups—Matthew and Mark—for his work. Hence the similarities and differences in the Synoptic Gospels.



On the contrary, there is a challenge with this hypothesis. From the three Synoptic Gospels, it is known that Mark is the shortest gospel, and majority of it is found in Matthew, which is believed to have been written first. The question that arises in Matthean priority over Markan is why such developments. Does it mean that Matthew had in mind what Mark intended to write and wrote; thereby making Mark's later writings to be found in that of Matthew's?

**The Two-Gospel Theory.** This theory which was developed by Griesbach is also referred to as Griesbach hypothesis. This theory also posits the Matthean priority. But unlike the traditional approach, this theory holds that Luke wrote his gospel before that of Mark. Hence Luke would have relied on Matthew while Mark would have also relied on both Matthew and Luke's work. Advocates of this theory include Henry Owen, J. J. Griesbach, and William R. Farmer.



Concern about this approach focuses on why the book of Mark, regarded among scholars, to be the first Synoptic Gospel book to be written could depend on Matthew and Luke which were written at a later time (Just, 2015). Again, what could account for the deletion of important and significant points that are located in Matthew and Luke (such as the birth of Christ and the Sermon on the Mount or Plain) if Mark is an abridged version of Matthew and Luke?

Again, it is known among scholars that "Mark's Gospel contains several grammatical, literary, historical, and geographical difficulties (minor errors which do not affect the impulse of the message) that are not found in Matthew and/or Luke" (Just, 2015). The question is, if Matthew was first, how come Mark could have brought up these difficulties and strange episodes? But recognising Markan priority, it is easy to see how Matthew and or Luke wanted to and were able to correct Mark's minor errors. An example is a crazy look of Jesus Mark portrays (7:32-37) which is corrected by Matthew (9:32-33) and Luke (11:14).

Again, Bishop Papias' statement that Mark had as his main source the "memoirs" of Peter and wrote his Gospel independently of Matthew largely undermines the Griesbach hypothesis, which claims that Mark used Matthew (Wallace, 2018).

**Two-Source Theory.** Among New Testament (NT) scholars of today, this theory seems to be the most accepted theory in solving the Synoptic Problem. A major intention is the ability of settling the Matthean priority. This theory holds Markan priority. Under the Two-Source theory, both Matthew and Luke separately used Mark as a source. This theory propounds that Matthew duplicates much of Mark's work, while Luke also slots in more than half. In addition to using Mark as a source, both writers of Matthew and Luke's gospel used a common source called the "Q-Document" which is also referred to as "Sayings Source" or "Redens-Quelle"<sup>2</sup>. This document is represented by the letter Q which is the German word *Quelle* meaning "source" or "spring." "Q" according to scholars such as Just (2015) "can ... be a tangible first century document, parts of various first century documents, oral tradition(s), or just the double tradition material that is found in both Matthew and Luke". The Q antedates both Matthew and Luke (Just, 2015). He [Just] adds that it would not contain narrative sections because the Q material in both Matthew and Luke are sometimes placed



2. This is the German language or Dutch of "Saying Source".

in different contexts. It is worth mentioning that many divergent hypotheses have been propounded concerning Q. Some suggest that there is no palpable proof that such a document existed outside of the double tradition (Just, 2015). But it must not be forgotten that people hardly keep or use older documents especially when they lay their hands on a revised and expanded edition. This probably is the case as to why Q-document is not in circulation.

This theory in as much as it brings out the similarities in Synoptic Gospels, fails to account for the inclusion of some passages that are found in Matthew and not in Luke as well as passages found in Luke but not in Matthew. This still keeps the Synoptic Problem lingering.

**Farrer Theory.** This theory is also known as “Goulder Theory” or “Mark without Q”. This theory gives Markan priority. Unlike Augustinian hypothesis where Mark depended on both Matthew and Luke’s materials, with this, Matthew would have depended on only Mark’s material while Luke would have relied on both the works of Mark and Matthew. Supporters of this theory such as J. H. Ropes, A. M. Farrer, Mark Goodacre, and M. D. Goulder postulate that it eliminates “... the need for a theoretical Q because both the triple tradition and the double tradition are explained without the need of an outside source” (Just, 2015).

Though this theory seems to have the advantage to solve the Synoptic Problem without the use of hypothetical external documents, it fails to explain why some passages in Luke (like the Good Samaritan) is omitted in the book of Matthew, and also not found in Mark.

**Three-Source Theory.** Among the theories of solving the Synoptic Problems, this theory is the least popular. The theory maintains the Markan priority and hold on to a Matthean influence on Luke. Thus, it promulgates that Mark was written first, followed by Matthew, and then Luke, with Matthew and Luke using the previous Gospel(s) as a source in addition to Q.

But this approach to solving the Synoptic Problem seems not be plausible by to some scholars as the idea of Luke using Matthew seems to contradict the reasons for the development of Q (Just, 2015).

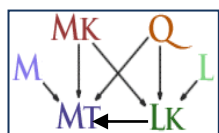
**Four-Source Theory.** This theory, which has Markan priority and is largely preferred among scholars, seems to be the combination of the Two-source theory and distinctive materials that each of the writers had in possession. Thus, with this theory, Matthew and Luke independently used Mark and Q, and each has both exclusive and independent materials to themselves. This theory was developed by B. H. Streeter (Porter & Dyer, 2016).

This theory best explains the similarities and differences among the Synoptic Gospels. Though this theory may not fully answer all the Synoptic Problem, it best identifies the similarities among the writings as Matthew and Luke’s usage of Mark, in addition to the Q and other independent materials. This brings out the inclusion of passages not found in Matthew but in Luke and those found in Luke but not in Matthew. Markan priority seems laudable as Mark “... was the secretary or ‘interpreter’ of Peter” who was the front-runner among the apostles. The ability of Peter would have had good reason for Christians to preserve what they considered to be a written record of Peter’s preaching (Porter & Dyer, 2016).

From the discussions so far, it has been observed that there are similarities, differences and peculiarities in the Synoptic Gospels and as such there have been many attempts towards solving the Synoptic Problem. It is realised that each of the proposals has its pros and cons. While at one point they seem to address the Synoptic Problem, at the other end they seem to create another challenge. For example, the traditional theory appreciates Matthew to be the first gospel to be written, followed by Mark, then Luke, but it is argued by other scholars that Mark was written first, followed by Luke, then Matthew (Stamps & Adams, 2003). In as much as these theories try to solve the differences in the Synoptic Problem, it also brings to the fore the issue of inconsistencies in the dates each of the book was written.

How can this problem be resolved?

## 7. Towards solving the synoptic problem for African biblical exegesis: a proposed solution



The Synoptic Problem in the gospels can be resolved when the Four-source theory is observed, taking into consideration Lukan priority over Matthew. Granted the dates for writing the Synoptic Gospels are AD 55-65, AD 60-63, and AD 60s for Mark, Luke and Matthew respectively (Stamps & Adams, 2003), Mark's gospel would have been the first gospel to be written. This view is held by Botello (2007),<sup>3</sup> who argues that the Synoptic Gospels were written before AD 70. So, the dates given for Luke and Matthew show that the two books would have been written in AD 60s. But while Luke's gospel would have been written not later than AD 63, Matthew's gospel goes beyond that. Provided Matthew's date for writing his work goes beyond AD 63, his gospel would follow Luke's gospel. Provided this is the case, then historically speaking Mark was written first, followed by Luke's gospel, and Matthew's gospel been the third. This, according to Just (2015), makes Mark's gospel to be the "older available record of the words and deeds of Jesus, yet another reason why early Christians might have preserved and continued to use it, despite its brevity and shortcomings." As an assistant to Peter, Mark became exposed to some of the sayings of Jesus from Peter—the leader of the Apostles.

It must be noted that the arrangement of the Synoptic Gospels in the canon does not connote which was written earlier than the other. It does not support Matthean priority, but was arranged as the scholars sought it right in their own eyes. Improving on B. H. Streeter's Four-Source Theory, it is proposed that "Lukan priority over Matthew" be added to the theory towards solving the Synoptic Problem.

In solving the Synoptic Problem under this proposal, the African Biblical exegete must observe the under listed outlines to enable them engage in a sound exegesis in the gospels.

1. Because Mark's gospel is the first to be written, there must first be a Markan priority. That is to say, because the other writers would have used Mark's work, the African Biblical exegete of NT must first consider Mark's passage. For of the three Synoptic Gospels, Mark which is the shortest in length, contains 661 verses, Matthew contains 1,068, and Luke contains 1,149. Comparatively, 97.2% of Mark is found in Matthew and 88.4% occurs in Luke (Green, McKnight & Marshall, 1992).

2. This is followed by reading other parallel passages from Luke and Matthew; with Lukan priority, for it was written before Matthew. This helps to get the general understanding and an informed judgment of the story, and to know the inclusion and exclusion of some portions of the passage, if any.

3. Proper exegetical interpretation of the text should be made from the book of Luke with the help of Bible commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, etc.

4. Because scripture passages complement each other, the student of the Bible should look for how Luke was able to correct the seeming minor errors in Mark's gospel, for he most at times amplifies Markan passages. This will give the reader much understanding of what Mark intended to say, which was probably said otherwise—with a consideration of possible grammatical, literary, historical, and geographical difficulties that may have been captured.

5. Undertake a biblical interpretation of the text under study from the book of Matthew. This is to throw more light on how the text can be understood in other context with the reader bearing in mind the target audience of Matthew which were largely Jewish communities. This may account for, much of the Jewish settings in the passage.

6. After reading all the passages, one has to analyse them by making inferences, one from the other to make meaningful presentation, and not forgetting that there were other independent sources that were peculiar to Matthew and Luke which, according to Ali (2010) are the "'M source' from Jerusalem," and "'L Source' from Caesarea."

<sup>3</sup> A research work undertaken by Jennell Botello on *Composition of Date of the Synoptic Gospels* demonstrated that the synoptic gospels were most likely composed before AD 70.

## 8. Solving the synoptic problem for african biblical exegesis: the case of the wicked tenants with the proposed solution

From the parable (in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; and Luke 20:9-19), Mark tells us that a man [whose identity he never gave] planted a vineyard. Using the work of Mark, Luke also repeated same, for they both had similar audience—Gentiles. However, Matthew who wrote to a Jewish audience identified the man as a landlord, for Jews are dwelling on a land given to them by God; making God a landlord (an example of Matthew's "M source"). This Person who is God delivered them from Egypt and planted them in a vineyard—rich land of milk and honey.

After safeguarding the vineyard and providing the necessary structures—thus, digging a pit for the winepress and building a watchtower—Mark [likewise Luke] tells that the man left and rented it to some farmers. At harvest time, the man sent a servant to the tenants to bring back some returns from the farm. But he was seized, beaten and sent away empty handed. Another was sent but was treated shamefully. The third one the man sent was killed. Mark says that these three servants were not the only people who were treated shamefully, beaten and killed; there were more to that (Mark 12:5). However, Luke never mentioned this part; he took it out of his narrative, possibly not to repeat what went on earlier. To him, these three characters are enough to tell the kind of treatment meted on the servants; they represented three main groups of servants. Matthew says that the landlord sent more servants in the beginning, possibly three of whom one was beaten, one killed, and the other stoned (Matt 21:35). He again sent other servants who were more than those sent earlier, and the tenants treated them same. In spite of all these, the man/landlord sent his beloved son, the reference of course is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the heir (Heb. 1:12); but they killed him and threw him out of the vineyard to be able to inherit the vineyard.

Mark finds the landlord predicting that the tenants will respect his son (12:6), whereas Luke reads, "it may be they will reverence him when they see him" (20:13 KJV). Once the landlord is viewed as God, Mark's wording is subject to the misunderstanding that God did not know that His Son would be rejected (an example of the minor error). But Luke who had the opportunity of having the material of Mark tried to alleviate the problem by going further to enumerate the threefold sequence of the mission (Luke 20:10-12). The mistreatment of each also builds toward the climax of the sending of the son who is killed. Matthew comes in to explain the punishment to the tenants—their inheritance would be taken away from them. But Matthew interpreted the tenants to mean Jewish leaders (an example of his Jewish audience). Unlike Mark and Luke who said, "He [the man] will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others," when they were asked the consequences of their actions, Matthew went ahead to give the returns the landlord will receive after he has dealt with the servants. "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time" (21:41). (Matthew might have accessed it from the exclusive and independent material he had to himself). He added it to enable his hearers understand the texts in their context.

## 9. Conclusion

Undertaking a biblical exegesis on a text is not an easy exercise, for it demands that the biblical exegete comes out with an interpretation as intended by the author. It even becomes more difficult when a text with parallel passages is involved; it demands interpreting the text to meet the intending meaning and purpose of two or more authors. This, notwithstanding, a careful and meaningful exegesis could be undertaken on a text with different settings, vocabulary, "seemingly contradictions", and peculiarities. In other words, a text with different writings styles—word order, word used, and grammatical variations—or dissimilar tenacities of telling the gospel story could be interpreted to meet the target audience, say the Africans, while remaining faithful to the intent of the author.

Using the proposed theory on Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; and Luke 20:9-19, the seeming contradictions in the texts were resolved, leading to an appropriate biblical interpretation of Scriptures. Thereby, enabling them to understand the text in their context as written by the original author.



## Recommendation

African biblical scholars and Bible users (and by extension, all scholars) should put the “Four-Source Theory with Lukan priority over Matthew” into practice for sound biblical interpretation of selected texts which are part of the range of texts with Synoptic Problem. This is to help their audience to appreciate and understand the gospel story from the evangelists without ambiguity.

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