

Jesus Walking on the Water – Summary of the Data

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Matt. 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:16–21

The synoptic problem is less visible in this pericope because of the silence of Luke. However, it is clear with even a cursory glance at the color-coded synoptic study that Matthew and Mark show great similarity (over 60 words in common; 44 identical words in extended passages). In the opening verses of both Matthew and Mark’s accounts, thirteen consecutive words are identical and in the same order. John, on the other hand, shows much less similarity, uniformly choosing different verbs as well as other viewpoints from which to tell the story.

Chart 1

Overview of Relationship in the Pericope

	Matthew	Mark	John
Total words	188**	131	86
Exact* words w/at least one other Gospel	63	67	16
Extended passage, ident. words & order	44	44	4
Same words (lexical form) w/slight change†	14	12	5
Synonymous word/phrase used	4	7	7

** Without the account of Peter walking on the water (Mt. 14:28-31) = 120 words.

*Exact word = same lexical form and same inflection.

† “Slight change” = same lexical form but different inflection (e.g., different case or tense).

The agreement between Matthew and Mark can be seen by a statistical study based on the color-coded synopsis. (This methodology is borrowed from Dr. Rodney Decker in his study of the feeding of the five-thousand.)

Chart 2

Agreement in Wording Between Any Two of the Gospels

(%) of words in this Gospel >
that are substantially the same
as those in this Gospel \

	Matthew	Mark	John
Matthew	–	77 (59%)	19 (22%)
Mark	77 (41%)	–	21 (24%)
John	19 (10%)	21 (16%)	–

Percentage = [number of words substantially the same–synonyms excepted] ÷ [number of words in the Gospel listed in the top row].

The relationship between Matthew and Mark becomes even more dramatic when Matthew’s account of Peter walking on the water (Mt. 14:28-31) is excepted (see chart 3).

Chart 3

Agreement in Wording Between Any Two of the Gospels (Without Mt. 14:28-31)

(%) of words in this Gospel >
that are substantially the same
as those in this Gospel \

	Matthew	Mark	John
Matthew	–	77 (59%)	19 (22%)
Mark	77 (64%)	–	21 (24%)
John	19 (16%)	21 (16%)	–

Conclusion

It is clear that there is a literary relationship between Matthew and Mark in this pericope (contra Linnemann). The percentages of agreement are too drastic to be incidental. The same order is generally followed, and the major difference between the two accounts is Matthew's inclusion of the Peter incident. (It is surprising that Mark, who, according to tradition, was Peter's disciple, omits the material about Peter's experience.) The similarities between Matthew/Mark and John can be explained as well. First, as Linnemann suggests, the actual words of Jesus (although originally in Aramaic!) may have been preserved in more standardized form: hence, John's only agreement in word order in an extended passage is Jesus' command ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (he omits θαρσεῖτε). The other explanation is that some words are necessary to describe the event, such as ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης and εἰς πλοῖον. It is probable that John has a higher percentage of agreement with the Synoptics in this pericope than in most others, which may be due to the relative brevity of the account.

It is therefore concluded that Matthew and Mark have some literary dependence, although it is impossible to tell without external argumentation which referred to which.

Verbal Parallels in the Accounts of Jesus Walking on the Water

Key (by color): **Exact words**; **extended passage of exact words in same order**; **slight change** (i.e. in form); **synonyms**

Matthew 14:22-33

22 Kai; eupew"
hpagkasen tou" maqhta"
embhhai eij" to; ploion
kai; proagein aupton
eij" to; peran,

ew" ouj apolush/ tou" oclou".

23 kai; apolusa" tou" oclou"
ajebh eij" to; ofro" kat! idian
proseukasqai.

ojyia" de; genomenh"
mono" hh ekei.

24 to; de; ploion hph
stadiou" pollou;" apo; th" gh" apeicen

basanizomenon
upo; twh kumatwn,

hh gar ejantio" ol ajemo".

Mark 6:45-52

45 Kai; eupu"
hpagkasen tou" maqhta" auptou"
embhhai eij" to; ploion
kai; proagein
eij" to; peran pro;" Bhsaidan,

ew" aupto;" apoluei ton oclon.

46 kai; apotaxameno" auptoi"
ajphqen eij" to; ofro"
proseukasqai.

47 kai; ojyia" genomenh"

hh to; ploion
ejn mesw/ th" qalassh",

kai; aupto;" mono" epi; th" gh".

48 kai; idwn auptou;"
basanizomenou"
ejn tw/ ejl aunein,

hh gar ol ajemo" ejantio" auptoi",

John 6:16-21

16 @V" de; ojyia egeneto,
katebhsan oij maqtai; auptou' epi; thn qav
lassan

17 kai; embante" eij" ploion
hjrconto
peran th" qalassh" eij" Kafarnaoum.

kai; skotia hjh egegonei
kai; oupw ejlhucei pro;" auptou;" ol jhso
u"

18 ht te qalassa ajemou megalou pneon
to" diegeireto

ejl akote" ouh w/ stadiou" eikosi pen
te hj triakonta

Verbal Parallels in the Accounts of Jesus Walking on the Water

Key (by color): **Exact words**; **extended passage of exact words in same order**; **slight change** (i.e. in form); **synonyms**

Matthew 14:22-33

25 **tetarth/ de; fulakh/ th" nukto;"**
hl qen pro;" aujtu;"
peripatwh epi; thn qal assan.

26 **oil de; maqhtai; idonte" aujton**
eji; th" qal assh" peripatuhta

ejtaracqhsan
legonte"
ofti fantasma ejstin,
kai; ajo; tou' fobou ekraxan.

27 **eujtu;" de;**
ejl al hsen »ol jhsou"¼ aujtoi"
legwn:
qarseite, egw eijmi:mh; fobeisqe.

28 **apokriqei;" de; aujtw/ol Petro" eipen:**
kurie, eij su; ei) kelleuson me eij qeih prov
" se eji; ta; udata.

29 **ol de; eipen:ejl qerkai; kataba;" ajo; tou'**
ploiou »ol¼ Petro" periepathsen eji; t
a; udata kai; hl qen pro;" ton jhsouh.

30 **blepwn de; ton ahemon »ijscuron¼ ejfo**
bhqh, kai; ajrxameno" katapontizesqai ej
kraxen legwn:kurie, swson me.

peri; **tetarthn fulakhn th" nukto;"** **erc**
etai pro;" aujtu;"
peripatwh epi; th" qal assh"
kai; hqel en parel qeih aujtuw'.

49 **oil de; idonte" aujton**
eji; th" qal assh" peripatuhta

eploxan

ofti fantasma ejstin,
kai; ajekraxan:

50 **pante" gar aujton eidon**
kai; ejtaracqhsan.
ol de; eujtu;"
ejl al hsen met! aujtw,
kai; legei aujtoi":
qarseite, egw eijmi:mh; fobeisqe.

qewrousin ton jhsouh
peripatuhta epi; th" qal assh"
kai; eggu;" tou' ploiou ginomenon,
kai; ejfobhqhsan.

ol de; legei aujtoi":
egw eijmi: mh; fobeisqe.

Mark 6:45-52

John 6:16-21

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Key (by color): **Exact words**; **extended passage of exact words in same order**; **slight change** (i.e. in form); **synonyms**

Matthew 14:22-33

31 eujew" de; ol jhsou" ekteina" thn c
eira epelabeto aujtou' kai; legei aujtw%oj
ligopiste, eij" tivepistasa" _

32 kai; anabantwn aujtw
eij" to; ploion
ekopasen ol ahemo".

33 oilde; ejn tw/ ploiw/ prosekunhsan aujt
w/
legonte":
ajlhqw" qeou' uib;" eil

Mark 6:45-52

51 kai; anebh pro;" aujtou"
eij" to; ploion
kai; ekopasen ol ahemo".

kai; lian »ek perissou% ejn ebutoi" ejis
tanto:

52 ouj gar sunhkan epi; toi" artoi", ajl
! hh aujtw h\ kardia pepwrwmenh.

John 6:16-21

21 hjelon ouh labeih aujton

eij" to; ploion

kai; eujew" egeneto to; ploion epi; th"
gh" eij" hj uphgon.

M. Pierce, 2/99