

Session 1: The Synoptic Gospels

What are the Synoptic Gospels? And how do Matthew, Mark and Luke choose to portray the story of Jesus, in order to emphasise the significance of his life, death and resurrection?

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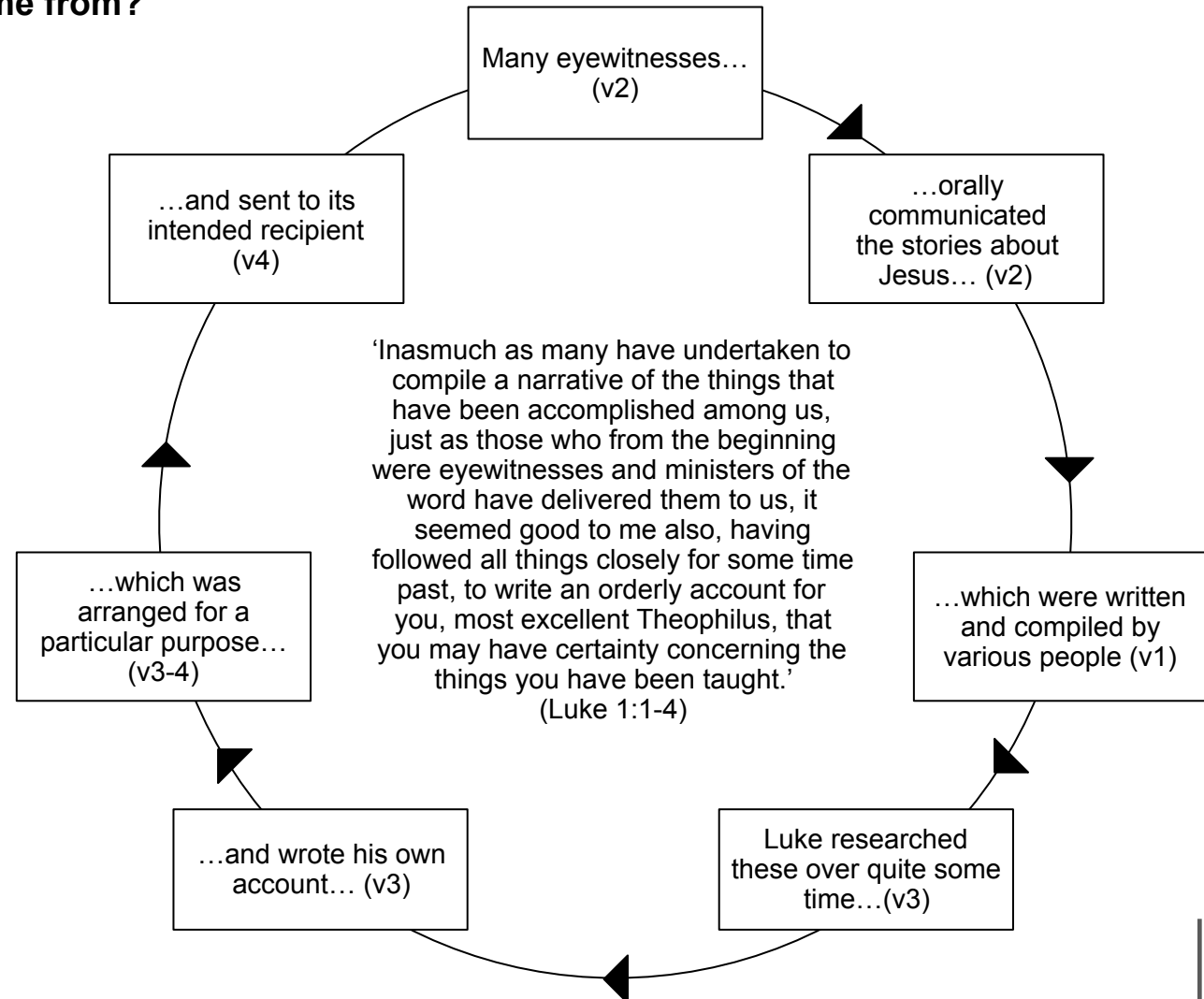
What is a gospel? Where did they come from?

What is a gospel?

- *Bios* = A form of biography
- They highlight the key events that surround a person; their words and deeds
- Whilst they are historical documents, they are not expected to be strictly chronological in order, but are often arranged thematically in order to emphasise the overall thrust and focus of the individual's life and work

Where did they come from?

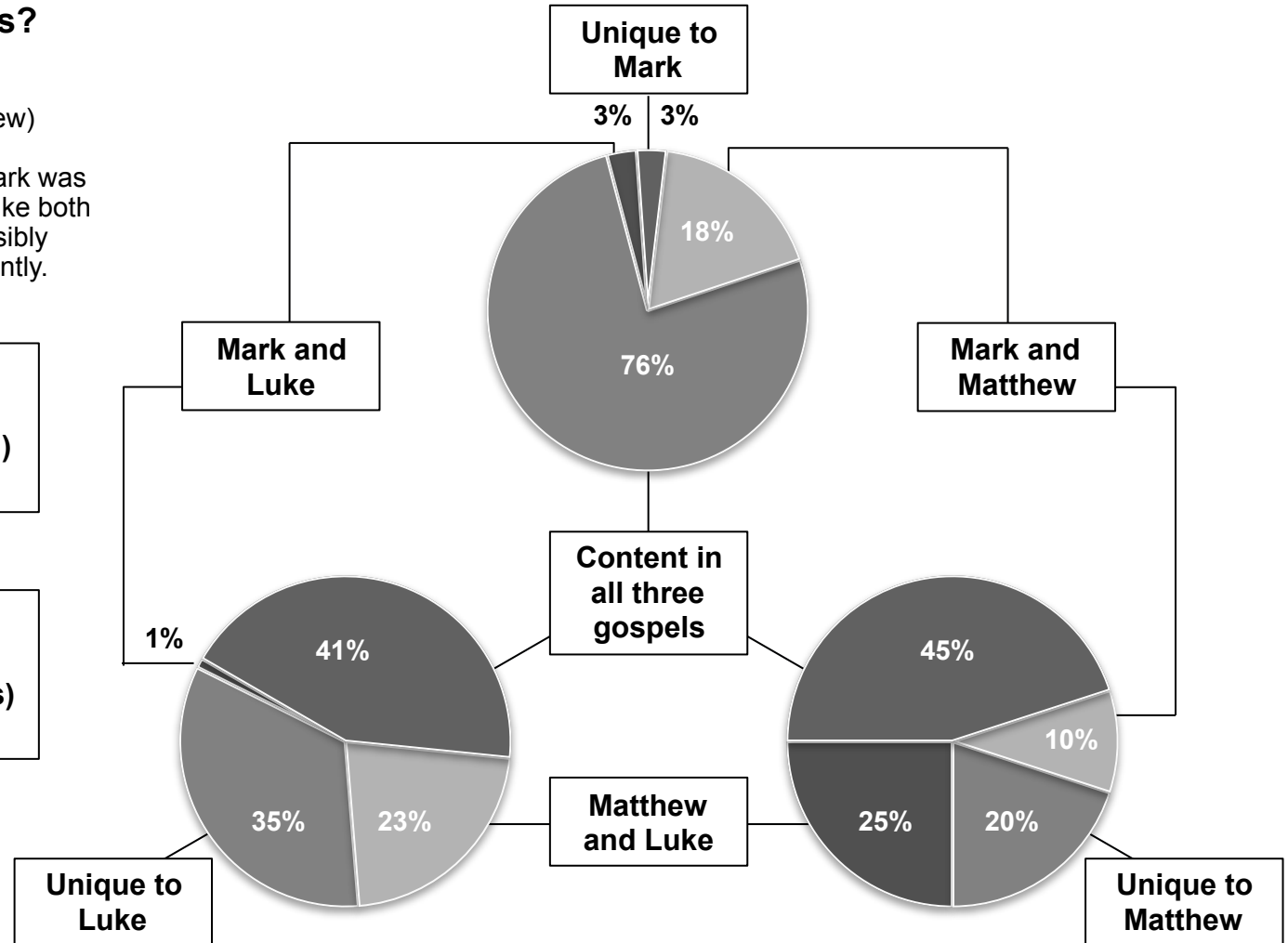
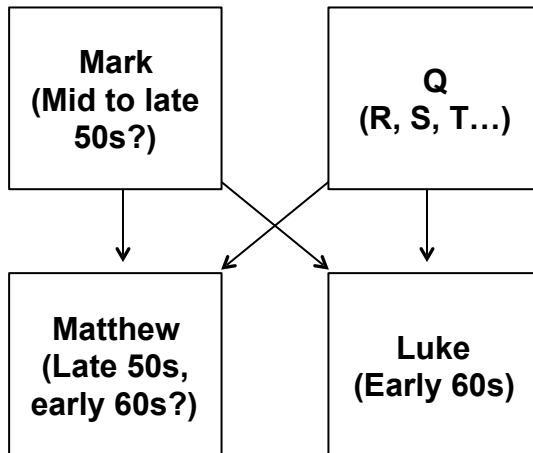
- **Source Criticism:** Seeks to reconstruct the original sources of the documents
- **Form Criticism:** Breaks down the books into sections and tries to work out the original setting for each story or item
- **Redaction Criticism:** Seeks to study how and why the documents were compiled as they were, and thus what is the purpose of the text?



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What are the Synoptic Gospels?

- *Synoptic* = *syn* (together) + *optic* (view)
- The most likely hypothesis is that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke both drew upon Mark's account (and possibly others). John was written independently.



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The feeding of the 5,000: an example of independence and interdependence

Number of words used to tell the story

Gospel	Number of words used
Matthew	157
Mark	194
Luke	153
John	199

Number of words common to all of the synoptic gospels: 53

Number of words John has in common with the synoptic gospels: 8

(five, two, five thousand, took loaves, twelve baskets of pieces)

Percentage of agreement between the gospels

Comparison	Percentage
Matthew / Mark	59
Matthew / Luke	44
Luke / Mark	40
John / Matthew	8.5
John / Mark	8.5
John / Luke	6.5

‘The following conclusions seem inevitable: John represents a clearly *independent* telling of the story. He uses only those words absolutely necessary to be telling the same story, and even uses a different Greek word for “fish”! The other three are just as clearly *interdependent* in some way. Those who know Greek recognise how improbably it is for two people independently to tell the same story in a narrative form and have a 60 percent agreement in the words used, and often in the exact word order.’

(Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth*)

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Why are there differences between the accounts?

Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Cleansing of leper	8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-16
Centurion of Capernaum	8:5-13	no parallel	7:1-10
Peter's mother-in-law	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39
Sick healed	8:16-17	1:32-34	4:40-41
Following Jesus	8:18-22	no parallel	9:57-62
Stilling the storm	8:23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25
Gadarene demoniac	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39
Healing of the paralytic	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26
Matthew's call	9:9-13	2:13-17	5:27-32
Fasting question	9:14-17	2:18-22	5:33-39
Jairus and the Woman	9:18-26	5:21-43	8:40-56

The authors were *selective*

- 'Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book [...] there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.' (John 20:30; 21:25)

The authors were *creative*

- Groupings of teachings or miracles
- Juxtaposition of a miracle and a teaching, to make the point in two way.
- **Exercise:** Compare the temptations in Matthew 4:5-10 and Luke 4:5-13. Why are they in a different order?

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Christology and Crisis: Matthew

- Matthew is often described as 'the most Jewish' gospel because of his attention to detail about Jewish customs, his focus on ethics and the law, his criticism of the Jewish leaders, and his regular reference to OT scriptures
- It may have been written to Jewish Christians, or Christians in areas with large Jewish populations (Syria or Palestine?) helping them to see Jesus as the fulfilment of the OT and giving them an ethical framework for how to live as kingdom people
- A large amount of Matthew's gospel is given over to sustained blocks of Jesus' teaching

Torah	Matthew	Significance
Exodus 1:15-17	2:16-18	Child saved from evil king slaughtering children
Exodus 2:15-22	2:13	Flees for his life and has to live in a foreign land
Exodus 2:23-24	2:19-20	He returns after the death of the King
Exodus 4:22	3:17	Son of God
Deuteronomy 8:2	4:1-2	Wilderness for 40 years
Exodus 19:20	5:1-2f	Teaching on the mountain top

Who is the Christ?

What is the Crisis?

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Christology and Crisis: Matthew

Compare the final speeches of Moses and Jesus. What similarities do you notice?	
Deuteronomy 31:2-8	Similarities
<p>‘The Lord has said to me, ‘You shall not go over this Jordan.’ The Lord your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the Lord has spoken. And the Lord will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. And the Lord will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”</p>	
Matthew 28:16-20	
<p>‘Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”</p>	

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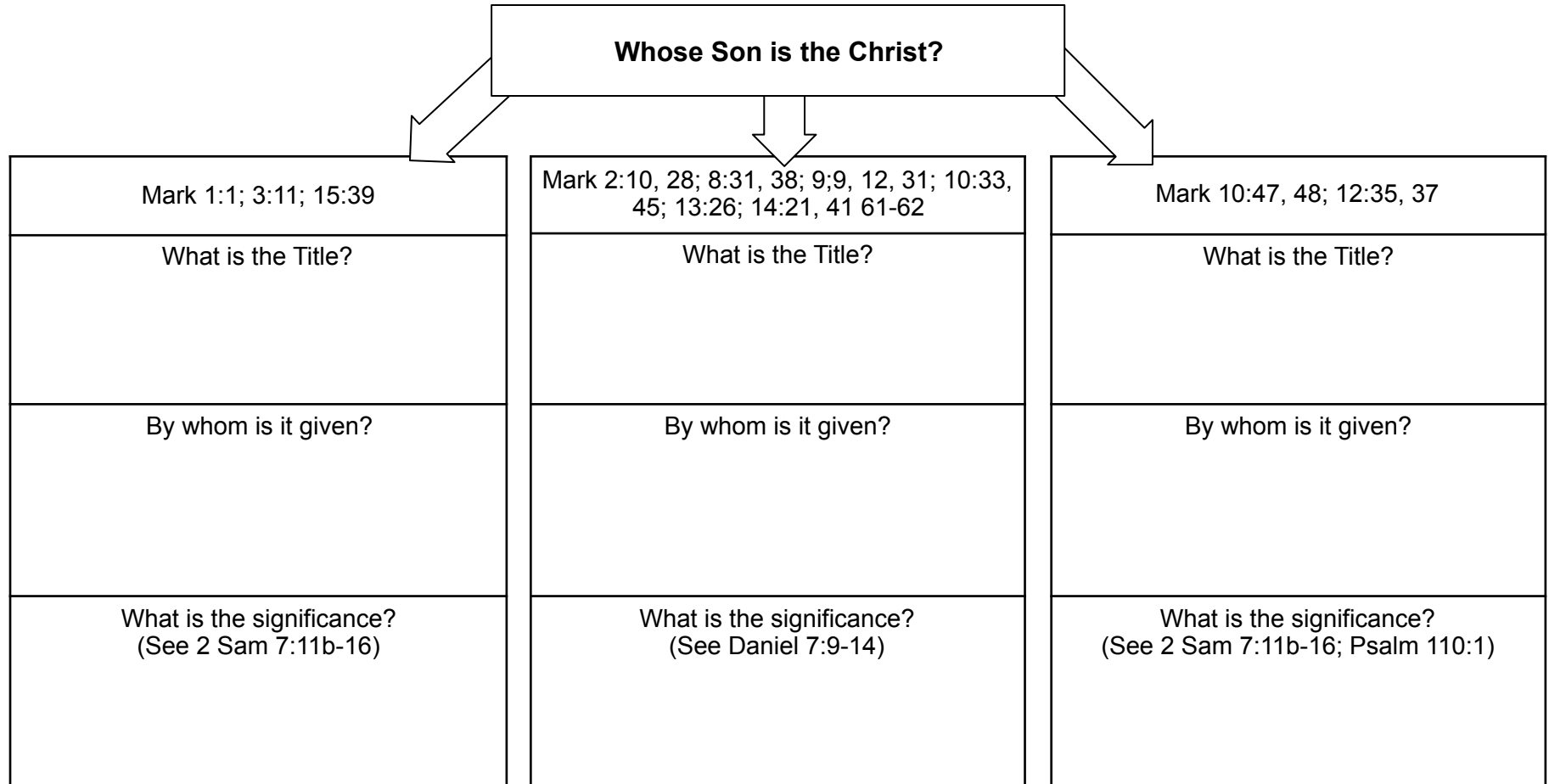
Christology and Crisis: Mark

- The first gospel account to be written
- Written to Gentiles. He translates Aramaic phrases and explains Jewish customs (e.g. handwashing in 7:3-4)
- Mark was not an eyewitness, but was 'Peter's Interpreter' (Eusebius' *Historica Ecclesiastica*, 3.39.15; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 106; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.1.2; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcion* 4:5 etc)
- Peter had a close relationship with Mark (1 Peter 5:13 – "my son")

Compare Peter's proclamation of the gospel with the structure of Mark's gospel	
Acts 10	Mark's Gospel
Good News' (v36)	'The beginning of the good news' (1:1)
God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit' (v38)	The coming of the Spirit on Jesus (1:10)
Beginning in Galilee' (v37)	The Galilean ministry (1:16-8:26)
He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil' (v38)	Jesus' ministry focuses on healings and exorcisms
We are witnesses of everything he did... in Jerusalem' (v39)	The ministry in Jerusalem (ch 11-14)
They killed him by hanging him on a cross' (v39)	Focus on the death of Christ (ch 15)
God raised him from the dead on the third day' (v40)	He has risen! He is not here' (16:6)

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Christology and Crisis: Mark



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Christology and Crisis: Mark

Three major themes in Mark's Gospel		
The Activity of Jesus	The Passion of Jesus	The Cost of Following Jesus
<p>Healings miracles and exorcisms.</p> <p>1:16-8:26 - Demonstrations of power</p> <p>'Immediately' used 42 times, compared to 7 in Luke and 4 in John</p>	<p>'[Mark is] a passion narrative with an extended introduction' (Martin Kähler)</p>	<p>The expectation of what it looks like to follow Jesus is modelled on his own suffering</p>

Passage	Theme	Setting
1.1-15	Introduction	
1:16-6:6	Demonstration of Jesus' Authority	Ministry in Galilee
6:7-8:26		Ministry beyond Galilee
8:27-10:52	Testing of Jesus' Authority Through Suffering	Journey to Jerusalem
11:1-13:37		Judgment on Jerusalem
14:1-16:20		Death and Resurrection

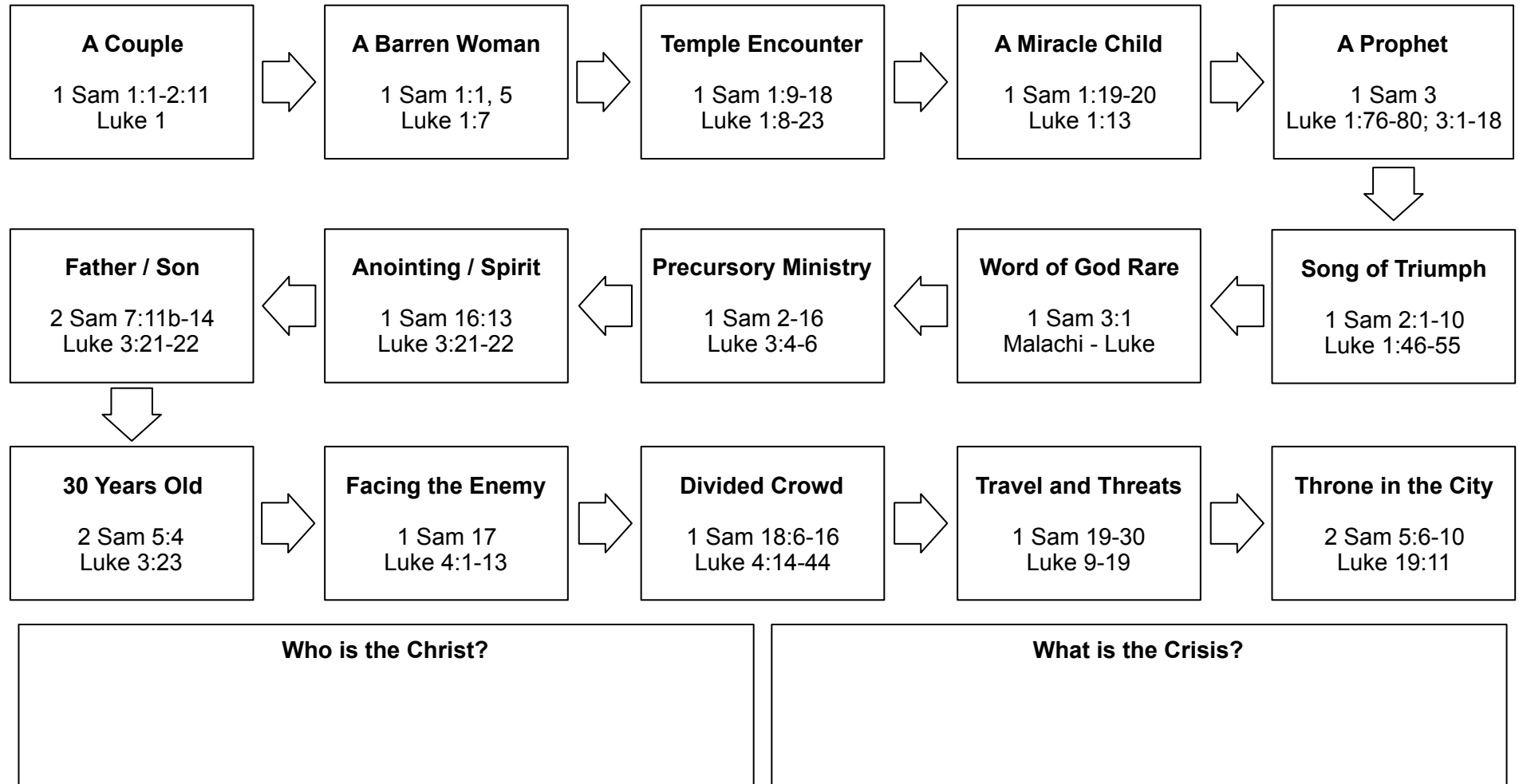
Jesus Predicts his Death	8:31	9:30-31	10:32-34
Disciples Misunderstand	8:32-33	9:32-34	10:35-40
Cost of Discipleship	8:34-38	9:35-37	10:41-45

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Christology and Crisis: Luke



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Christology and Crisis: Luke

Jesus bears burdens	Jesus provides strength to bear burdens
Jesus appears to the meek and lowly	Begins and ends in the Temple (1:5-23; 24:53)
Mary's viewpoint (2:19, 51) and her family	Prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 11:1-4; 18:1-8; 22:40 etc)
Shepherds (2:9) rather than Wise Men	Holy Spirit: 18x. 57 in Acts. 6 in Mark. 12 in Matt
Angel appears to Mary (1:26) rather than Joseph (Matt 2:20)	Joy and Praise (ch 1-2 repeatedly; 10:17, 21; 15:7, 10; 19:37; 24:41, 53)
Warnings to the rich (12:13-21, 22-34; 16:14, 19-31; 18:18-25; 9:1-10)	<pre> graph TD A[Jerusalem and Temple (1:5-4:13)] --> B[Galilee (4:14-9:50)] B --> C['Set his face to Jerusalem' (9:51)] C --> D[Long and steady journey (9:51-19:27)] D --> E['Stay here in the city' (24:49)] E --> A </pre>
Eating with Sinners (5:29-32; 15:1-2; 19:7)	
The Lepers (5:12-16; 7:22; 17:11-19), crippled (5:17-26; 7:2) and blind (7:21-22; 18:35-43)	
Tax Collectors (5:27-30; 15:1-2; 19:1-10)	
Lost Coin (15:8-10) and Prodigal Son (15:11-32)	
Women: Mary x 13. Widow of Nain (7:11-17); Woman with ointment (7:36-50)	
Gentiles: Good Samaritan (10:29-37); Centurion (7:1-10) etc	

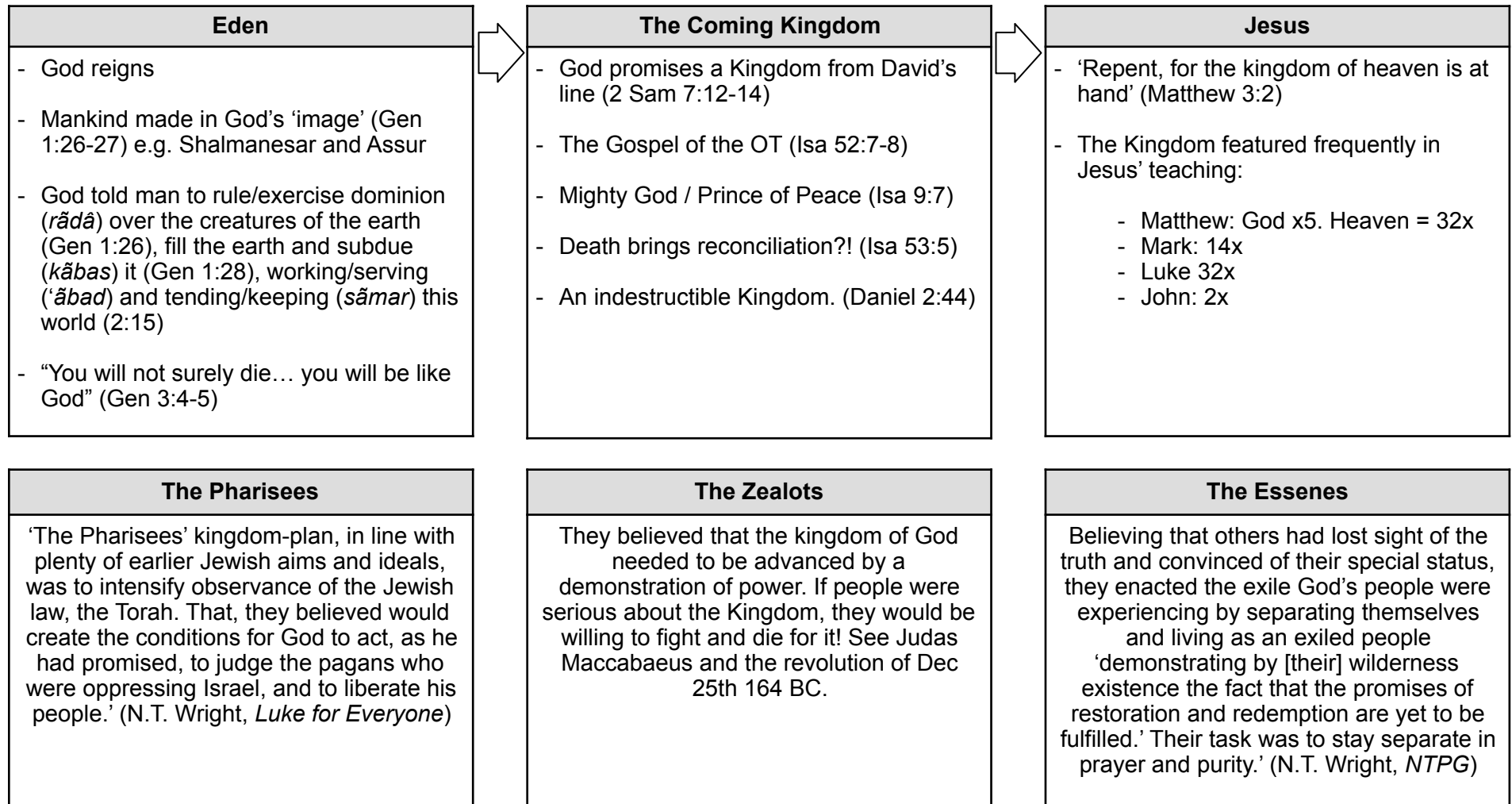
‘Jerusalem is named about thirty-three times in Luke’s gospel, as often as in Matthew, Mark and John combined; while it comes sixty times in Acts, the rest of the New Testament has it only fourteen times, which shows how central it is in Luke’s thinking.’ (Richard Burridge)

Session 2: The Kingdom of God

How does Jesus' life, death and resurrection continue the grand theme of Scripture? And how should we understand the central theme of his ministry: The Kingdom of God?

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The story of the Kingdom

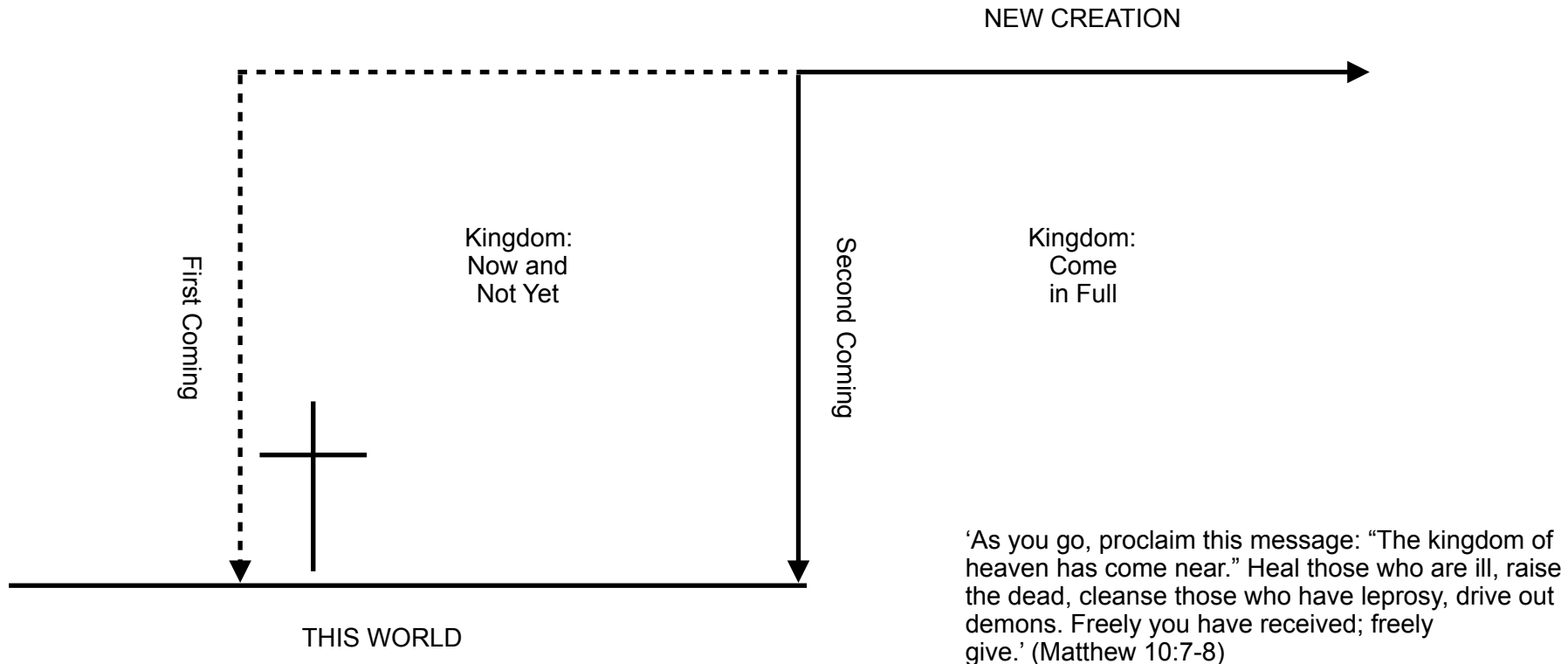


Session 2: The Kingdom of God

What is the Kingdom?

‘The sovereign and saving rule of YHWH’ (Tom Wright)

‘The king-dominion of God’ (D.A. Carson)



Session 2: The Kingdom of God

The Parables: Stories of the Kingdom

Communicative	The parables are not simply entertaining stories (or preaching illustrations!) but tools of communication, so their themes are likely to correspond to the overall themes of Jesus' teaching
	'The parables represent the interpretation which our Lord offered of His own ministry' (C. H. Dodd)
	'They made sense only within the whole context of Jesus' career. They echoed, reflected, interpreted and indeed defended the main thrusts of Jesus' work, and themselves set up other echoes in turn' (N.T. Wright)
	The story which can be evoked by the phrase 'kingdom of god' may well be present even though the phrase itself is absent' (Wright)
Cultural	Written to people at a particular point in time, with references that would make sense to them in their world.
	'What seems to the western mind to be bad farming is simply customary usage in Palestinian conditions' (J. Jeremias)
Confrontational	'When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds' (Matt 21:45-46)
	'For the most part, though not exclusively, they are weapons of controversy. Every one of them calls for an answer on the spot ... All of the parables that deal with the gospel itself are a defence of the good news. The actual proclamation of the good news to sinners took a different form, in the offer of forgiveness, in Jesus' inviting the guilty to taste his hospitality, and in his calling them to follow him. It was not to sinners that he addressed the gospel parables, but to his critics, to those who rejected him because he gathered the despised around him' (J. Jeremias)
Cryptic	Matt 13:1-17, 34-35; Mark 4:11-12 – are these deliberately cryptic in order to confuse people? Compare Matt 13:14-15; Isa 6:9-10
	'The parables not only conceal but also reveal and often they reveal that which was previously concealed' (Craig Blomberg)

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The Parables: Stories of the Kingdom

Look for one main point	Look at the wider setting	Look at its place in Jesus' ministry	Look at the use of OT imagery
'Often a parable will only have one basic truth in mind. We must not try to read more into a parable than we ought [...] we must never try to make a parable stand on all four legs! Not every detail of a parable has to have a meaning.' (R.T. Kendall)	<p>Why did Jesus tell the parable?</p> <p>How did his hearers interpret it?</p> <p>What is around it? Other parables? Miracles?</p>	How does it fit with the other main themes of Jesus' ministry? In particular the Kingdom?	<p>The parables <i>may</i> contain allegorical elements, but their meaning is most often derived from the OT.</p> <p>How were these symbols used previously? Does the story sound familiar?</p>

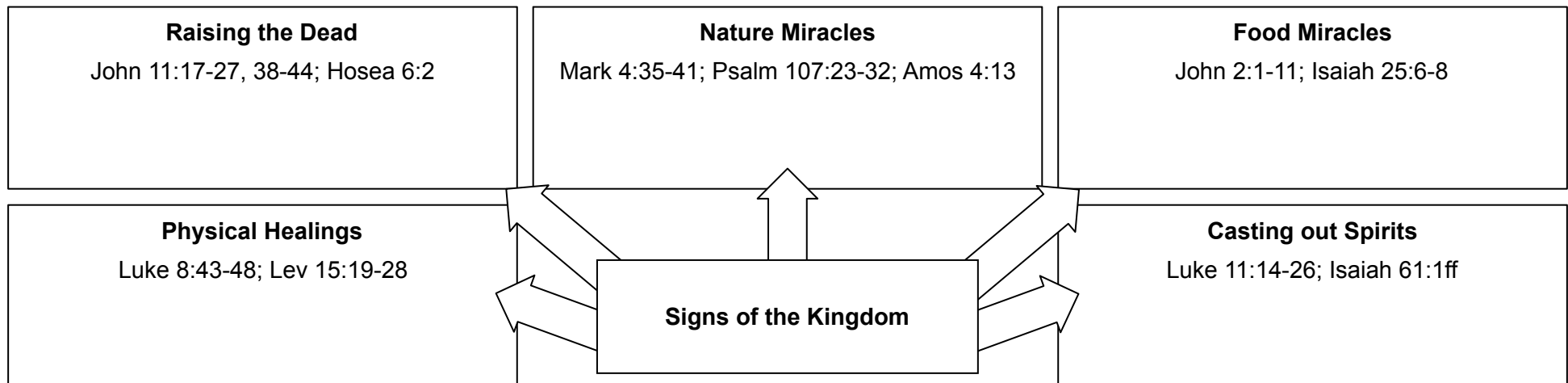
What do these parables teach us about the Kingdom?

Matthew 13:31-32	Matthew 13:33	Matthew 13:44
Hint: Consider Ezekiel 31:1-14 and Daniel 4:10-23 and think about how Jesus may be adapting the imagery to make his point	Hint: Most leaven imagery is negative (Matt 16:6; 1 Cor 5:6; Gal 5:9). How should we understand Jesus' <i>positive</i> use?	Hint: What were people's expectations about the Kingdom and how would this parable challenge them?

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Signs of the Kingdom

What do the signs tell us about the King and the Kingdom?			
Does the episode give clues? Observe people's responses, or author's comments.	Look at the wider setting What is around it? Parables? Teachings? Other miracles? When, where and to whom did Jesus do the miracle?	Look at Jesus' wider ministry Does the miracle shed any light on another theme in Jesus' teaching?	Look at the use of OT imagery Does the miracle include any references to OT themes and prophetic promises?



Pick one of the following exercises for your personal study:

How do you find the idea that the gospel writers were selective and creative in the way they told the Jesus story? Does the idea concern you? Or does it help you better appreciate them? (1,000 words)

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Choose one of the synoptic gospels and read it through, bearing in mind what we have learnt about the agenda and focus of each writer. Are there things you notice, that you would not have seen before? (1,000 words)

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Read Isaiah 5:1-7 and Mark 12:1-12. Bearing in mind the events surrounding Mark 12, the main themes of Jesus' ministry, and the OT background, what do you think Jesus was trying to communicate in the parable of the Wicked Tenants? (1,000 words)

Recommended Resources

General Reading

Author	Title	Notes
Bailey, Kenneth	Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes	Great material on Jesus' cultural context
Bauckham, Richard	Jesus and the Eyewitnesses	Great material on the trustworthiness of the gospels
Burridge, Richard	Four Gospels, One Jesus	Good material on each of the gospel writers' purpose
Carson, D.A. and Moo, Douglas	An Introduction to the New Testament	A great reference book for the whole NT
Köstenberger, Andreas and Taylor, Justin	The Final Days of Jesus	A chronological study of Jesus' last days
Leithart, Peter	The Four	Good material on each of the gospel writers' purpose
Wright, N.T.	The New Testament and the People of God	Three volumes on the historical context of the NT. Very academic. Jesus and the Victory of God is the most helpful for understanding the synoptics and the kingdom.
	Jesus and the Victory of God	
	The Resurrection of the Son of God	
	Simply Jesus	More popular level books on Jesus and his life, teaching and ministry
	When God Became King	

Top Three Commentaries

Matthew	Mark	Luke
Morris, Leon (Pillar)	Lane, William (NICNT)	Bock, Darrell (NIVAC / IVPNTC)
France, R.T. (NICNT)	English, Donald (BST)	Morris, Leon (TNTC)
Carson, D.A. (EBC)	Wright, N.T. (For Everyone)	Green, Joel (NICNT)