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# Getting started with the Gospels

Handouts in English and Swahili:

<http://stevewalton.info>

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# What have we seen in Mark?

- ! something surprising or striking
- \* a fresh insight
- ? have a question or don't understand
- want to find out more

# Mark's picture of Jesus

- Produce a one paragraph summary of the key things you have learned from reading Mark about
  - Jesus' identity
  - Jesus' actions
  - Jesus' teaching
  - Others' reactions to Jesus

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What is a Gospel?

# Which Gospels?

- apocryphal Gospels
  - e.g. Thomas, Peter
  - do not have all the key features of our four canonical Gospels, based on 1 Cor 15:3-4 [Simon Gathercole]

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that **Christ** died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

I Corinthians 15:3-4

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1 Corinthians 15:3-4



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1 Corinthians 15:3-4

# Which Gospels?

- apocryphal Gospels
  - e.g. Thomas, Peter
  - do not have all the key features of our four canonical Gospels, based on 1 Cor 15:3-4
    - Jesus as Messiah/Christ
    - Jesus' vicarious death
    - Jesus' resurrection on the third day
    - fulfillment of the Scriptures

# Which Gospels?

- the four canonical Gospels
  - recognised by the early church because of apostolic authority
    - Matthew and John thought to be by apostles
    - Luke the travel companion of Paul
    - Mark the scribe and translator of Peter
  - first called 'Gospels' by Justin Martyr (2nd century AD)

# The nature of the Gospels

- why ask?
- ancient readers knew different genres (types of book)
- ‘gospel’ = the gospel **message**
  - Greek *euangelion* = ‘good news’

Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of **good tidings**;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of **good tidings**,  
lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
“Here is your God!”

Isaiah 40:9

How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger  
who announces peace,  
who brings **good news**,  
who announces salvation,  
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

Isaiah 52:7

# The nature of the Gospels

- why ask?
- ancient readers knew different genres (types of book)
- ‘gospel’ = the gospel **message**
  - Greek *euangelion* = ‘good news’
  - in Paul *euangelion* is always a **spoken message**



For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Romans 1:16

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the **gospel** that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand

I Corinthians 15:1

# Two approaches

- The Gospels are like other ancient writings
  - key proposal: ancient 'lives' *bioi*

I am not a writer of histories but of biographies. My readers therefore must excuse me if I do not record all events or describe in detail, but only briefly touch upon, the noblest and the most famous. For the most conspicuous do not always or of necessity show a man's virtues or failings, but it often happens that some light occasion, a word or a jest, gives a clearer insight into character, than battles with their slaughter of tens of thousands and the greatest array of armies and sieges of cities. As painters produce a likeness by the representation of the countenance and the expression of the face, in which the character is revealed, without troubling themselves about the other parts of the body, so I must be allowed to look rather into the signs of a man's character, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of great events and battles.

Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 1.1 (1st century AD)

# Two approaches

- The Gospels are like other ancient writings
  - key proposal: ancient 'lives' *bioi*
    - focus on a person
    - *ethos* (character) very important in *bioi*

# Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*

25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

## WHAT ARE THE GOSPELS?

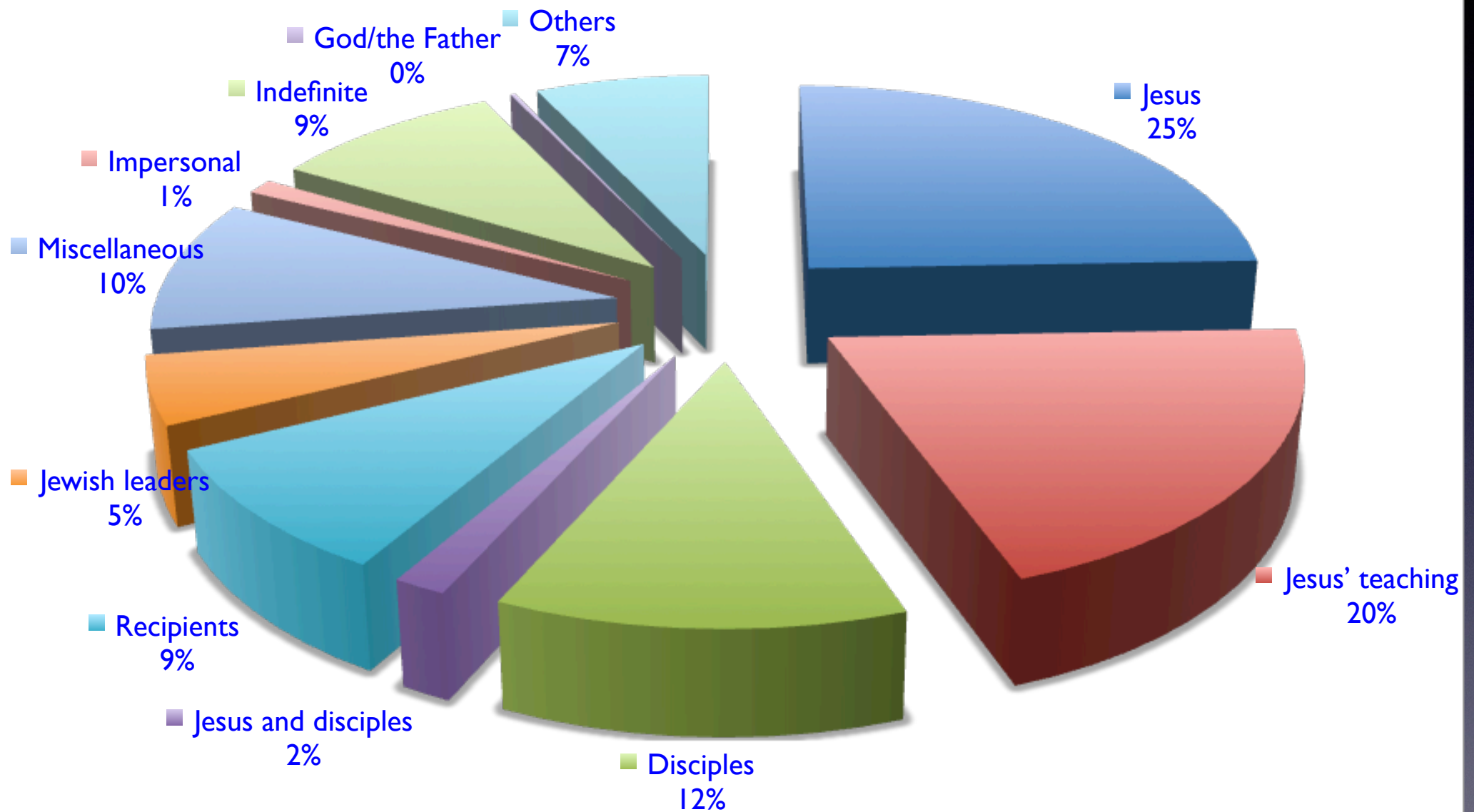
A COMPARISON WITH  
GRAECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY

RICHARD A. BURRIDGE

- opening features
- subject



# Verb subjects in Mark (Burridge's analysis)



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## WHAT ARE THE GOSPELS?

A COMPARISON WITH  
GRAECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY

RICHARD A. BURRIDGE



- opening features
- subject
- external features
- internal features
- weakness?
- not modern biographies



# Two approaches

- The Gospels are like other ancient writings
- The Gospels are **unlike** other ancient writings
  - C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development*

# The apostolic preaching

Acts 10:34-43	Topic
vv 37, 43	John the Baptist, OT fulfilled
vv 38-39a	Jesus' ministry described
v 39b	passion narrative
vv 40-41	resurrection of Jesus
v 42	command to make disciples

# The apostolic preaching

Acts 10:34-43	Topic	Mark
vv 37, 43	John the Baptist, OT fulfilled	1:1-15
vv 38-39a	Jesus' ministry described	1:16–8:30
v 39b	passion narrative	8:31–15:47
vv 40-41	resurrection of Jesus	16:6
v 42	command to make disciples	16:7

# Two approaches

- The Gospels are like other ancient writings
- The Gospels are **unlike** other ancient writings
- Truth in both views?

“Here, then, in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, each with its own peculiar emphasis, may be found **the deposit of early Christian explanation**: here are the voices of Christians explaining what led to their existence—how they themselves came to be: telling the story to themselves, that they may tell it to others, or even telling it directly to those others.”

C. F. D. Moule

# Key take-away

- The Gospels are books about **Jesus**
  - what is this teaching about **who Jesus is?**
  - what is this teaching about **what Jesus has come to accomplish?**
- Secondly: what is this teaching about **what it means to follow Jesus?**

# Why were the Gospels written?

- evangelistic reason
  - ‘These things are written so that you may believe that the Messiah is Jesus’ John 20:31
- didactic (teaching) reason

“I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **so that you may know the truth of the words in which you have been instructed.**”

Luke 1:3-4



# Why were the Gospels written?

- evangelistic reason
  - ‘These things are written so that you may believe that the Messiah is Jesus’ John 20:31
- didactic (teaching) reason Luke 1:3-4
- geographical reason—spreading out of the original witnesses
- historical reason

How were the Gospels written?

Luke 1:1-4

“Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as **they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word**, I, too, decided, as one who followed closely everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth of the words in which you have been instructed.”

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# Matthew, Mark and Luke

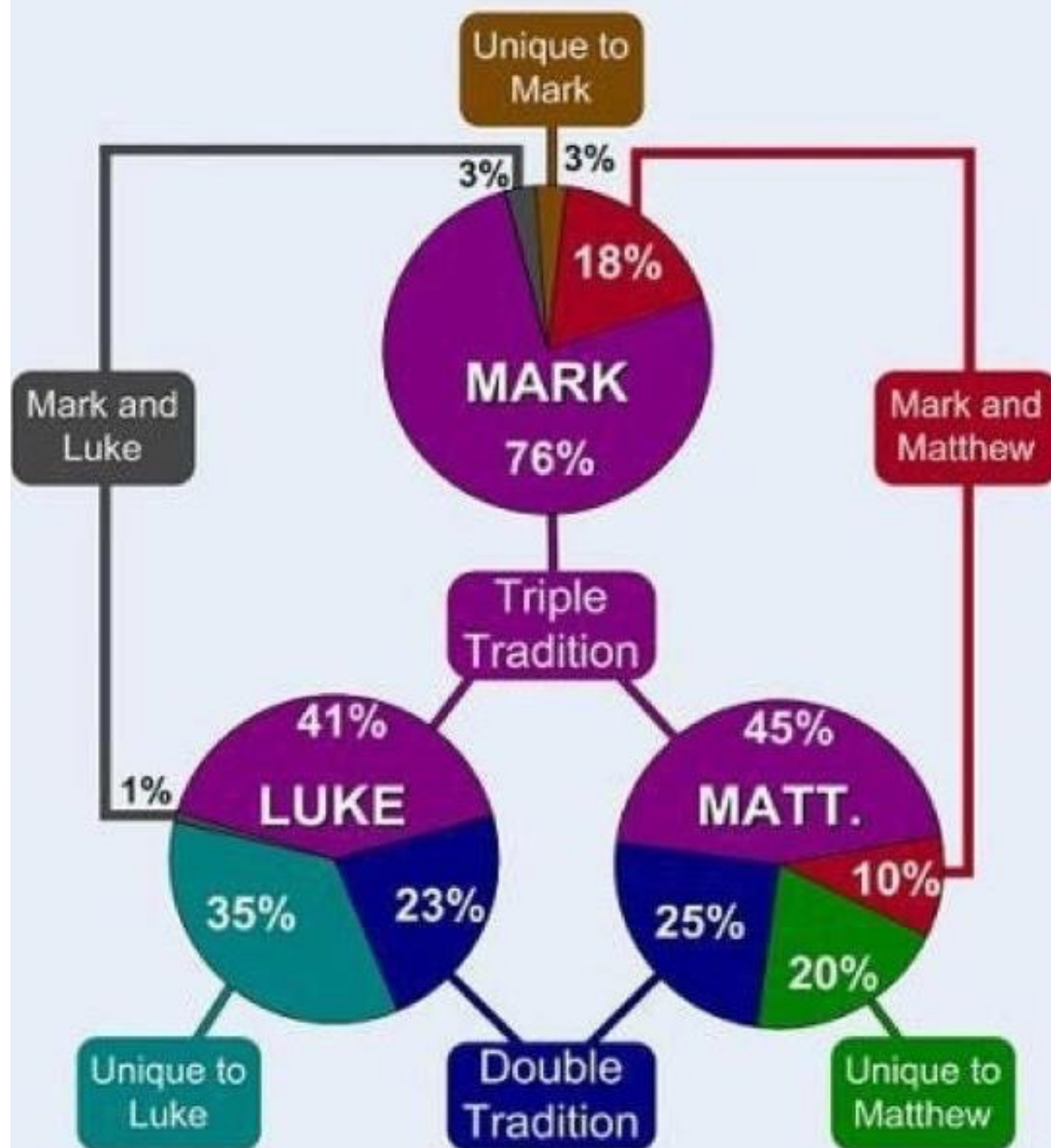
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The 'Synoptic' Gospels

# The 'Synoptic' Gospels

- name comes from arrangement in 'synopsis'—to be seen together
- source criticism focuses on written sources
  - Luke 1:1 'Many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events'
  - most scholars think Luke and Matthew used Mark as one of their sources

# Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels





*Matt. 22:22-27*

<sup>23</sup> The same day some Sadducees came to him, saying there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, saying, <sup>24</sup> “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies childless his brother shall marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.’ <sup>25</sup> Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. <sup>26</sup> The second did the same, so also the third, down to the seventh. <sup>27</sup> Last of all, the woman herself died

*Mark 12:18-22*

<sup>18</sup> Some Sadducees who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, saying, <sup>19</sup> “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that ‘if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no child the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.’ <sup>20</sup> There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; <sup>21</sup> and the second married her and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; <sup>22</sup> none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died.

*Luke 20:27-32*

<sup>27</sup> Some Sadducees those who say there is no resurrection, came to him <sup>28</sup> and asked him a question saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. <sup>29</sup> Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; <sup>30</sup> then the second <sup>31</sup> and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. <sup>32</sup> Finally the woman also died.

Matt. 22:28-33

<sup>28</sup> In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her.”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. <sup>30</sup> For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

<sup>31</sup> And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, <sup>32</sup> ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is God not of the dead, but of the living.” <sup>33</sup> And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

Mark 12:23-27

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<sup>26</sup> And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? <sup>27</sup> He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.”

Luke 20:33-40

<sup>33</sup> In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; <sup>35</sup> but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. <sup>36</sup> Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. <sup>37</sup> And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself

showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. <sup>38</sup> Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” <sup>39</sup> Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” <sup>40</sup> For they no longer dared to ask him another question.

# Agreement in the sequence of stories

<i>Story</i>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>
Jesus' teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum		1:21-22	4:31-32
Jesus' healing of the demonised man in the		1:23-28	4:33-37
Jesus' healing of Peter's mother in law	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39
Jesus healing and exorcising in the evening:	8:16-17	1:32-34	4:40-41
Jesus leaves Capernaum		1:35-38	4:42-43
Jesus preaching in Galilee: summary	4:23	1:39	4:44
The miraculous catch of fish			5:1-11
Jesus heals a leper	8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-16
Jesus heals a paralysed man	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26
Jesus calls Levi to follow him	9:9-13	2:13-17	5:27-32
A question about fasting	9:14-17	2:28-22	5:33-39
A question about plucking grain on the	12:1-8	3:1-6	6:1-5
A question about healing on the sabbath	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11
Healing by the sea: summary	4:24-24; 12:15-16	3:7-12	6:17-19
Jesus chooses the twelve	10:1-4	3:13-19	6:12-16

# Agreement between two Gospels

Matt. 7:7-11

“7 Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?

11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Luke 11:9-13 (§ 148, p. 106)

9 “And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for <sup>e</sup>

a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

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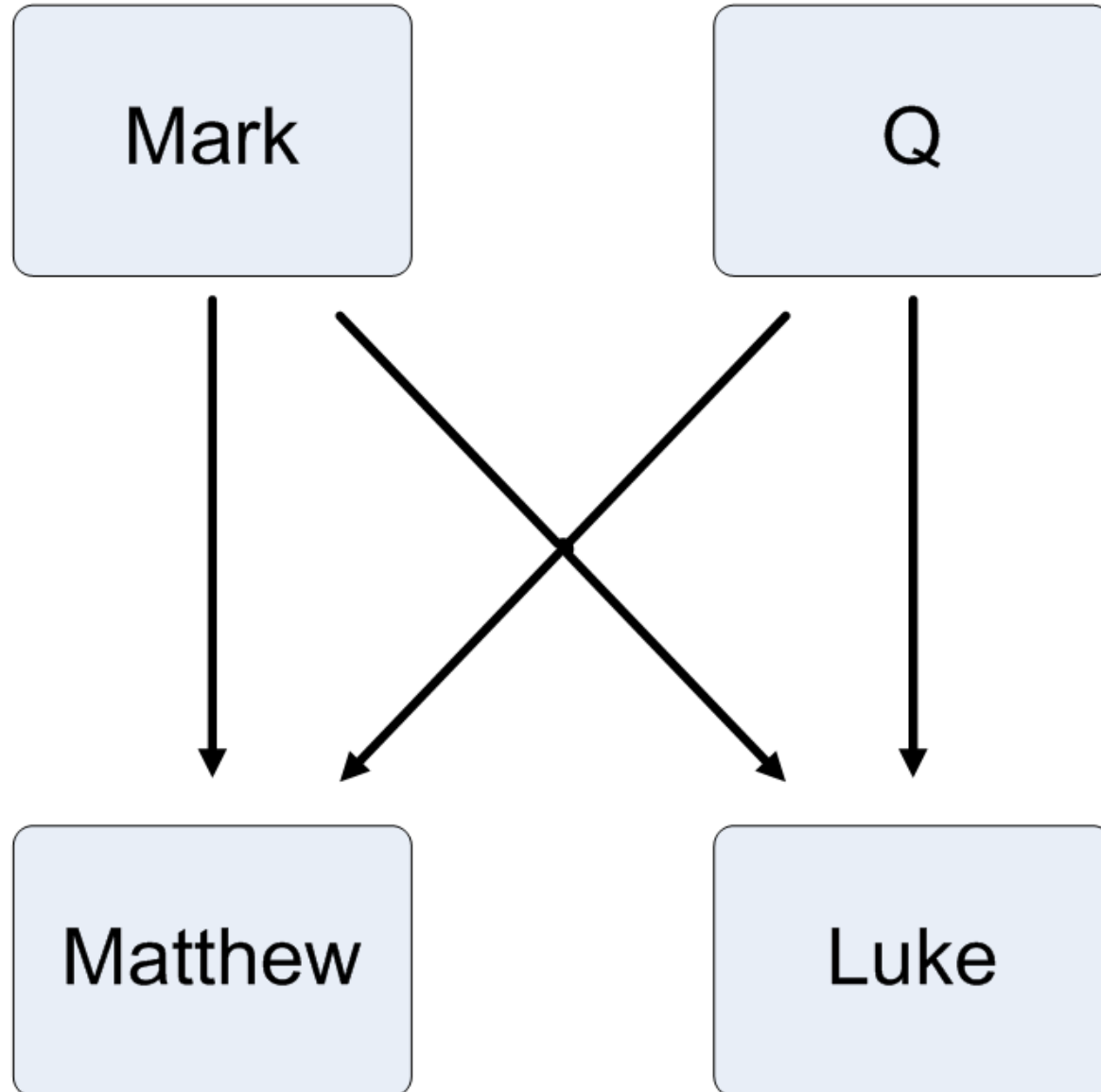
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# Sections unique to each Gospel

- Matthew 13:36-52 A series of parables
- Mark 3:19b-21 Jesus' visit to his home
- Luke 15 Three 'lost' stories—the sheep, the coin and the two sons

# The 'two source' theory





Matt. 12:9-14

9 And he went on from there and entered their synagogue. 10 And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him.

11 He said to them, "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! \*

So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath."

13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, whole like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how to destroy him.

Mark 3:1-6

1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here."

4 And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.\*\*

5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

6 The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Luke 6:6-11

6 On another sabbath, when he entered the synagogue and taught, a man was there whose right hand was withered. 7 And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. 8 But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there.

14:5 (§ 168, p. 119):

5 And he said to them, "Which of you, having an ass or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a sabbath day?" \*

6:9 And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" \*\*

10 And he looked around on them all,

and said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored.

11 But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

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Luke 6:6-11

6 On another sabbath, when he entered the synagogue and taught, a man was there whose right hand was withered. 7 And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. 8 But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there.

14:5 (§ 168, p. 119):

5 And he said to them, "Which of you, having an ass or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a sabbath day?" \*

6:9 And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" \*\*

10 And he looked around on them all,

and said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored.

11 But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Matt. 12:9-14

9 And he went on from there and entered their synagogue. 10 And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him.

Mark 3:1-6

1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

Luke 6:6-11

6 On another sabbath, when he entered the synagogue and taught, a man was there whose right hand was withered. 7 And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. 8 But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there.

3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here."

11 He said to them, "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! \*

So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath."

13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, whole like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how to destroy him.

4 And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.\*\*

5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

6 The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

14:5 (§ 168, p. 119):

5 And he said to them, "Which of you, having an ass or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a sabbath day?" \*

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and said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored.

11 But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

# The value of source criticism

- Shows the limits of study of the synoptic Gospels
  - not giving verbatim (word for word) reproduction of their sources
    - sayings of Jesus—paraphrasing, expanding and modifying to help readers understand
  - varying order of events
  - helps us to see the emphases of each writer

# Preparation for Wednesday: please study one set of parallels

- Notice the similarities and differences between the three accounts
- Angalia kufanana na tofauti kati ya akaunti hizo tatu
- What do these similarities and differences show us about the point or points which each writer is emphasising?
- Je, mfanano na tofauti hizi zinatonyesha nini kuhusu jambo au mambo ambayo kila mwandishi anasisitiza?