

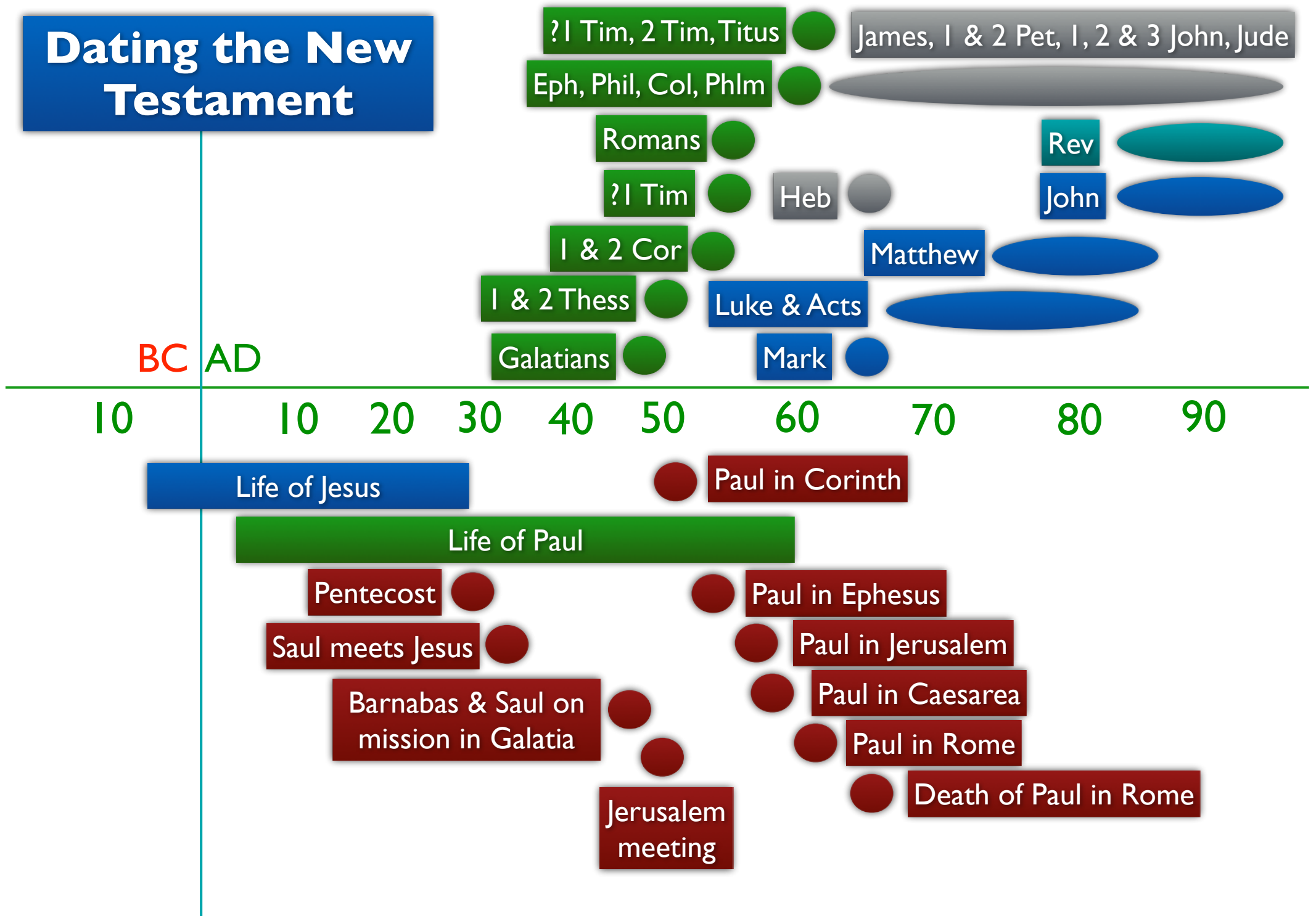
MAKING SENSE of the New Testament

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Dating the New Testament



Reading New Testament letters

Types of letters in the New Testament

- individual to individual
- individual to specific group
- circular letter to several groups
- team to specific group
- an “apocalypse” in letter form
- anonymous letters

Ancient letters

- common in the ancient world
- generally fairly short
- form
 - **opening**: sender, recipient, greeting, wish for good health
 - **thanksgiving**
 - **body**
 - **closing**: greeting, wish for good health

Hilarion to his sister Alis, many greetings, likewise to my lady Berous and to Apollonarion. Know that we are even yet in Alexandria. Do not worry if they all come back (except me) and I remain in Alexandria. I urge and entreat you, be concerned about the child and if I should receive my wages soon, I will send them up to you. If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out. You have said to Aphrodisias, "Do not forget me." How can I forget you? Therefore I urge you not to worry. (Year) 29 of Caesar, Payni 23

John L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 111-12, letter 72, from 1 BC

Antonius Maximus to his sister, Sabina, very many greetings. Before all else I pray that you are well, for I myself am well. Making mention of you before the gods here, I received a letter from Antonius our fellow citizen. And when I learned that you were well, I rejoiced exceedingly. And I do not hesitate to write to you about my welfare and that of my family at every opportunity. Greet Maximus much and Kpres, my lord. My wife, Aufidia, greets you and so does my son, Maxmumus, whose birthday is the thirtieth of Epeiph according to Greek reckoning, as well Elpis and Fortunata. Salute my lord...I pray that you may be well.

John L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 160-61, letter 103B, 2nd century AD.

The role of secretaries

- as scribe—taking dictation or shorthand
- as editor—taking notes and editing into good style
- as drafter—given the general sense of what to write, and then writing the letter
- in each case the sender would authorise the letter, often by writing their name at the bottom
- in the New Testament

“ I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.”

Romans 16:22

“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.”

I Corinthians 16:21

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- in the New Testament
- senders kept copies of letters they sent

Types of ancient letters

- letter of recommendation or introduction
- paraenetic or exhortative letters
- family letters

I Corinthians

- opening 1:1-3
- thanksgiving 1:4-9
- body 1:10–16:18
 - transitional formulae, e.g. “now concerning”
7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1
- closing 16:19-24

Read 3 John

- Identify the verse(s) which are the different sections of an ancient letter
- Where are the places the author is “christianizing” the ancient letter form?
- What seems to be the occasion for this letter?
- What does the elder John say in response to the issues he tackles?
- What implications might this letter have for Christians in the twenty-first century in the West?

Implications for interpreting letters

- What are the issues?
- How is the letter organised?
- Whose voice are you hearing?
- Look out for sub-genres within a letter

Reading the Gospels

What kind of books are the Gospels?

- “gospel” εὐαγγέλιον *euangelion* = message
- in secular use for good news of victory in battle
- Paul’s use
 - “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 good news that I proclaimed to you**, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to **the message that I proclaimed to you**—unless you have come to believe in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:1-2

The Gospels as unlike other writings

- the “kerygmatic hypothesis” Karl Ludwig Schmidt 1923
 - the Gospels as “folk literature” rather than “high literature”
 - the writers as “scissors and paste” editors
 - the Gospels as preaching documents
- the apostolic preaching in Acts: C. H. Dodd 1936

The apostolic preaching in Acts

Acts 10:34-43

John the baptiser, Scripture fulfilled

vv 37, 43

Jesus' ministry

vv 38-39a

passion narrative

v 39b

Jesus' resurrection

vv 40-41

command to make disciples

v 42

The apostolic preaching in Acts

Acts 10:34-43

Mark

John the baptiser, Scripture fulfilled

vv 37, 43

1:1-15

Jesus' ministry

vv 38-39a

1:16-8:30

passion narrative

v 39b

8:31-15:47

Jesus' resurrection

vv 40-41

16:6

command to make disciples

v 42

16:7

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- the apostolic preaching in Acts: C. H. Dodd 1936
- Mark 1:1 Ralph P. Martin 1972
 - “The **beginning** [*archē*] of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”
 - the Gospels as **testimony** about Jesus

The Gospels as like other writings

- the Gospels as ancient biographies

“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

The Gospels as like other writings

- the Gospels as ancient biographies, “lives” βίοι *bioi*
- characteristics of ancient biographies
 - opening features
 - title
 - opening formulae

The Gospels as like other writings

- the Gospels as ancient biographies, “lives” βίοι *bioi*
- characteristics of ancient biographies
 - opening features
 - subject
 - is subject of a large proportion of verbs
 - given the lion’s share of space

The Gospels as like other writings

- the Gospels as ancient biographies, “lives” βίοι *bioi*
- characteristics of ancient biographies
 - opening features
 - subject
 - external features
 - style, structure, etc.

The Gospels as like other writings

- the Gospels as ancient biographies, “lives” βίοι *bioi*
- characteristics of ancient biographies
 - opening features
 - subject
 - external features
 - internal features
 - setting
 - topics/content
 - values and attitudes espoused and promoted

The Gospels as like other writings

- the Gospels as ancient biographies, “lives” βίοι *bioi*
- characteristics of ancient biographies
 - opening features
 - subject
 - external features
 - internal features
 - the author’s intention and purpose
- the Gospels are books about Jesus
 - but not like modern biographies

The Gospel of Mark

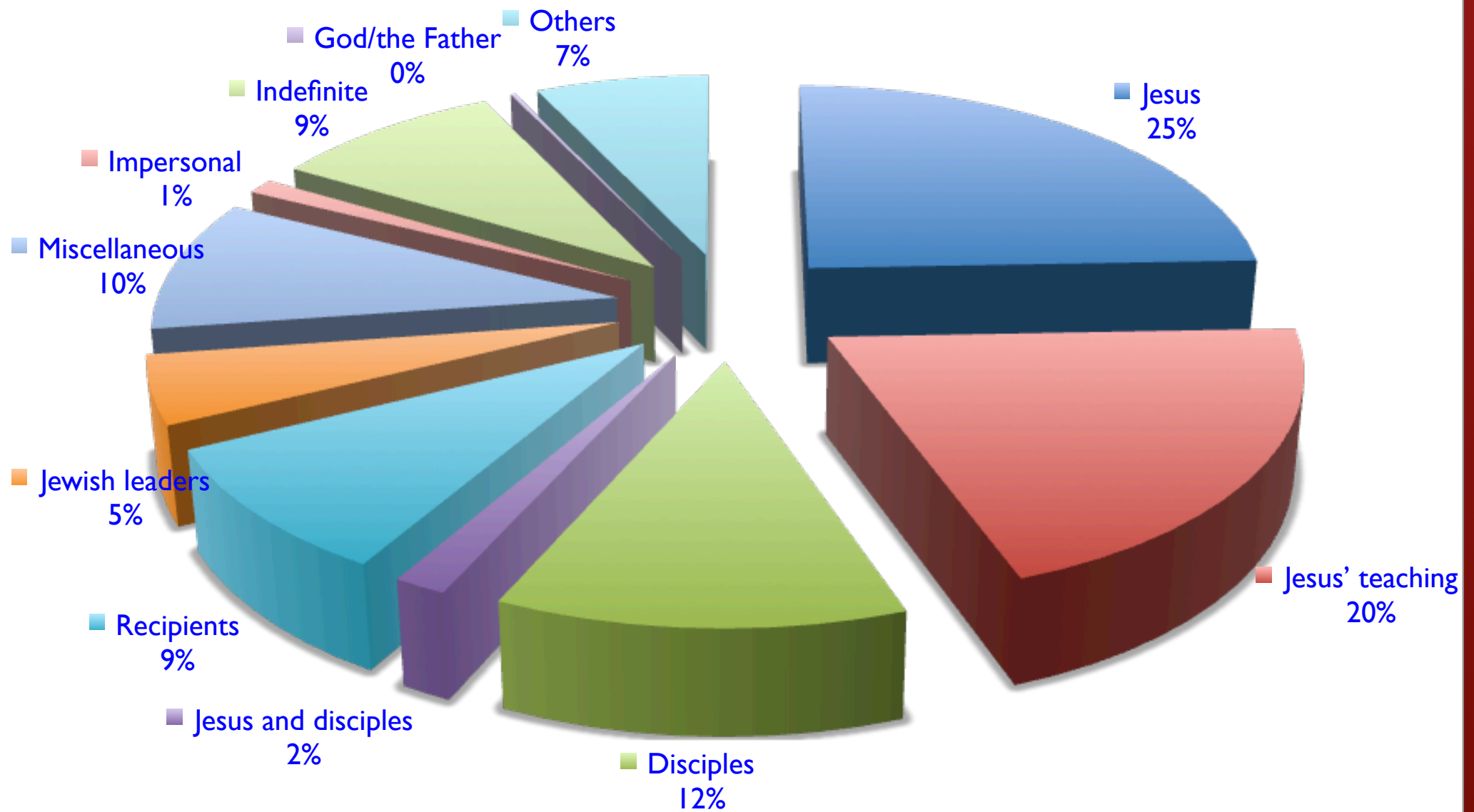
“Immediately” εὐθύς

- “And **just as** he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.” 1:10
- “the Spirit **immediately** drove him out into the wilderness.” 1:12
- “And **immediately** they left their nets and followed him.” 1:18
- “**Immediately** he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.” 1:20
- “They went to Capernaum; and **immediately** when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.” 1:21 (adapted)
- “**Just then** there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit” 1:23
- etc.!

It's all about Jesus

- The Gospels as ancient biographies (Burridge, Bond)
- opening features I:I
- the subject dominates the action

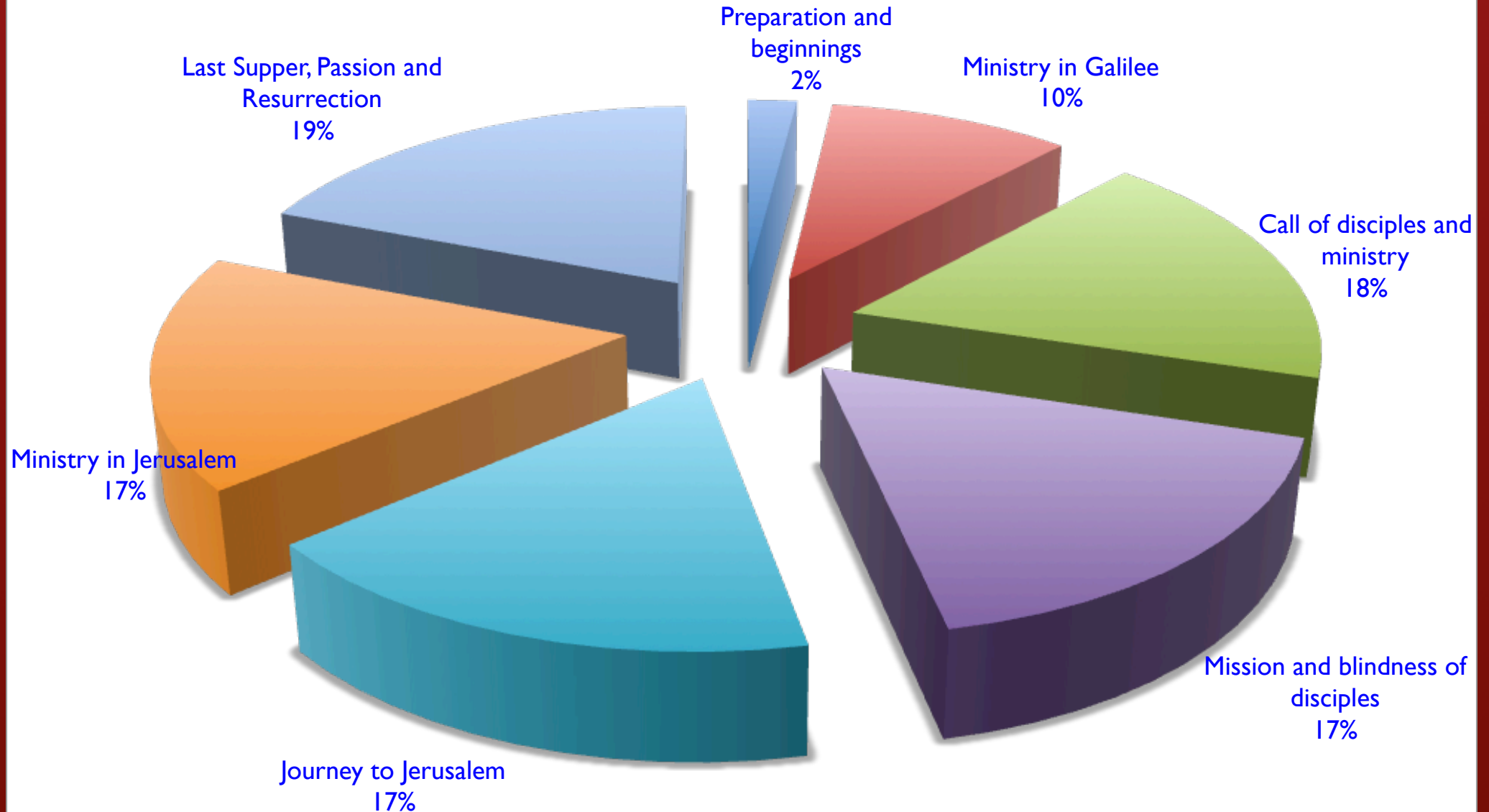
Verb subjects in Mark (Burridge's analysis)



Structure of Mark (Burridge)

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Verses</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>%age of work</i>
1:1-13	13	Preparation and beginnings	2.0
1:14-3:6	66	Ministry in Galilee	9.9
3:7-6:6	119	Call of disciples and ministry	17.9
6:7-8:26	113	Mission and blindness of disciples	17.0
8:27-10:52	113	Journey to Jerusalem	17.0
11-13	114	Ministry in Jerusalem	17.1
14-16:8	127	Last Supper, Passion and Resurrection	19.1
	665		

Content analysis of Mark's Gospel (Burridge)



Jesus' identity
and mission are
revealed
8:27–9:10

Who is Jesus?
1:1–8:26

Why has Jesus
come?
9:11–16:8



It's all about Jesus

- roughly chronological
- geographical progression from Galilee to Jerusalem
- topic material grouped
- scale: focus on Jesus

“The circle of light is always sharply defined. The description of those who appear in it is limited to the essential.”

Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), 25

It's all about Jesus

- literary units
- characterisation
 - by words and deeds in ancient writings
 - Jesus' portrait through words and deed
 - other characters portrayed *in relation to Jesus*

It's all about Jesus

- internal features
 - settings focused around Jesus

“Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves” 11:15

It's all about Jesus

- internal features
 - settings focused around Jesus
 - topics and contents included
 - “As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and **he had compassion for them**, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” 6:34

It's all about Jesus

- internal features
 - settings focused around Jesus
 - topics and contents included
 - “**Moved with pity**, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’” 1:41

It's all about Jesus

- internal features
 - settings focused around Jesus
 - topics and contents included
 - “Jesus said to them, ‘Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ **And they were utterly amazed at him.**” 12:17

It's all about Jesus

- internal features
 - settings focused around Jesus
 - topics and contents included
 - author's intention and purpose

It's all about Jesus

- not the early church
- not the Christian life

When we read Mark,
we should focus on **Jesus**
as **Mark portrays him**

How Mark writes 11:12-21

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; 16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

18 And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. 19 And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

20 In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 Then Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered."

How Mark writes

- Sandwiches
- Developing themes
 - echoes
 - 6:41 **Taking** the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and **blessed** and **broke** the loaves, and **gave** them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all.
 - 8:6 Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he **took** the seven loaves, and **after giving thanks** he **broke** them and **gave** them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd.
 - 14:22 While they were eating, he **took** a loaf of bread, and **after blessing [it]** he **broke** it, **gave** it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.”

How Mark writes

- Sandwiches
- Developing themes
 - echoes
 - sustained notes 2:1–3:6; chs 4; 7
- Parables
 - the sower models Jesus dealing with unresponsive people 3:6, 20-22
 - the wicked tenants portrays Jesus as the son 12:1-12
 - “The seed of the word is nourished by the blood of the son” (John Proctor, *Mark's Jesus*, 16)

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Acts and More

<http://steve walton.info>