



Information Sheet

Exploring the Gospels in parallel

The person at the very centre of our faith is Jesus. His life, death and resurrection are at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. Yet, there are four accounts of all these events within our Bibles and we tend to explore that life either through the lens of one of these accounts or by a 'pick and mix' of elements of them all. Is there a better way?

In his book *Parallel Lives of Jesus: Four Gospels, One Story* Edward Adams says, "The ... title ... reflects the current scholarly consensus that the New Testament Gospels are a form of ancient biography; hence, in generic terms, they are "lives" of Jesus. Insofar as they are parallel accounts of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, they may be called "parallel lives" of Jesus....."

He goes on to write that "the layout of the Gospels in standard versions of the Bible is not conducive to a comparative reading of them, but a resource called a 'synopsis' has been devised for this purpose. A synopsis sets out parallel Gospel passages side by side so they can be viewed together. ..." "It is a great way of exploring the commonality and individuality of the Gospels. One can quickly spot similarities across matching passages and see where they differ"

The resources that accompany this Information Sheet offer an introduction to this kind of approach to the Gospels. They offer:

- The parallel texts of six episodes that feature in three or all four Gospels spanning the beginning, middle and end of the common gospel story:
 - The baptism of Jesus
 - The feeding of the five thousand
 - The walking on the water
 - The transfiguration
 - The death of Jesus
 - The discovery of the empty tomb
- A Study Guide for each story
- A series of questions to explore each story
 - i. What are the common elements in each of the stories?
 - ii. What are the differences in each of the accounts?
 - iii. How do we see Jesus in each account?
 - iv. What different emphases do the writers give to the episode?
 - v. What might we take from each account to help us in our discipleship?



What others have said about this approach to exploring the Gospels

This approach to the Gospels, while common in theological colleges and seminaries, is not often used with small groups in congregations. But in The Episcopal Church in the Philadelphia area of America a number of groups have been doing this for some time under the banner of *Approaching the Gospels Together*.

Helen White, the convenor of many of these groups speaks of it being “a text centred approach (where) participants read together the Synoptic Gospels in a small group setting.” These groups enter first and fully on the Parallels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), then the Gospel of John. The books they use are listed below and available via Amazon.

Helen goes on to say that this approach “is intentionally offered in the congregation as a way to begin to close the ‘gap’ between the seminary, pulpit and the pew. Participants, having read together the actual texts, are no longer dependent on what they have been told they have said....and they are eager to read more.”

Responses from three participants who have worked through the whole story of Jesus in parallel in a weekly Bible study. The voices of Inez, Pat and Greg,

"Reading in this manner (parallel accounts), simultaneously hearing the words from three perspectives, allowed me to take in the words of Scripture in such a way that I have never heard any one gospel reading previously.....It really was for me a meeting of Jesus the Christ as he walked through the pages of Scripture."

"I have found that, no matter how many times I begin again the parallel study of the synoptics, I always discover something new and exciting."

"Reading the Gospels in parallel, a page or two at a time, once a week, we grappled with why did Mark include this scene, why did Matthew use that language, who was Luke speaking to, and why was John singing such a different song?"

Books

Parallel Lives of Jesus: Four Gospels, One Story by Edward Adams (SPCK 2011)

Available at: <http://www.spckpublishing.co.uk/shop/parallel-lives-of-jesus/>

Also available to BILC participants at 30% discount – use code: **parallax080816**

To use it, just type (or paste) into the ‘coupon code’ box in our site’s Shopping Basket and click ‘apply coupon’,

[Records of the Life of Jesus](#) by Henry B. Sharman.

[Approaching the Gospels Together - Leaders Guide for Group Gospels Study](#) by Mary C. Morrison.

Both available via Amazon or other electronic book outlets



