

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 12, Synoptic Theology Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 12, Synoptic Theology, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture from Robert Newman's Synoptic Gospels course introduces the concept of Biblical Theology and its application to understanding the Synoptic Gospels. It contrasts Biblical Theology with both Unbiblical and Systematic Theology, focusing on how individual Scripture presents theology through its unique style and terminology. The lecture examines word frequencies in the Synoptics compared to the entire New Testament to identify unifying themes, specifically Christology, love, faith, salvation, forgiveness, and kingdom. It uses Herman Ridderbos' book *The Coming of the Kingdom* as a case study, exploring the characterization of the Kingdom of God as theocratic, dynamic, messianic, future, and present. The lecture also considers the relationship between the Kingdom and the Church, the Lord's Supper, and the future consummation of the Kingdom, concluding that Ridderbos' focus on the coming of the kingdom is a valuable lens for interpreting the Synoptics.

2. 21 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 12 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → Synoptic Gospels).



**Newman_Synoptics
_Session 12.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 12, Synoptic Theology

Briefing Document: Synoptic Theology According to Dr. Robert C. Newman and Herman Ridderbos

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and ideas presented in excerpts from Dr. Robert C. Newman's lecture on "Synoptic Theology," drawing heavily on Herman Ridderbos's work, *The Coming of the Kingdom*. Newman uses Ridderbos's framework to analyze unifying theological themes within the Synoptic Gospels, specifically focusing on the concept of the "Kingdom of God."

I. Introduction to Biblical Theology

- Newman distinguishes between two uses of "Biblical Theology":
- **Biblical Theology as Orthodox Theology:** Doctrine consistent with the teachings of the Bible.
- **Biblical Theology as Distinct from Systematic Theology:** The study of how Scripture presents theology in its own unique terms, vocabulary, and structure. This is the focus of the lecture. "Biblical Theology is trying to see what terms, pictures, etc., John used to proclaim God's Word in the Gospels... or what terms Paul used in his epistles... because God worked through the individuals...so they had different styles...and so you wind up with different terms sometimes being used."

II. Word Statistics and Emphases in the Synoptics

- Newman uses word frequency analysis to highlight distinctive emphases in the Synoptic Gospels compared to the rest of the New Testament. He compares word usage to the benchmark of 0.33, representing the approximate proportion of the NT comprised of the Synoptics. Key observations include:
- **Christology:** "Christ" is a relatively *rare* term in the Synoptics (0.05 frequency). This relates to the idea of the "messianic secret".
- "Son of Man" is an unusually *common* term (0.8 frequency), chosen by Jesus himself, though intentionally ambiguous.
- "Son of God" appears at approximately the average frequency (0.33).

- **Love:** The terms *agapao* (verb) and *agape* (noun) are relatively infrequent (0.18 and 0.02 respectively). The *doing* of love is more emphasized than the direct terminology in the Synoptics.
- **Faith:** The terms *pisteuo* (to believe) and *pistis* (belief, trust) are also surprisingly *low* (0.15 and 0.10). Faith is a more prominent Johannine and Pauline theme.
- **Salvation:** *Sozo* (to save) and *soter* (savior) are *low* frequency (0.09 and 0.08), while *soteria* (salvation) is *high* (0.44). This suggests the Synoptics emphasize deliverance and salvation more than the act of saving or the title of savior. Newman attributes this to the synoptic writers' attempt to avoid imposing post-resurrection understanding onto Jesus' pre-crucifixion ministry. "They're trying to help you look at Jesus as he appeared to the people before his death on the cross, and its significance became apparent."
- **Forgiveness:** Both *aphiemi* (to forgive) and *aphasis* (forgiveness) are *high* frequency (0.79 and 0.47), indicating forgiveness as a prominent theme.
- **Kingdom:** *Basilea* (kingdom) is a *high* frequency term (0.74), confirming its importance. *Basileus* (king) is somewhat high (0.40) while *basileuo* (to reign) is somewhat low (0.21).

III. The Kingdom of God: Ridderbos's Framework

- **Central Theme:** According to Ridderbos, the major theme of the Synoptic Gospels is the coming of the Kingdom of God.
- **Kingdom of Heaven vs. Kingdom of God:** Newman agrees with Ridderbos that there is no substantial distinction between these phrases. Matthew uses "Kingdom of Heaven" more frequently, possibly due to the Jewish custom of avoiding direct references to God. "The standard guess today is that Matthew follows the pious Jewish practice of sometimes using substitutes for explicit references to God."
- **Characterizing the Kingdom:** Ridderbos identifies several key characteristics:
- **Theocratic:** Ruled by God. Evident in the terminology itself ("Kingdom of God," "Kingdom of Heaven").
- **Dynamic:** Refers to God's *activity* and *rule*, not primarily to a spatial territory. The kingdom can exist among God's followers even in a world in rebellion. "Our English word kingdom is used primarily to refer to a spatial territory... But rather, the term kingdom is used to refer to the king's activity. So, it's the rule of God."

- **Messianic:** God rules through His mediator, the Messiah. Jesus uses the ambiguous term "Son of Man," which has roots in Daniel 7, where a human-like figure receives the universal, eternal kingdom from God.
- **Future & Present ("Already and Not Yet"):** The kingdom is described in eschatological terms as not yet fully come, *but* it is also present in Jesus' first coming. This differs from a purely dispensational view, where the kingdom was offered and then withdrawn until the millennium.

IV. The Present, Provisional Kingdom

- **Kingdom Already Fulfilled:**
 - Satan has already been overcome (temptation, casting out demons).
 - Jesus' miraculous power demonstrates the restoration of creation.
 - God is visiting his people through Jesus' work.
 - The good news is being proclaimed (fulfillment of Isaiah).
 - Jesus' followers already possess the kingdom in some sense (Matthew 5:3-10, Luke 19:9, 10:20).
 - Jesus, the Messiah, is already present.
- **Kingdom as Provisional (Not Yet Complete):**
 - The time of the evil one still continues (Lord's Prayer, desires to have Peter, tares growing with wheat). "So, in the Lord's Prayer, deliver us from the evil one, is what we pray."
 - Miracles are signs, pointing to the coming kingdom, not the consummation itself. Their use is limited and linked to faith.
 - Parables reveal and conceal the mystery of the kingdom: the king is here, but the kingdom is not yet as expected.
 - Judgment is delayed.
 - The kingdom advances through growth, not military conquest.

V. Christology: Son of Man and Servant of the Lord

- The Synoptics' Christology focuses on two aspects of Jesus:
- **Son of Man:** Emphasizes Jesus' kingship, drawing on Daniel 7, but with intentional ambiguity.
- **Servant of the Lord:** Stresses Jesus' obedience and suffering, referencing Isaiah 40-55. The temptation in the wilderness demonstrates that glory comes through hardship and obedience. "The temptation of the wilderness shows us that the path of glory lies through obedience, hardship, and suffering." The messianic secret is necessary due to impending rejection.

VI. The Gospel of the Kingdom: Salvation and Commandments

- The good news of the kingdom encompasses both salvation and commandments. It's the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, particularly for the oppressed.
- **Salvation:**
- Offered as remission of sins.
- Antithetical to the rabbinic doctrine of reward. "Jesus' good news of salvation is kind of the opposite of the rabbinic view of reward."
- Depicted as God being our Father.
- Provides assurance of salvation.
- Earned by Jesus, not by us.
- Characterized by doing the Father's will. "And yet those who are saved are characterized by doing the Father's will. This is a very important part of the gospel which tends to get lost in this Lordship-Salvation controversy."
- **Commandments:**
- God intends for his children to be righteous.
- God's demands are summarized as righteousness.
- Good works demonstrate the presence of the kingdom.
- Fulfilling the law (Sermon on the Mount) by giving it its full measure, rejecting rabbinic interpretations. "Jesus is not against the law, but against refusal to be

fully committed to God's law. A rather different take than is common in an antinomian society."

VII. Kingdom, Church, and the Lord's Supper

- **Relationship of Kingdom and Church:** The Kingdom is God's work of salvation consummated in Jesus Christ. The Church are the people called by God who share in the bliss of the kingdom and participate in Jesus' work of salvation by spreading the message and being examples.
- **The Lord's Supper:** Displays both the death of Christ and the eschatological kingdom. "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do so until the Lord's coming." It distinguishes between the commencement and consummation of the kingdom and is provisional in nature, symbolizing fellowship through Christ's death and Jesus as the sacrifice inaugurating the new covenant. It is a sacrificial meal rather than the sacrifice itself.

VIII. Future Consummation of the Kingdom

- **Liberal Interpretation vs. Ridderbos's Approach:** Ridderbos rejects the liberal claim that Jesus and the disciples mistakenly believed the second coming would occur in the first century. He views this as a simplification that discards inconvenient data. "Liberals usually claim that Jesus and the disciples thought that the second coming would occur in the first century, but they were mistaken...But Ridderbos says, this is a simplification of a complex problem by the selective discard of inconvenient data."
- **Jesus' Predictions:** Passion statements reflect Isaiah's suffering servant.
- Parousia statements relate to Daniel's Son of Man.
- The Great Commission lifts the veil, inaugurating a new period in salvation history.
- The resurrection reveals the connection between Jesus' roles as servant and Son of Man.
- Events at the crucifixion prefigure the end of the age.
- **The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21):** Outlines the beginning of sorrows, the great tribulation, and the parousia (second coming). The great tribulation refers to the fall of Jerusalem, but not exclusively. Newman suggests that the fall of Jerusalem is a "dress rehearsal" for the second coming. "My read

would be... is that the event surrounding the fall of Jerusalem is kind of a dress rehearsal for the second coming."

- **Interpreting Time-Limited Pronouncements:** Newman disagrees with Ridderbos's interpretation of "this generation" as certainty without any time indication. He favors interpreting it as Jesus asking listeners to imagine being present during future events. The generation that sees the signs will be close to the end of the age.
- **Parousia Parables:** Point to a substantial period between the Ascension and the Parousia, but the length is unknown.
- **Fulfillment and Consummation of Eschatological Prophecies:** The Synoptics do not provide a systematic eschatology. We must piece together the puzzle, recognizing the potential for error in our interpretations and openness to divine surprises.

IX. Key Principles for Understanding Eschatology:

- Pay attention to signs but avoid being deceived by false messiahs. The signs include the beginning of sorrows, the abomination of desolation, the great tribulation, and cosmic catastrophes.
- Some living at Jesus' time will witness His powerful manifestation as Son of Man before they die, including His enemies.
- Do not give up praying for the coming of the kingdom.
- Be watchful; no one knows when He will come.
- Don't forget the great task in the meantime.
- Prophecy lacks time perspective.
- There is an interweaving of Jewish and universal elements. The prophet paints the future in colors known to him, using figurative language.

X. Conclusion

- Ridderbos provides a valuable framework for understanding the Synoptic Gospels through the lens of the coming of the Kingdom of God. There are many aspects to unpack within this theme, but Ridderbos' work provides a great starting point.

4. Study Guide: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 12, Synoptic Theology

Synoptic Theology: A Study Guide

Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. What are the two distinct uses of the term "Biblical Theology" discussed in the lecture?
2. According to the word statistics presented, which Christological term is most common in the Synoptic Gospels when compared to the rest of the New Testament, and why might this be significant?
3. Why does the lecturer say that Jesus might have used the term "Son of Man" to refer to Himself?
4. According to Ridderbos, what are the five characteristics of the Kingdom of God?
5. In what ways is the Kingdom of God considered present, according to the lecture?
6. How is the present Kingdom also considered provisional?
7. What are the two aspects of good news that Ridderbos sees within the Gospel?
8. How does the lecturer describe the relationship between the kingdom and the church?
9. What is the liberal claim about when Jesus and the disciples thought the second coming would occur?
10. What signs does the lecture mention we should pay attention to and not be deceived by false messiahs?

Quiz: Answer Key

1. The term "Biblical Theology" is used in contrast to "Unbiblical Theology," referring to doctrine in accordance with the Bible, or in contrast to "Systematic Theology," referring to the study of how Scripture presents theology in its own terms.
2. "Son of Man" is the most common. This is significant because it was Jesus' chosen term for himself, a term that can be interpreted ambiguously, thus obscuring his identity as the Messiah.

3. Jesus may have chosen the term "Son of Man" because it could refer to his humanity, an allusion to the messianic figure in Daniel 7, or simply a human carrying out God's commands, thus obscuring his messianic identity.
4. The five characteristics of the Kingdom of God are that it is theocratic, dynamic, messianic, future, and present.
5. The Kingdom of God is present in several ways: Satan has already been overcome, Jesus displays miraculous power, good news is being proclaimed, Jesus' followers possess the kingdom, and Jesus the Messiah is already here.
6. The present Kingdom is considered provisional because Satan still has power, the miracles are merely signs, and the judgment is delayed until the end of the age.
7. The two aspects of the good news are salvation, which is the antithesis of the rabbinic view of reward, and commandments, which God intends for his children to follow to be righteous.
8. The kingdom is God's work of salvation consummated in Jesus Christ. The church, on the other hand, are the people who are called by God who share in the bliss of the kingdom, and who participate in Jesus' work of salvation by spreading the message.
9. The liberal claim is that Jesus and the disciples believed the second coming would occur in the first century, but they were mistaken.
10. The lecture mentions we should pay attention to these signs: the beginning of sorrows, the abomination of desolation, the great tribulation, and cosmic catastrophes.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of word statistics in understanding Synoptic Theology. Provide specific examples from the lecture to illustrate your points.
2. Explain Ridderbos' concept of the Kingdom of God as both present and future. How does this "already and not yet" framework inform our understanding of the Synoptic Gospels?
3. Analyze the relationship between Jesus' miracles and the coming of the Kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels. What purpose do the miracles serve, and how are they limited?
4. Explore the connection between Jesus' identity as the Son of Man and his role as the Suffering Servant in the Synoptic Gospels. How do these two focal points of Christology intersect, particularly in light of the messianic secret?
5. Examine Ridderbos' perspective on the future consummation of the kingdom and the interpretation of eschatological prophecies. What cautions does he offer regarding the overpressing of certain teachings, and how should Christians approach the study of eschatology?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Biblical Theology:** The study of how a part, usually, or even the whole, of Scripture, presents theology in its own terms, its own vocabulary, images, structure, that sort of thing.
- **Systematic Theology:** A method of theological inquiry that formulates an orderly, rational, and coherent account of Christian beliefs.
- **Christology:** The study of the nature and person of Jesus Christ.
- **Messianic Secret:** A motif in Mark's Gospel in which Jesus attempts to conceal his identity as the Messiah.
- **Theocratic:** Ruled by God.
- **Dynamic:** Characterized by activity and change; in this context, referring to the Kingdom of God as the active rule of God.
- **Messianic:** Relating to the Messiah.

- **Eschatological:** Relating to the end times or the final events in history.
- **Provisional:** Temporary or conditional; in this context, referring to the present Kingdom of God as not yet complete.
- **Parousia:** The second coming of Christ.
- **Olivet Discourse:** Jesus' teachings on the Mount of Olives, addressing questions about the destruction of the temple and the end times (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21).
- **Premillennialism:** A view of eschatology that believes Jesus will return to earth before a literal 1,000-year reign of peace and righteousness.
- **Amillennialism:** A view of eschatology that believes the 1,000-year reign of Christ is symbolic and is currently being fulfilled in the church age.
- **Great Commission:** Jesus' command to his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:16-20).
- **Abomination of Desolation:** A phrase from the book of Daniel referring to a desecration of the temple; in the Olivet Discourse, it is a sign of the coming tribulation.
- **Antinomian:** One who holds that under the gospel dispensation of grace the moral law is of no use or obligation because faith alone is necessary to salvation.
- **Form Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that classifies the written material by form and attempts to work out the setting in life from which each form arose.
- **Soteriology:** The study of salvation.

5. FAQs on Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 12, Synoptic Theology, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Biblical Theology of the Synoptic Gospels: An FAQ

Here's an FAQ based on the provided text about Biblical Theology and the Synoptic Gospels.

- **What is Biblical Theology, and how does it differ from Systematic Theology?**
- Biblical Theology, in one sense, ensures doctrine aligns with Scripture, contrasting with "Unbiblical Theology." In another sense, it contrasts with Systematic Theology. This focuses on how specific parts or the whole of Scripture present theology using its own unique terms, images, and structure. It seeks to understand the individual authors' styles and perspectives within their historical and cultural contexts. We want our study to be Biblical Theology in both senses.
- **What is a unifying theme in the Synoptic Gospels according to the lecture?**
- According to Herman Ridderbos, a major unifying theme is the coming of the kingdom of God. This theme is prevalent throughout the Synoptics and can be further characterized as theocratic, dynamic, messianic, and both future and present.
- **What does it mean to say the kingdom of God is "theocratic" and "dynamic"?**
- "Theocratic" means the kingdom is ruled by God, evident in phrases like "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of Heaven." "Dynamic" means the term "kingdom" refers primarily to God's active rule and influence, not merely a geographical territory. This rule can manifest among God's followers even in a world rebelling against Him.
- **In what ways is the kingdom of God both "future" and "present" in the Synoptic Gospels?**
- The kingdom is "future" because it's often described in eschatological terms as not fully realized. It is "present" because aspects of the kingdom have already arrived with Jesus' first coming. Evidence of this includes Jesus overcoming Satan, displaying miraculous power, and the proclamation of good news. Jesus' followers also, in some sense, already possess the kingdom.

- **How is the concept of the "Son of Man" significant in the Synoptic Gospels, and why is it used instead of "Christ" more often?**
- "Son of Man" is a frequently used self-designation of Jesus in the Synoptics, referencing Daniel 7 where one like a human receives eternal dominion from God. This term has an ambiguous quality about it that is most likely intentional. The term "Christ" is comparatively rare in the Synoptics because Jesus didn't openly proclaim himself as Messiah, likely to avoid immediate polarization and interference with his intended purpose.
- **What is the relationship between the messianic secret and Jesus' mission?**
- The messianic secret, where Jesus often avoids openly declaring his messianic identity, is related to his mission as the substitutionary death required that people give in to him without repenting. God orchestrated events such that people, in their repentance, would come to know the truth about Jesus as the Messiah.
- **What does the lecture mean by the "provisional" nature of the present kingdom, and how does this relate to the delay of the final judgment?**
- The "provisional" nature means the present kingdom is not yet complete. Though Satan's power is being overcome, he still has influence. Miracles are signs, but not the consummation. This delay, as shown in the parables, allows for the growth of the kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel and the labor of the disciples in seeking what is lost and is tied to the fact that Jesus has not yet come again.
- **According to the lecture, what is the relationship between the Kingdom and the Church?** The kingdom is God's work of salvation consummated in Jesus Christ. The church is comprised of the people called by God who share in the bliss of the kingdom and participate in Jesus' work of salvation by spreading the message.