

The Gospel of Mark

The Historical Jesus

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Introduction

As any careful reader of the NT gospels will notice, Mark, Matthew, and Luke have striking similarities as well as significant differences. Each gospel has a different emphasis, a slightly different order of events, and a different target audiences. Each portrays Jesus in a different role. Therefore the first question is how are the accounts of the synoptics different? What are the differences, and what picture of Jesus can be gathered from each? Next, what does the result mean for the study of the historical Jesus? Is it important, and if so, why?

We will begin by listing the most commonly used titles for Jesus in the gospel narratives and expound on what they mean. Then, each synoptic gospel will be examined and the different themes and emphases extracted. Finally, the findings will be pulled together and conclusions about the study of the historical Jesus developed.

Titles of Jesus in the Gospels

Son of God

One of the most used titles for Jesus is “Son of God.” Mark uses that title in the very beginning of his gospel, and right after Jesus’ death quoting the Roman centurion present: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” This title is not unique to Jesus. It is used of angels in the Old Testament in Job 1:6, Daniel 3:25, and probably Genesis 6:2. It’s used of Israel as a nation in Exodus 4:22-23, Hosea 11:1, and Malachi 2:10. Finally, it’s

used for Israel's king in 2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 2:7, and Psalm 89:26-27. Each time it signifies a special relationship between God and the designee.¹

The title is also found in non-canonical literature like the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, as well as several Qumran texts, which link the title with the messiah,² although historian Geza Vermes remarks that "...all that may be said of the Scrolls in this connection is that they indicate that the epithet, *son of God*, can accompany the title, 'Messiah,' but any claim to an equality or interchangeability of the two exceeds the evidence."³ Rabbinic sources give the title "to those who keep the divine commandment (Akiba m Ab 3:15; Lazar y Kid. 61c)."⁴

The Greeks also use the designation in the Hellenistic tradition, but as Anderson remarks, "those concepts arose subsequent to the writing of the New Testament."⁵

Jesus doesn't use the title of himself in Mark, and only rarely in John, but Jesus confirms it as applying to himself in Matthew 26:63. The title itself, according to J. Oliver Buswell, signifies full deity: "In Jewish usage the term Son ... did not generally imply any subordination, but rather equality and identity of nature. Thus Bar Kokba, who led the Jewish revolt 135-132 B.C. in the reign of Hadrian, was called by a name which means 'Son of the Star.' It was supposed that he took this name to identify himself as the very Star predicted in Numbers 24:17. The name 'Son of Encouragement' (Acts

¹ Anderson, Charles C. *The Historical Jesus: Quests and Questions*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2000. p. 468

² *ibid.* p.469

³ Vermes, Geza. *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.

⁴ Anderson, Charles C. *The Historical Jesus: Quests and Questions*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2000. p. 468

⁵ *ibid.* p. 470

4:36) doubtless means, 'The Encourager.' 'Sons of Thunder' (Mark 3:17) probably means 'Thunderous Men.' 'Son of man,' especially as applied to Christ in Daniel 7:13 and constantly in the New Testament, essentially means 'The Representative Man.' Thus for Christ to say, 'I am the Son of God' (John 10:36) was understood by His contemporaries as identifying Himself as God, equal with the Father, in an unqualified sense."⁶

On the same topic Dr. David Lowery remarks: " 'Son of God' is thus first a functional description. It does, of course, have relevance for understanding Jesus' status and relationship to God, but the fact that others have been and will be called "sons of God" is a reminder that it is less an ontological statement or confirmation of his deity, and more an ethical or functional affirmation that Jesus did in fact carry out the will of His father.

There is, of course, no question about His deity. His conception was "from the Holy Spirit ([Matthew] 1:20). He is called "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (1:23). He has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (28:18). But the designation "Son of God" gives particular attention to His manner of life. In this area too He showed Himself unique."⁷

Anderson adds that "[s]cholars have sometimes noted a difference in the emphasis on sonship in the respective Gospels. Mark emphasizes sonship as characteristic of

⁶ Buswell, J. Oliver. *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962. 1:105

⁷ Lowery, David K. "A Theology of Matthew." In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, edited by Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994. p 27.

Jesus' whole life, but particularly his suffering and death. Matthew and Luke trace it back to his conception and birth. John writes of it in terms of his pre-existence.”⁸

Also noteworthy is the number of times the title is used of Jesus in the gospels. Mark uses it eight times, Matthew uses it eighteen times — the most in the synoptics — whereas Luke only uses it six times. John uses it twenty-nine times.

Messiah/Christ

Messiah, or *Christ* in the Greek, means “Anointed One.” The Messiah was the promised savior of the nation of Israel that was to restore Israel to its rightful place as the chosen people of God, under his rule. Isaiah writes of the Messiah as the one on whose shoulders the government will rest⁹, which explains why the Jews during Jesus' time were looking for a political leader, maybe one associated with the zealots. Isaiah also describes Messiah as “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,”¹⁰ clearly indicating his divinity. We know that Jesus is talked of here, because Matthew applies the beginning of this passage from Isaiah to Jesus in Matthew 4:15f: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a Light dawned.”¹¹

⁸ Anderson, Charles C. *The Historical Jesus: Quests and Questions*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2000. p. 471

⁹ Isaiah 9:6

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ cf Isaiah 9:1f

The time of the Messianic kingdom would be one of wrath against and judgment for evildoers¹², as well as restoration for Israel¹³. None of this was fulfilled during Old Testament times, nor at Jesus' first coming, and Scripture makes clear that this will be fulfilled during Jesus' second coming.¹⁴

At this point it would be beneficial to briefly talk about the “messianic secret,” a theory put forth by William Wrede in “Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien” in the early 20th century. According to Anderson, “Wrede theorized that there were two positions held in the early church with respect to the messiahship of Jesus. The first and oldest position held that Jesus had neither claimed messiahship nor acted as the Messiah during his life on earth, but that he had become the Messiah through his resurrection. Against this older position there gradually arose an opposing position which insisted that if Jesus was destined to be the Messiah, then he certainly must have given some evidence of this during his life. Mark pulled these two positions together insisting that Jesus had claimed messiahship during his life, but that his messiahship was known only to his chosen disciples and demons on both of whom he urged secrecy.”¹⁵ Wrede then concluded that Mark putting the two points together was historically invalid, and Mark was therefore to be seen as historically unreliable and unable to provide any true information about Jesus. This skepticism was further

¹² cf Zephaniah 1:12-18; Malachi 4:1-6

¹³ cf. Joel 3:1-2; Isaiah 63:1-4; Zechariah 14:1-9;

¹⁴ For more detail, see Geisler, Norman. *Systematic Theology*. 4 vols. Vol. 4. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2005. p 464-498.

¹⁵ Anderson, Charles C. *The Historical Jesus: Quests and Questions*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2000. p. 170f

developed by Burton Mack, who deviated slightly from Wrede's and Bultmann's views on the subject.¹⁶

Lowery gives a more biblical explanation on why Jesus may have kept his messiahship secret from all but his disciples during his lifetime. He says that "[t]his combination of great authority and abject humiliation in Jesus' life understandably bewildered even those closest to Him. Thus, the desire to limit pronouncement about His messiahship can be seen as a conscientious and compassionate course of action in view of the confusion and misunderstanding it would otherwise have produced. Mark's portrait of this phenomenon can thus be seen as historically coherent given the fact that humans then and now have certain expectations which they associate with the privilege of power and authority."¹⁷

Son of David

The title *Son of David* signifies Jesus' royal lineage and rightful place as king of Israel. It was displayed on the sign above his head on the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," and confirmed by Jesus himself before Pilate in Matthew 27:11: "It is as you say."

However, he is not the typical ruler. Zechariah 9:9 shows him to be humble in a prophesy that Jesus fulfilled: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."¹⁸

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.171f

¹⁷ Lowery, David K. "A Theology of Mark." In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, edited by Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994. p. 75

¹⁸ fulfilled in Matthew 21:5; Mark 11:7; John 12:14; Luke 19:33ff

Nevertheless, Jesus' second coming will be in glory and power, exalted and in judgment.¹⁹

Son of Man

Son of Man is the most common title Jesus applied to himself. The majority of its use is in the synoptics, and there mostly in Matthew (30 times) and Luke (25 times). Though scholars disagree on the exact source of the term²⁰, Birger Gerhardsson convincingly states that “[the phrase ‘Son of Man’] evidently was felt to be as clumsy and hard to understand as it was misleading. Nevertheless we find this awkward term in the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels - - and nearly exclusively there. This can scarcely be explained otherwise than that early Christians felt obligated to preserve a peculiarity in Jesus' own manner of speaking.”²¹

As far as the meaning of the phrase is concerned, it obviously refers to Jesus' humanity. More precisely, the sayings in the synoptics about the Son of Man are often classified into three groups: 1. The Son of Man presently at work on the earth; 2. the Son of Man as suffering, dying, and rising again; 3. the Son of Man as coming again in eschatological glory. Each group should be treated as authentic.²²

Not only does the phrase speak of Jesus' humanity, but the parallel to Daniel 7 also suggests his divine nature. I.H. Marshall summarizes: “It is because of this dual origin of

¹⁹ Lowery, David K. "A Theology of Matthew." In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, edited by Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994. p. 26.

²⁰ Anderson, Charles C. *The Historical Jesus: Quests and Questions*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2000. p. 458

²¹ Gerhardsson, Birger. *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979. p. 57

²² Anderson, Charles C. *The Historical Jesus: Quests and Questions*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2000. p. 460

the phrase [i.e. the Aramaic roots of it from Daniel 7 used in the Greek] that it can be used to refer both to the humanity of Jesus and also to his divine origin. Jesus can use the term to refer to himself as a human over against God (Mark 2:10, 28), but also to indicate his divine origin. In the latter case 'Son of man' is a veiled way of expressing his relationship to God."²³

Biblically we see this from the fact that the Son of Man has authority (Mark 2:10, 28), would suffer and die (Mark 9:12; 10:33, 45), and that he would be resurrected and exalted (Mark 10:34; 13:26).

Mark

Having explained the most commonly used titles for Jesus, let's examine how Jesus is portrayed in the gospels, starting with Mark.

Mark emphasizes Jesus' humanity and describes him as the suffering servant of God.

Instead of focusing on Jesus' teaching, he emphasizes his service and sacrifice. Also unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark omits any genealogies and childhood accounts and starts with Jesus' baptism by John, and the beginning of his ministry. Particular attention is paid to Jesus' emotions and voluntary²⁴ limitations as a human.

Jesus himself says that he came to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many, in Mark 10:40: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." This went contrary to the Jewish tradition at the time, which expected the messiah to be a political ruler, causing many Jews then and

²³ Marshall, I. Howard. "Son of Man." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall Joel B. Green. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992. pp. 780-81

²⁴ cf Philippians 2:5ff

contemporary scholars today to question Jesus' role as messiah, at least during his lifetime.²⁵ Further, Jesus displayed common human emotions in Mark. In 1:41, he healed the leper “[m]oved with compassion.” In 3:5, he gets angry and grieved at the Pharisees' hardness of heart to be so entangled in their religious tradition that they were blinded to the true purpose of the Sabbath. Again, in 6:34, Jesus feels compassion towards the lost, large crowd and continues to teach them. Perhaps with frustration and sadness, he “[sighed] deeply in His spirit” and refuses to give in to the Pharisee's test for him to give them a sign in Mark 8:12. His treatment and obvious love for children also show his human emotions, e.g. in Mark 9:36, or his indignation towards the disciples when they forbade children to be brought to him in Mark 10:13-16. Only Mark adds that Jesus felt love for the rich young ruler in Mark 10:20f; Luke and Matthew omit that detail.

Besides his emotions, Mark also mentions Jesus' voluntary limitations²⁶ as a human being. Just like any other human being, he needed sleep. He “was in the stern, asleep on the cushion” when their ship was thrown around in a storm on the Sea of Galilee in Mark 4:38. He became hungry after leaving Bethany on their way back to Jerusalem in Mark 11:12. Moreover, he didn't appear to be omniscient at all times, for he says in Mark 13:32 that, “of that day or hour [when heaven and earth will pass away] no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”

²⁵ See *Messiah/Christ* above for a treaty on the Messianic Secret.

²⁶ again, cf Phil 2:5ff. The theologically correct thing to say is that “Jesus emptied himself of the independent exercise of the prerogatives of deity.”

Mark's treatment of the passion shows the importance he put on Jesus as the suffering servant, and statements like that in Mark 8:34 make clear that not only Jesus was to suffer, but his followers as well. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." This is no easy thing, as Jesus himself showed in Mark 15. Paul confirms this idea of suffering for believers in Romans 8, stating that believers are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed [they] suffer with Him so that [they] may also be glorified with Him." This quasi-mandate²⁷ of suffering and the encouragement given were a timely word considering the early persecution of Christians in the Roman empire.

Despite the absence of Jesus using the term "Son of God" to refer to himself in Mark, the evidence from these other titles demonstrates his claim to deity.²⁸ Compared to the other synoptic gospels, however, Mark's focus lies with Jesus' humanity and his role as the suffering servant of God, not his deity. Mark does not deny his deity. In fact, he implicitly affirms it without focusing on it.

Luke

²⁷ By "quasi-mandate" I mean that although there is no command to suffer, the importance of suffering is essential to the gospel and inevitable for the believer.

²⁸ cf. Anderson, pp 472-476

Luke was probably the only Gentile to write any canonical books in the New Testament. According to the two source hypothesis²⁹, Luke was written between Mark and Acts, which puts it sometime in the late 50s or early 60s.³⁰

Luke mentions the role of women and children in Jesus' ministry³¹ more than the other gospel writers, as well as Gentiles partaking in the salvation offered through Messiah. Luke's account is more scholarly, written in excellent, polished Greek. The introduction to Luke explains his method very well: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."³²

Thus, Luke claims to give a chronological account of Jesus' later years, though not religiously so, whereas Matthew and Mark don't always do that. Luke also emphasizes the predetermined work of God in everything that happened with Old Testament quotations like Matthew, but caters to his largely Gentile audience. For that reason, he used mainly Greek terms instead of Aramaic or Hebrew ones and quoted the LXX, not a Hebrew bible. In his narrative those who are showing themselves to be in need of a

²⁹ Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. pp 92-98.

³⁰ See Appendix B for more info on the historical background of Mark, and the dating of Mark and Luke-Acts.

³¹ Luke 7:12-15, 37-50; 8:2,3,43,48; 10:38-42; 13:11-13;21:2-4; 23:27-29, 49,55,56

³² Luke 1:1-4

savior — the outcasts of society, the sick and possessed and weak, and not the religious elite — take center stage. Jesus is the “Great Physician,” lovingly caring for those who humble themselves and realize their need for help.

Luke puts the spotlight on prayer³³, forgiveness³⁴, and joy that comes with salvation and faith.³⁵ He also focuses on the need for personal salvation in Jesus’ encounters with “Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon, Anna, Martha, Mary, Simon, Levi, the centurion, the widow of Nain, Zacchaeus, and Joseph of Arimathea.”³⁶

Matthew

Matthew wrote to a primarily Jewish audience, which is evident in his many quotations from the Old Testament and his referring to Jesus’ fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and promises. As such, Matthew’s focus is on establishing Jesus as “the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”³⁷ There is a big focus on Jesus’ teaching ministry³⁸, unlike Mark, who focuses mainly on Jesus’ deeds. His account is not chronological, but often logically connected: “As examples, the genealogical tables are broken into three equal groups, a large number of miracles are given together, and

³³ Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 22:32, 40-41

³⁴ Luke 3:3; 5:18-26; 6:37; 7:36-50; 11:4; 12:10; 17:3-4; 23:34; 24:47

³⁵ Luke 1:14; 8:13; 10:17; 13:17; 15:5, 9, 32; 19:6, 37

³⁶ Martin, John A. "Luke." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by Roy B. Zuck John F. Walvoord. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2004. p 201.

³⁷ Matthew 1:1

³⁸ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr. "Matthew." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by Roy B. Zuck John F. Walvoord. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2004. p 16

the opposition to Jesus is given in one section. Matthew's purpose is obviously more thematic than chronological."³⁹

Dr. David Lowery puts it this way: "While Jesus' life and ministry are the focus of Matthew's gospel, he makes it clear that what Jesus said and did, as well as the events that conspired to bring Him to the cross, are a part of the plan and purpose of God. A primary means of making this point is in the frequent linkage of events in the life of Jesus to passages from the Old Testament. To one degree or another all the gospel writers portray Jesus' life and ministry as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and expectation. But Matthew is particularly distinctive in this regard. His gospel is characterized by a series of Old Testament quotations introduced by a phrase using the verb "fulfill" in the passive voice (*plērothēnai*)."⁴⁰

The Historical Jesus

The quest for the historical Jesus and consequent questioning of the historical accuracy of the gospels began during the Enlightenment and was popularized by Johannes Weiss, Martin Kähler, and the aforementioned William Wrede. Albert Schweitzer built on those foundations in *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, "extracting [history] from the Gospels like a kernel from the husk."⁴¹ Rudolf Bultmann, true to the existentialist ideas that started with Søren Kierkegaard, "kept peeling until there was

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Lowery, David K. "A Theology of Matthew." In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, edited by Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994. p 20.

⁴¹ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992. p. 50f

almost nothing left.”⁴² He decoupled any faith experience from the true, historical events, saying that “the acknowledgement of Jesus as the one in whom God’s word decisively encounters man, whatever title be given him...is a pure act of faith independent of the answer to the historical question.... Faith, being personal decision, cannot be dependent on the historian’s labor.”⁴³ However, this level of skepticism is unnecessary. The separation of honest and accurate history over against passionate, theological writing is an artificial one. Martin Hengel comments: “In reality the ‘theological’ contributions of the evangelist lies in the fact that he combines both these things inseparably: he preaches by narrating; he writes history and in doing so proclaims.”⁴⁴

A convincing case can be made for the historical accuracy of the gospel accounts and a (harmonizing) reconstruction of the objective Jesus from all the gospels. Carson et al. state, commenting on Brevard Child’s rejection of any kind of harmonization, that while “Childs is right to insist that meaning is to be found in the texts as we have them, rather than in some necessarily hypothetical pasting together of all four accounts, he is wrong to deny all significance in harmonies. For the truth of what the evangelists are saying is inevitably tied to the historical reality of what they narrate. The attempt to put together that historical reality — the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth — is both necessary and significant.”⁴⁵ In a different work, Carson warns of going to extremes on

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Bultmann, Rudolf. *Theology of the New Testament*. 2 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951-55. 1:26

⁴⁴ Hengel, Martin. "Literary, Theological, and Historical Problems in the Gospel of Mark." In *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985. p. 41

⁴⁵ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992. p. 52.

either side of the spectrum in harmonizing the gospel accounts: “But surely only *glib* harmonizations ought to be dismissed; *easy* harmonizations ought to be given the most serious consideration. To adopt glib harmonizations is historiographically irresponsible, but refusal to adopt easy harmonizations is equally irresponsible. Of course, when someone dismisses a harmonization as “easy,” what he means is that it is glib. Nevertheless, my objection is more than semantic; for the underlying historiographical question -- viz, When are harmonizations permissible, or even mandated? -- gets buried under the euphemism “easy,” so that somehow harmonization is rejected as a cop-out, something that scholars who recognize how *difficult* (as opposed to *easy*) the material is will eschew.”⁴⁶

We also need to realize that sometimes, “fully satisfactory answers simply are not available. In such cases, it is better, as Luther put it, to just to [*sic*] let it alone than to force unlikely meanings on the text.”⁴⁷ Carson et al. argue: “The fact, then, that a detailed life of Jesus cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the Synoptic Gospels in no way discredits the Gospels as accurate historical sources. They should be judged for what they do tell us, not for what they do not tell us.”⁴⁸

This conclusion invites the question of how the apparent contradictions and differences in the gospels can be harmonized. Without going into much detail, most can usually be explained by realizing that some parallel passages have less commonalities than are attributed to them and should not be harmonized, events are ordered topically

⁴⁶ Carson, D.A. "Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary Tool." In *Scripture and Truth*, edited by D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983. pp 139-40.

⁴⁷ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992. p 52.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

instead of chronologically, and too little information is available that would help pinpoint exact times and dates of the accounts.⁴⁹

More importantly, the “four different Jesus” problem then becomes a problem only in presuppositions⁵⁰, but not in actuality. That is, only with the presupposition that the gospel accounts are contradictory do there appear to be irreconcilable problems with the text. Only with that presupposition do the gospels talk about four different Jesus’ instead of one.

When one realizes that, it is entirely possible to harmonize the different gospel accounts into one coherent whole to get a full and accurate picture of Jesus.

In conclusion, the different accounts of the gospels are invaluable for the study of the historical Jesus. They don’t pose a problem for the accurate discovery of the historical Jesus, but rather an opportunity to gain insights into different sides of one person, Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Son and Savior of Man. No one account by itself would have provided the rounded picture of the historical Jesus we get from the four gospels. That also means that faith in Jesus is not removed from the factual accuracy of the accounts about him, but supported and abetted by it; it provides a solid foundation for the study of the objective Jesus who walked the earth, beneficial for devotion and scholarship.

⁴⁹ For more details, cf. *ibid.* p 53.

⁵⁰ A critique of non-theistic presuppositions with an explanation of why a theistic worldview is necessary is given in Appendix A.

Appendix A - Presuppositions

This writer presupposes the existence of God — and rejects materialism — for three reasons. First, the bible assumes God’s existence. Genesis 1:1 reads “In the beginning God [...]” No reason is given and no argument is made, it is simply assumed that a being “God” exists. Furthermore, not only does God exist, he has also communicated with his creation. Second Timothy 3:16 says: “All Scripture is God-breathed [...]” and Second Peter 1:20 confirms that “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

From the very beginning, “Scripture” included the New Testament writings, e.g. Peter calls Paul’s writings Scripture in Second Peter 3:16: “just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the *rest of the Scriptures*.” (emphasis mine)

Paul includes Luke’s gospel right alongside Scripture in First Timothy 5:18, quoting Luke 10:7. Jesus had a very high view of Scripture. He affirmed its imperishability (Matthew 5:17f), unbreakability (John 10:35), its ultimate supremacy (Matthew 15:3,6), its factual inerrancy (Matthew 22:29; John 17:17). He cites as historical the global flood (Matthew 24:37f) , Jonah in the belly of the fish (Matthew 12:40), God’s creation of the world (Mark 13:19), including the creation of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4-5).⁵¹

⁵¹ for more detail, cf Geisler, Norman. *Systematic Theology*. 4 vols. Vol. 1. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2005. pp 229-280.

Second, philosophical materialism is inherently self-defeating. The flagship of materialistic epistemology is the scientific method; to arrive at true knowledge, evidence is gathered and evaluated, theories are formulated from hypotheses and confirmed in repeatable experiments. However, no evidence has been gathered or repeatable experiment performed that confirms that the scientific method is able to arrive at true knowledge; it is simply assumed. In fact, any attempt to perform such an experiment would be circular.

Additional assumptions are the uniformity of the universe and the reliability of our faculties. The latter is also not warranted given an anti-supernatural worldview because if our senses are products of the mechanisms of this universe, we have no way of knowing whether they are reliable in finding true knowledge, or why the mechanisms that produced them have any obligation to make our senses reliable.

Third, rationality is dependent on the immaterial. To illustrate, the laws of logic — the law of non-contradiction, the law of the excluded middle, etc — are not material things; one cannot put them in a box. They are immaterial, and independent of the human mind. The fact that the sun is not the not-sun was true even before humans entered the scene. Therefore, a purely materialistic worldview cannot account for immaterial concepts or universals. Even the introduction of such a realm of abstracts or universals, as Plato has done in his idealism, doesn't solve the problem, for there is still no connection between our realm of particulars and the immaterial realm of universals, a

problem that Plato tries to solve with his introduction of a “demiurge” to connect the two.⁵²

Consequently, a worldview that does not allow for the immaterial is inadequate in explaining this world. At best, materialism requires faith just as the theistic worldview does. At worst, it is utterly incapable of accounting for any rational thought. Therefore it is most reasonable and consistent to assume the existence of God and interpret the Scriptures from that presupposition.⁵³

⁵² Dusman. "Dialectical Tensions II." In *Grace in the Triad*, 2007. Accessed February 10, 2010. <<http://graceinthetriad.blogspot.com/2007/03/dialectical-tensions-ii.html>>

⁵³ cf. e.g. Cheung, Vincent. *Apologetics in Conversation*. 2004. Accessed February 10, 2010 <<http://www.vincentcheung.com/books/conversation.pdf>>.

Appendix B - Historical Information on Mark

Author

The gospel of Mark is anonymous, but early tradition confirms that Mark was the author and closely associated with the apostle Peter. Through a series of quotes from Eusebius, quoting *Exegesis of the Lord's Oracles*, written by Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, around 140 A.D, we learn that:

“The Elder said this also: Mark, who became Peter’s interpreter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had neither heard the Lord nor been one of his followers, but afterwards, as I said, he had followed Peter, who used to compose his discourses with a view to the needs of his hearers, but not as though he were drawing up a connected account of the Lord’s sayings. So Mark made no mistake in thus recording some things just as he remembered them. For he was careful of this one thing, to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no untrue statement herein. (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15)⁵⁴

This means that the gospel of Mark has the apostolic authority of Peter, that it recorded truthfully and without mistake the eyewitness account of Peter, and that it was not a chronological account of Jesus’ ministry.

⁵⁴ Gaebelien, Frank E. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. 12 vols. Vol. 8. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984. page 605.

This fact is strengthened when Peter’s sermon in Acts 10 is compared to Mark’s gospel in the following table:⁵⁵

Acts 10	Mark
“good news” (v. 36)	“the beginning of the gospel” (1:1)
“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit” (v. 38)	the coming of the Spirit of Jesus (1:10)
“beginning in Galilee” (v. 37)	the Galilean ministry (1:16-8:26)
“He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” (v. 38)	Jesus’ ministry focuses on healings and exorcisms
“We are witnesses of everything he did ... in Jerusalem” (v. 39)	the ministry in Jerusalem (chaps. 11-14)
“They killed him by hanging him on a tree” (v. 39)	focus on the death of Christ (chap. 15)
“God raised him from the dead on the third day” (v. 40)	“He has risen! He is not here.” (16:6)

Biblically, the author of Mark is probably the same (John) Mark mentioned in Acts (12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37) and a few epistles (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11) as accompanying Paul and then following Barnabas. Peter mentions in 1 Peter 5:13 that Mark was with him and called him his son, indicating a close relationship between the two.

⁵⁵ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992. page 106.

Date

Many different dates have been proposed, from the 40s up to the 70s.⁵⁶ If Luke was written after Mark, and Acts after Luke, a date in the 50s makes sense. Considering that Paul was in a Roman prison at the end of Acts, but not yet executed, Acts can be dated around the year A.D. 62⁵⁷, putting the gospel of Luke sometime before then. Finally, with Luke probably using the canonical Mark, Mark can be dated to sometime in the 50s.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* pp. 96-99

⁵⁷ *cf ibid.* pp. 192ff

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