

The Nature of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels

Presented to the One God Conference, Albany, NY June 9, 2007

Thesis:

The synoptic gospels demonstrate obliviousness to Jesus' deity.

There is not a single scripture in these three books which teach or imply that Jesus was God in the flesh.

Every passage in these books reflect the same understanding about the nature of Jesus that our group proclaims: That Jesus was the son of God, not God the Son. That Jesus was the Christ of YHVH, anointed by YHVH, not YHVH playing the role of the anointed one. That Jesus' progenitor was YHVH, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures who made the worlds, entered into covenant with Abraham and chose Israel as his special people.

What are the synoptic gospels?

Syn=same, optic=see

Lk. 1:1-3

“Source Q”—written compilation of Jesus' words and deeds; probably formed the basis for the construction of the synoptics

Therefore the synoptics represent something of a consensus record of the Church, especially the apostles, regarding what Jesus said and did during his ministry

Why is this important? Because it is critical to understand that the synoptic gospels reflect the Christology of the first century Church, in the time that they were written.

When were they written? None of them are thought by scholars to have been written inside of two decades after Jesus' ministry.

The synoptic gospels are not only products of the minds of Matt, Mark and Luke. They are products of the Church at large, where the information concerning Jesus was compiled and passed down.

So what did Jesus say in the presence of the apostles about himself, and who he was?

In the synoptic gospels, by far the predominant term Jesus uses for himself is “Son of Man.”

Jesus is referred to as the “Son of Man” 30 times in Matthew, 15 times in Mark, and 25 times in Luke --70 times total. With few exceptions, it is Jesus referring to himself by this term

What did Jesus mean when he used this term?

Dan. 7:9-13

The Ancient One = “the Most High” v. 22

Two things to notice:

The Son of Man is led into the presence of the Ancient One, as a subject approaching a royal court

He is given authority by the Ancient One. He does not possess it until it is given to him.

Mt. 24:30; 26:62-67

“You have said it” referring to the claim that he was Messiah, Son of God

“Prophesy to us, you Messiah!”

We can conclude from this exchange that for the Jews of that time, Son of Man = messiah=son of God. This is how Jesus evidently meant it, and how his hearers evidently understood it.

For an uneducated blue collar worker from a backwater town in a hick district of Israel to claim to be the Messiah, and soon to be seated at God’s right hand as vice-regent in fulfillment of Daniel 7, was enough to enrage the high-born Jewish leadership.

No hint of preexistence or deity needed for the charge of blasphemy to be levied.

Matthew

Written no earlier than 50 AD, but possibly as late as 75 AD

4:1, 8-10

Can God be tempted by sin? (Ja. 1:13)

YHVH only shall you serve--Does Jesus serve himself?

16:13-17

God reveals to Peter the truth about himself: Messiah, Christ, Anointed One—but God has not revealed to Peter that Jesus is God in the flesh

21:8-11, 46

Jesus’ most enthusiastic followers don’t dare to believe that Jesus is God come to life as a man (pagan belief—Ac. 14:1-12)

28:18-20

It is claimed that there is one God, but three names.

First, it doesn't say to be baptized into the one God, F,S,HS. It says to be baptized in the name of the Father, AND the Son AND the HS; three different things with three different names.

Second, Jesus' point is not theological, but salvific. He is talking about how people are to be disciplined, or saved, with the baptismal ceremony at the center of a public witness to their saving faith. And he is stating that the F, S and HS each have their respective role in the salvation process.

We cannot recognize only the Father; we must also believe in His Son; Why? Because "I have been *given* all authority in heaven and on earth." (In order to be given something, you must not own it in the first place.)

In addition, without the power of the HS in our lives, no true discipleship is possible and no faithful obedience to his commands are possible: v. 20.

Mark

Written no earlier than 50 AD, possibly as late as 75 AD

10:18

If you were one of Jesus' disciples and you'd heard Jesus say this, without any further comment or explanation, would you conclude that Jesus was claiming to be God? Or just the opposite?

12:28-34

Shema understood by Pharisees and Jesus to teach that there is only one God, not that the God persons in the Godhead are unified.

How can the scribe be "not far from the Kingdom of God" when he doesn't even know who God is? And how could he possibly find out when Jesus is deliberately misleading him about how many God persons there are?

Luke

Written no earlier than 50, possibly as late as 63 AD

1:32-35

Gabriel did not tell Mary she would give birth to God, but the son of YHVH. “Give him the throne of *his* ancestor, David. If God was going to give Jesus something, how could Jesus be God?

It is the conception by the HS which made Jesus the Son of God

1:67-70

Did the HS lead Zechariah to believe Jesus was God incarnate?

Zechariah filled with the HS and confirms Jesus’ earthly origins.

2:25-32

Same with Simeon

2:52

How could God not have favor with God? Was Jesus filled with God’s nature, or God’s favor? If the first is true, the second makes no sense

4:18, 19

If you were listening to this, would you conclude that Jesus=Jehovah?

5:17

Jesus did not do miracles because he was God, as it is claimed, but because God’s power was with him

22:28-29

Why would one God person grant to another God person a kingdom he already possessed? The ideological framework of Nicean Christology doesn’t fit Jesus’ words

22:42

Jesus had will independent of God’s

24:17-19

Two believers did not know Jesus was God; instead they thought he was a mere “prophet”

Can God be a “prophet?” No. A prophet, in the sense that the Bible always uses the term, is not God, but a servant of God; one who mediates between God and His people to convey a message from God. A prophet is a mouthpiece, God’s mouthpiece. God is not a prophet any more than an 18-wheeler is an air horn.

Well we might expect here that Jesus quickly upbraids them for their lack of understanding of his true nature, and sets them straight.

Ac. 3:22-26

Our brief study of the synoptic gospels has demonstrated:

In the synoptic gospels, everything said about Jesus by Jesus and his followers evinces a unitary monotheistic worldview.

If everything we knew about Jesus were contained in the synoptic gospels, we would not have the slightest reason to suspect that Jesus was God in the flesh.

We would, however, have every reason to believe what our group has always believed and taught: that Jesus was God's unique son: begotten by the Holy Spirit, righteous in word and deed, faithful to the end; a just and mighty Lord Messiah who reigns as God's glorified vice-regent in heaven, and before whom all knees shall bow.