

# Jesus *the* God-Man

THE UNITY AND DIVERSITY  
OF THE GOSPEL PORTRAYALS

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*with* Benjamin I. Simpson

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**Baker Academic**

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Academic  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bock, Darrell L., author.

Title: Jesus the God-man : the unity and diversity of the gospel portrayals / Darrell L. Bock, with Benjamin I. Simpson.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015048414 | ISBN 9780801097782 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Jesus Christ—Biography—History and criticism. | Bible. Gospels—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BT301.9 .B63 2016 | DDC 232—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015048414>

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16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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With appreciation to Sally Bock and Amber Simpson,  
for partnership, support, and being there as gifts from God

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# Preface

I have long wanted to write this book. It has an interesting prehistory that also helps to explain its origins and importance. In the first edition of *Jesus according to Scripture*,<sup>1</sup> the discussion of Jesus's teaching as a whole made up the final section, part 4. I had hoped that it would be seen as a useful synthesis of what the Gospels are doing. As can sometimes happen in a long and complex book, the part the author most wanted to be seen as the climactic section was lost in all the detail that preceded it. So I have decided to expand and develop this section and let it stand on its own, updating and reworking the material in the process.

Part of what I wanted to show and now can make even more clear is how the Synoptics and John work on their own and in relationship to each other. In the interim, I have thought a lot more about some of the ideas I first expressed in the concluding section of that book. My key premise is that the Synoptics primarily present Jesus through what he does. They reveal who Jesus is from the earth up by taking readers from categories we normally apply to people and then showing how it dawned on his followers that Jesus uniquely transcends those categories. John goes the other direction. We know from John

1. Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002; 2nd ed., forthcoming).

1:1 that Jesus is divine and took on flesh. John declares who Jesus is from the start. This difference has led believers to rely heavily on John. In the process, the Synoptics have been less appreciated for how they present Jesus, since John does much heavy lifting for us.

What makes this difference important is that all of us must approach Jesus from the earth up. None of us comes with an inherent understanding of all that he is. Someone must explain Jesus and his uniqueness to us. This book aims to retell that story and show how the Gospels do it. The hope is that in doing so, a fresh appreciation for how to read the Gospels and understand how Scripture presents Jesus will emerge for you as it has for me. My desire is that this book will not only prove to be a useful summary of key elements in the Gospels' portrait of Jesus but also serve to open up fresh avenues for understanding how the Gospels work within the canon.

So what was originally intended as a climactic section in a developing inductive study of Jesus in the Gospels we now present as a stand-alone synthetic look at Jesus from the core documents of the early church. By highlighting the inherent unity and consistency among the Gospels, I hope to instill a greater appreciation for how to read the Gospels and how to talk about Jesus to those who are curious to understand what his life and ministry sought to achieve.

We continue to be grateful to Dallas Theological Seminary for its support. Mark Bailey and Mark Yarbrough deserve thanks for their encouragement of our writing. Joseph Fantin, Mike Burer, Will Johnston, Samuel Chia, Terri Moore, and James Davis need to be added to the names of supportive New Testament colleagues. Thanks also goes to the staff at the Hendricks Center, including Bill Hendricks, Pam Cole, Kymberli Cook, and Mikel DelRosario. Heather Zimmerman at the Center worked on a related project that also fed into this work.

Of course we also thank our wives, Sally Bock and Amber Simpson, who put up with much when we undertook this project.

Darrell L. Bock  
Ben Simpson  
October 15, 2015

# Introduction

And the prophetic dignity in Christ leads us to know that in the sum of doctrine as he has given it to us all parts of perfect wisdom are contained.<sup>1</sup>

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.15.2

Jesus has always been a topic of intense conversation and controversy. A sense has always existed that he was a unique individual and that in him much wisdom is to be found. Yet controversy also has always surrounded him. Is he a prophet, the Messiah, or something profoundly more? Or was he crucified because his claims or those of his followers far outstripped his person? This is part of the story the Gospels tell and try to answer by showing the unique character of his life, both in terms of his actions and the titles applied to him.

The study of Jesus has always had to interact with an attempt to explain the seemingly curious result of his life, a crucifixion grounded in rejection, and the emergence of a religion rooted in worshipful reception that eventually spanned the globe. Its beginning in a small, fringe part of the Roman Empire belies the scope of what eventually

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:496.

emerged from the life of this man from Galilee. This book is about the study of that contrast, its causes and results. That contrast is what makes studying Jesus and understanding the Gospels so fascinating.

Recently three developments have impacted the study of Jesus in the Gospels. First, there has been a shift of focus from debates about the historical Jesus, which are still discussed in NT studies, to concern for “Jesus remembered,” or how his impact is seen in the narrative theology of the Gospels.<sup>2</sup> It is an important development because now the “quest” is not so much for the Jesus behind the Gospels or for a reconstructed Jesus, but for the Jesus of the documents that ended up being the portrait that produced historic impact on the world.

Second, alongside this has come a shift from focusing the discussion of Jesus from his sayings and titles to his actions. The roots of this shift go back to the early days of the third quest for the historical Jesus, and the new focus has led to a greater appreciation for how the events in Jesus’s life point to who he portrayed himself to be.<sup>3</sup> This book will work with these shifts, since they are important in understanding Jesus and his ministry.

Third, there is a greater appreciation for the role of narrative in presenting theology. This fits with the emphasis on actions and deeds. It also parallels how the texts show Jesus handling the issue of his activity and person. When John the Baptist sent emissaries to ask Jesus if he was the one to come or whether they should expect another, Jesus replied with a listing of his actions that told a narrative about the arrival of the new age (Luke 7:18–23//Matt. 11:2–6). This study of Jesus will keep all three of these recent developments in mind, since they have the potential to open up fresh ways to appreciate what the evangelists saw Jesus doing and saying. (The order of doing and saying is important here.)

One other idea is crucial to this book. It is the proposition that three Gospels tell the story of Jesus mostly from the earth up, while

2. J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

3. The core feature of the Third Quest is to root Jesus’s ministry in its Second Temple Jewish background, something that will be prominent in the present book. Among major proponents in recent times, covering a range of approaches, are Martin Hengel, Ben Meyer, George Caird, E. P. Sanders, John Meier, J. D. G. Dunn, Tom Wright, I. Howard Marshall, Craig Evans, Ben Witherington, Scot McKnight, Robert Webb, and Craig Keener.

John tells the story from heaven down. The difference is important. The path the Synoptics set has been largely lost on the church today, which prefers that John do the heavy lifting in presenting Jesus. Jesus's uniqueness is something we can more deeply appreciate when we look at him from the earth up.<sup>4</sup>

The church's presentation of Jesus includes the claim that here is a human being unlike any other. He is God incarnate. So how does one come to see and appreciate this claim about who Jesus is and what he is about? How does someone grow in their understanding of who Jesus is if they start with him as being simply a great human being? In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each Gospel in its own way makes its case and points to how monotheistically oriented Jews came to affirm a uniquely exalted status for Jesus among all who have trod the earth. The church needs to relearn this way of presenting Jesus. Much of this volume is an effort to explain how this can be done. So we offer this account of how Scripture presents Jesus, mostly from the earth up, and how he delivered his message about kingdom hope. Along the way, energized by this extraordinary figure, we discover how that kingdom's activity fulfills promises God had made long ago.

Christ's teaching and the works of apostolic reflection about God's work through him in the NT have served as a hub for instruction that has guided the church and influenced culture over the centuries. A crucial portion of that valuable deposit of divine truth is the evangelists' portrayal of Jesus's teaching. So we consider the major themes and actions of Jesus's ministry as the Gospel writers present them. Under each key theme, we try to single out whether the emphasis is the concern of any particular evangelist or is a shared concern. We also point out any particular emphases of any evangelist within each topic. Finally, we pay special attention to how "public" or "private" the teaching in question was as the evangelists portray it. Here we

4. A careful study going in a similar direction on how the Gospels handle the Hebrew Scriptures and Christology in the presentation of Jesus is by Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014). What he calls "figural," we call "pattern prophecy." He argues that when one reads narratively, it is important to read both forward and retrospectively to appreciate all that a Gospel is doing. His chapter on Mark is especially clear in presenting this kind of reading. What he has done for the use of the OT we are applying to the reading of the Synoptics as a whole.

find a clue as to what Jesus said to all versus what he taught just to the disciples.

The synthesis does not proceed Gospel by Gospel, but thematically. We consider what Jesus presented as teaching or reflect on the significance of his actions. The evangelists' narrative commentary is excluded from consideration. Elsewhere I have developed that other approach to reading by working through the pericope units of the Gospels in *Jesus according to Scripture*.<sup>5</sup> Now I do something different. I gather together the key strands of that story, strands said to go back to Jesus. What the evangelists passed on has come to us through tradition and from the choices that the given evangelists made concerning what they wished to show about Jesus. The church regards what is passed on to be the result of the active work of God's Spirit leading the authors to write what they do. Such teaching no doubt was passed on with the conviction that it was of value to the original audiences of each Gospel. Those churches passed these testimonies on to later generations. They believed that these accounts reflect what Jesus was about in preaching the kingdom and in doing the work God had sent him to do. Thus the teaching of the Gospels is pastoral at its core. It seeks to ground readers solidly in a walk with God through the development of a devotion to God, appreciating what God has done through Jesus. The church, in turn, recognizing the value of what was recorded for nurture in the faith, embraced these works and their portraits of Jesus as faithful expressions of what it means to confess Jesus and follow him. There can be no better capstone to a personal study of Jesus than to focus on the key themes of his life and ministry and their connection to his own teaching and actions.

5. Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002; 2nd ed., forthcoming).

# Preparation: Birth, John the Baptist, and the Temptations

## *The Endorsed and Qualified Anointed One*

For one must reckon *a priori* with the possibility—even with the probability—first, that in his teaching and life Jesus accomplished something new from which the first Christians had to proceed in their attempt to explain his person and work; second, that their experience of Christ exhibited special features not present in any obvious analogy to related religious forms. It is simply unscholarly prejudice methodically to exclude from the beginning this possibility—this probability.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus's teaching was unique and made unique claims. But how in the world did the church reach this understanding? More important, how in the world did first-century Jewish disciples grasp it? In the face of a host of gods and idols in their world, what caused those

1. Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1959), 5.

who believed in one Creator God to affirm that Jesus's relationship to God was neither polytheism nor a violation of the faith in the one God of the Shema? It is that journey portrayed in the Gospels that the theology of the Jesus of Scripture explores.

That transformation of thinking out of a Second Temple Jewish context is why understanding him and his portrait in the Gospels is so important. Jesus claims to give unique insight into God's plan and to present the way to divine fellowship and blessing. Many of these claims are rooted in the Jewish foundations to which Jesus belonged. However, Jesus's teaching on hope led to an appreciation that he was speaking about more than a plan for Israel. The nation's calling always had been to serve as a means of blessing for the world. Jesus's starting point involved a call to Israel to prepare for the promised completion of what God had started with them. However, that plan, at least as far back as Isa. 40–66, not to mention all the way back to Gen. 12:3, had foreseen the inclusion of the Gentile nations within God's blessing. Jesus's teaching ultimately aims at this comprehensive goal of blessing extended to all the righteous by faith from every nation. God's promise, given long ago, had affirmed that blessing would come for the righteous in the whole world. We turn our attention to the major strands of Jesus's teachings and actions because through their interplay we see what his ministry was all about.<sup>2</sup> So we start with Jesus's birth, John the Baptist, and the temptations.

## **Incarnation: Jesus the Sent Son/Messiah**

This initial chapter focuses on the frame around which Jesus's ministry appears. The incarnation emerges as part of a reflective introduction about Jesus the Word incarnate (John 1:1–18) or as part of the emphasis in the presentation of Jesus's infancy in two of the Synoptics (Matt. 1–2; Luke 1–2). John plays all of his cards from the start, from the very first verse: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus is affirmed as

2. The survey is mostly thematic rather than chronological, but where sequence matters, we will pay attention to it, as with the framing of Jesus's ministry in birth, baptism, and the temptations.

the Creator (John 1:1–3), a role for God. John tells the story of Jesus very much from heaven down.

The Synoptics take a different route. Mark simply starts with the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus's acceptance of baptism from him. This frames Jesus's work in the eschatological hope and call to repent that John preached. It means that Jesus affirmed and endorsed John's call to Israel to turn back to God and prepare for God's coming deliverance. In both Matthew and Luke, the emphasis is on how Jesus's birth fulfilled divine promises.

In Matthew, the emphasis is on themes tied to messianic promise or the patterns of Israel's history, including themes about conflict and rejection. As a narrator Matthew points out how Jesus fulfills promises about where the Messiah would be born (Mic. 5:2), how Jesus replicates the calling of Israel as Son (Hosea 11:1), how he mirrors the suffering of the nation (Jer. 31:15), and how "God with us" would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). In Matthew's introduction, the portrait of "God with us" is the dominating note that implies the presence of the divine in Jesus. Jesus is clearly sent as part of a divine program already suggested in Scripture. The virgin birth points to the start of a unique journey for, with, and through Jesus. Yet this is still from the earth up, as those around Jesus's birth are seen as coming to grips with what all of this means.

Luke's infancy account goes in a similar direction but with less explicitness. A virgin birth is described, but Isaiah is not noted. The Scripture is present, but not in narrative notes of citation. Rather, hymns of scripturally rooted praise frame the birth as the arrival of hope. In Matthew, Jesus's birth comes with suffering and rejection from the start, with the slaying of the infants in Bethlehem as Rachel weeps for her children. The notes in Matthew show the conflict from the start. In contrast, Jesus's arrival in Luke is one of continuous joy, with the only hint of trouble coming near the end of the infancy sequence in Simeon's word to Mary and in Jesus's independent act when he stays behind in Jerusalem and declares that he must be about his Father's work (Luke 2:49 NKJV).

In Luke, a series of three hymns presents the core theology. Mary is thankful that she can experience the grace of God as a humble woman of the nation and anticipates a just reversal, where the arrogant are brought down and the humble are exalted (Luke 1:46–55,

the Magnificat). Zechariah praises God for raising up a Davidic Horn to rescue God's people: Messiah is pictured as the rising sun of the morning, bringing dawn to darkness (Luke 1:68–79, the Benedictus). Simeon can return to God through death in peace because he has seen God's salvation, with Messiah again seen as a light, a revelation to Gentiles, and a glory for Israel (Luke 2:29–32, *Nunc Dimittus*). So the note of explicit incarnation is less obvious in Luke. Rather, what dominates is the realization of God's program and the hope it generates. The themes of joy and celebration arise in light of the fulfillment of divine promise. The hymns that reveal the theology of hope invoke the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Luke 1:31–35, 68–69) and point to Jesus as son of David, seated on the throne that God promised to David's house. Here "son" takes on an ambiguity early in the account, for the king could be seen as a son (2 Sam. 7:8–18).

The Synoptics take the rest of the narrative to describe the kind of person Jesus is and to give the significance of his coming. Sometimes by looking back, aware of how the story ends, we miss how the story emerged in its unfolding and the struggle that faced those who followed him. We have a hard time understanding their struggle to appreciate what they were seeing at the time. Hindsight is twenty-twenty. So we can miss how the account builds up gradually to display who Jesus is for the evangelists. Knowing the end of the mystery, we forget the drama that takes us up many steps, one step at a time, to its disclosure. The birth of Jesus frames his ministry as one sent from God, the bearer of a special message as a result of a special birth. Just how special all of this was and what it all meant requires the rest of the story. The risk is that in arriving at the finish line of an exalted confession, we forget how we arrive there and how others got there as well. Luke's infancy account ends with Jesus presenting his sense of vocation to his parents. He must be about the work of his Father. That brings us to the preparatory work of John the Baptist.

## Jesus's Submitting to John's Baptism and the Divine Voice

Jesus's choice to share in John's baptism means that he was identifying with John's call to the nation of Israel to repent and prepare for

the coming of God's kingdom. The point is important because some argue that Jesus taught wisdom and ethics and avoided talk about judgment or things that reflected Jewish apocalyptic hope, expecting a divine vindication for the righteous. John clearly fits in this latter category of teaching, so Jesus's submitting to baptism by John indicates an acceptance of that message. Thus it is a flawed reading of Jesus to force a choice between a Jesus who called for ethical or moral integrity before God and one who preached about the coming judgment and vindication of God. As we shall see, Jesus taught and reflected on both ideas.

John's ministry is corroborated by Josephus (*Ant.* 18.5.2 §§116–19),<sup>3</sup> who points out that many Jews saw the defeat of Herod's army by the Nabatean ruler Aretas IV as divine punishment for Herod's slaying of John. Josephus reports that John urged people to receive baptism as well as to cultivate virtue and practice piety and justice. Josephus portrays this baptism as an act of purification. Virtue, piety, and justice are concepts that Josephus's Roman audience could grasp. Herod slew John the Baptist because he feared John's persuasive power with the people.

The eschatological elements of John's ministry, drawing from Isa. 40:3, also have parallels in Judaism. The Qumran community appealed to this text for their separatism and desire to await the approach of God's redemption (1QS 8.14; 9.19–20). The Qumranians applied this text to justify withdrawing from corrupt society and religious practices in order to study the law in holy preparation for God's coming.

All the Gospels connect John to this Isa. 40 tradition when introducing his ministry.<sup>4</sup> John's baptism makes a call for righteousness

3. For a thorough discussion of this text, see John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 2 vols., ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:56–62. In this discussion Meier states that Josephus had no desire to report the more eschatological features of John's message, such as judgment. For apologetic reasons, Josephus also probably suppressed those issues involving Israel alone in order to avoid offending his Roman audience. Thus Josephus's portrait of John makes him look like a good moral philosopher. Meier hints that the portrait of Luke 3:10–14 may connect with Josephus's portrait of John's ministry, pointing to a call for justice.

4. Mark (1:2) adds a connection to the idea of God's messenger sent ahead from Mal. 3:1, while Luke (3:6) lengthens the Isa. 40 citation to extend its outreach to all flesh (40:5), an emphasis fitting his concerns for non-Jews. These additions by the evangelists serve to introduce the ministry and give a context for its meaning.

similar to the Qumranians' call but without the focus on law or withdrawal; rather, his baptism represents an identification with the nation's and the individual's need to prepare for God's powerful coming. By submitting to baptism, one shared in the washing that the nation needed as preparation for God's coming. However, it was not the rite of washing that was key for John but the response of the heart ready for God to come. In fact, given Luke 3:10–14, the stress of John's call is that such a recognition of repentance will mean that the person prepared for God's coming will treat others with more compassion and integrity. There is an important dimension to John and Jesus's teaching that says turning toward God in repentance will impact how one also treats others. This is why, when Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment, he links love for God with love for one's neighbor. The two go together. How we love and worship God is seen by how we walk and love others.

As all the Synoptics make clear, there is a call to bear fruit worthy of repentance: this is a part of the call to be prepared and baptized. It represents the removal of obstacles that stand in the way of God's coming (cf. Isa. 57:14). Thus, there is a community dimension to the eschatological washing. When Jesus participates in John's baptism, he is identifying with and endorsing the message of the prophet, especially in its national dimension as a community statement of Israel's need for God and his coming.<sup>5</sup>

Associated with the baptism is the voice from heaven. This event appears to have been a primarily private interaction between Jesus and God, given Mark's description. However, John the Baptist apparently also had access to it as a witness for Jesus, as John's Gospel affirms (John 1:29–34). The other Gospels appear to highlight the event's significance. It was at this event that God marked out his beloved Son as his unique agent.

5. R. L. Webb, "Jesus' Baptism: Its Historicity and Implications," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10 (2000): 261–309. For discussion of issues tied to the historicity of John's baptism and ministry, as well as his baptism of Jesus, see R. L. Webb, "Jesus' Baptism by John: Its Historicity and Significance," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 95–150; Darrell L. Bock, *Who Is Jesus? Linking the Historical Jesus with the Christ of Faith* (New York: Howard Books, 2012), 26–38.

Key to the event is not only the testimony of the heavenly voice but also the anointing by the Spirit. The voice marks out Jesus both as royal, given the allusion to Ps. 2:7, and as a servant figure, as the use of Isa. 42:1 shows. This affirmation lays the foundational groundwork for identifying Jesus's roles. The experience of the voice and God's provision of the Spirit served as a confirmation of his call. The anointing by the Spirit confirms the call by supplying the agent of enablement, who marks out Jesus as "anointed" (the Messiah-Christ) and also affirms his prophetic connection to the will of God.<sup>6</sup>

So we see God identifying Jesus as Son-Servant. Psalm 2 is a regal messianic psalm. Sonship and kingship come together, laying groundwork for what Jesus will say about the kingdom of God. What kind of son exactly is Jesus in relationship to the kingdom? What kind of servant is he exactly in relationship to the promise? The servant image looks to a figure who ultimately is not only God's messenger of deliverance but also one who will not be completely understood in that role, as Isa. 49:1–6 and 52:13–53:12 indicate. Most Jews had not anticipated the surprising juxtaposition of king and servant that will reveal the unusual features of Jesus's ministry. The unfolding of this combination is another part of the earth-up portrait the rest of the narratives will unfold.

With this directing call behind him, Jesus now is free to move out in ministry. He picks up the message where John the Baptist left off. God's rule is approaching in the one whom God has marked to take up the call. First, however, there is an important test of his readiness.

## **Jesus's Temptation: Introduction of the Battle Lines and the Son's Qualifications**

All the Synoptics recount Jesus's temptations as the last event before Jesus moves into ministry. With Jesus's initial encounter involving a

6. Given the church's recognition of Jesus's divinity, such affirmation and confirmation may seem odd, especially primarily as a private experience. However, these acts represent an equipping that shows how seriously the Gospel writers took Jesus's humanity. His ministry has all the markings of, and more of the divine calling than, any major prophetic figure (cf. Isa. 6; Ezek. 1–3; Jer. 1). This is a part of the earth-up theme.

challenge by malevolent forces, the nature of a more cosmic battle for what Jesus's coming represents becomes a key part of the opening frame of Jesus's ministry. The battle is not with flesh and blood but with spiritual forces that seek to challenge the way and program of God.

Mark tells the account in summary form, simply stating that Jesus was tempted, was with the beasts, and had angels minister to him. Mark immediately follows the account with Jesus's proclamation that the time is fulfilled, the kingdom is approaching, and so one must repent and believe in the gospel. What is significant about Mark's version is that Jesus emerged unbowed from the test. Unlike a previous temptation (Gen. 3), there was no succumbing to the presence of evil.

Matthew and Luke give details, although in different order, with Matthew apparently giving the tighter sequencing. Matthew first narrates the devil's temptation for Jesus to turn stone into bread, then to dive off the temple's pinnacle, and finally to receive the kingdoms of the world by worshiping the tempter. Luke reverses sequence of the second and third temptations, making the temple challenge a climactic event, probably because of the importance of Jerusalem to the end of his Gospel, since he makes more of Jesus's journey to Jerusalem to meet his fate than do the other Gospels.

Both these writers use the event to precede the introduction of the Galilean ministry. Luke is most explicit when it comes to showing the importance of the event: he has the temptations follow a genealogy that ends with the identification of Adam as "son of God." Here is yet another sense in which "son of" is used. Son can picture the king, but also picture those made in God's image, created by him to walk with him and manage the creation. So Jesus succeeds where Adam failed and becomes the representative for humanity who is able to stand up to the devil. Where Matthew has Jesus qualified as Messiah to represent people, Luke has Jesus qualified as the reflection of humans made in the image of God.

So important themes of the temptations are Jesus's success and dependence on God, not to mention his qualifications to be a representative of Israel's hope and of humanity.

Also significant is the introduction of the devil as the key spiritual opponent to Jesus's cause. Opposition to Jesus is not merely or even

primarily a matter of social or political forces. Jesus's later action in casting out demons will reinforce the point about the cosmic nature of opposition to Jesus. The event's uniform placement here before Jesus launches his ministry focuses on this "cosmic" dimension of Jesus's battle from the start. Jesus's call is to restore the creation. Some are out to stop it. That opposition is not merely or even primarily human. It is a battle of spirits that fight for the well-being and makeup of the cosmos.

Often it is claimed that the story of Jesus's temptation is a creation of the church. No doubt its explicit supernatural elements are responsible for such skepticism. The objection is raised that the event has no witnesses. But a better question might be, What would cause the church to remember such an event, whether in skeletal or detailed form, making it multiply attested in two strands of the church's tradition (Mark and Q [Q = material common to Matthew and Luke])? It seems that this had to be a story that Jesus related to his soon-to-be-gathered band of the Twelve. Its point would be to underscore that Jesus's mission was not ultimately just about politics or the social order. Rather, associated with Jesus's coming was a deeper spiritual battle in which unseen forces always seek to seduce people away from walking in the direction of God's call. Such a calling entailed suffering, not the kind of self-satisfaction that Satan was offering to the Son.

To precede the introduction of Jesus's ministry with this shared note means that the Synoptics have underscored where the real battle for hearts and souls lies, including choices between God and self. It is what Paul would stress later when he told the Ephesians that the believers' battle is not against "flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

## Conclusion

These opening scenes strike many notes. Jesus is the one who advances the program of God and represents God taking up his promises anew. Covenant fulfillment is present. Notes of joy abound. A special birth

launches the events. A king of the line of David arrives. God affirms Jesus's sonship through the bestowal of a call through the Spirit.

Yet evidence of resistance also appears. A leader bypasses the opportunity to welcome the child and instead brings suffering and murder. Mary is warned that events will cut through her heart like a sword. With Jesus's coming, dark clouds also appear. Satan shows up. Jesus eschews the opportunity to use his power on his own behalf. He will walk the path God gives to him. He will face the darkness as light, engaging the darkness as light.