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978-0-521-48363-6 - What are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography

Richard A. Burridge

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While the nineteenth-century assumption that the gospels could be likened to biographies has been denied by the scholarly consensus of this century, in recent years a biographical genre has begun to be assumed once more. Dr Burridge provides a good foundation for the reintroduction of this biographical view of the gospels, and compares the work of the evangelists with ten Graeco-Roman biographies, drawing on insights from literary theory in the process. The author shows that the view that the gospels are unique is false: a first-century reader would have seen them as biographies, or 'Lives', of Jesus, and they must be interpreted, therefore, in this light.

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What are the Gospels?

A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography

RICHARD A. BURRIDGE

Dean

King's College London



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PREFACE

This study is the revised version of my doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr P. Maurice Casey at the University of Nottingham, 1983–9. It was undertaken part-time during my ordination training and curacy, being finished after my appointment as Lazenby Chaplain to the University of Exeter. It has affected all my relationships and everyone I know ought to be thanked. I am grateful for the assistance of staff members and library facilities of St John's College, Nottingham, the Universities of Oxford, Nottingham and Exeter, King's College, London, St George's College, Jerusalem and Bromley Reference Library. Computing assistance was given by Lou Barnard of the Oxford University Computing Service Text Archive and by Project Pallas, University of Exeter. The support and encouragement of the Rt Revd David Say, Lord Bishop of Rochester, the Revd Canon Michael Beek, my vicar at Bromley Parish Church and the Vice-Chancellor and Lazenby Trust of Exeter University have been vital in ensuring the completion of this work. I wish to thank the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, the Dioceses of Rochester and Exeter, the Universities of Nottingham and Exeter, and the Bishop Henry Phillpotts Trust for financial assistance.

Papers about my research were given to the following: the University of Nottingham Theology Department Staff and Post-graduate Seminar, 27 November 1984; the 'Creating Theologians' Conference, St John's College, Nottingham, 19 July 1985; the British New Testament Conference, King's College, London, 20 September 1986; Rochester Diocese Clergy Study Day, 24 March 1987; the University of Exeter Classics Department Staff Research Seminar, 13 May 1988; Tavistock Deanery Chapter, 10 November 1988; the Hooker Group, Exeter, 16 March 1989; Christianity Deanery Chapter, 6 June 1990. I am grateful to all who participated for their comments and questions. In particular, I would like to

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Finally, my family have suffered the side-effects of postgraduate study. I am grateful to my parents and my mother-in-law for all their love, and to my daughters, Rebecca Siân and Sarah Bethan, who may have delayed the work by being born during its much longer gestation but who have so greatly enriched my life. I owe a debt greater than I can say to my wife, Sue, for all that she has done and has been throughout this entire period, and I dedicate this work to her in thanks on our Wedding Anniversary, 1 September 1990.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , ed. Wolfgang Haase, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>CUP</i>	Cambridge University Press
<i>ET</i>	English translation
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSS</i>	<i>JSNT Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>NCBC</i>	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NICNT</i>	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OCT</i>	<i>Oxford Classical Text</i>
<i>OUP</i>	Oxford University Press
<i>SAP</i>	Sheffield Academic Press (formerly JSOT Press)
<i>SBL</i>	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SBLDS</i>	SBL Dissertation Series
<i>SBLMS</i>	SBL Monograph Series
<i>SNTSMS</i>	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series

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<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Bible Commentary</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>