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**Contact Information:**

Peter S. Williams  
peterswilliams@gmail.com  
[www.peterswilliams.com](http://www.peterswilliams.com)

*Behold the Man: Essays on the Historical Jesus*

by Peter S. Williams

Wipf and Stock, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers  
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**New Title from Peter S. Williams**  
*Behold the Man: Essays on the Historical Jesus*



After a substantial new essay examining the nature of a properly skeptical historical inquiry into Jesus of Nazareth in the context of contemporary worldviews, from pre-modernism to meta-modernism, *Behold the Man* presents revised essays on an eclectic range of issues: from how the Epistle of James treats Jesus as Divine within decades of the crucifixion, and an evaluation of recent arguments about the dating of the Fourth Gospel, to debunking claims about Jesus and “ancient aliens,” and furthering debate about the resurrection. With a foreword by eminent New Testament scholar Craig L. Blomberg, and extensive recommended resources, *Behold the Man: Essays on the Historical Jesus* represents a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary engagement with historical Jesus studies.

**Peter S. Williams** is an assistant professor in communication and worldviews at NLA University College in Norway as well as an English philosopher. His books include *An Informed Cosmos: Essays on Intelligent Design Theory* (Wipf & Stock, 2023); *A Universe from Someone: Essays on Natural Theology* (Wipf & Stock, 2022); *Apologetics in 3D: Essays in Apologetics and Spirituality* (Wipf & Stock, 2021) and *Outgrowing God? A Beginner's Guide to Richard Dawkins and the God Debate* (Wipf & Stock, 2020).



## Interview with Peter S. Williams

### **What is your new book *Behold the Man: Essays on the Historical Jesus* about?**

*Behold the Man: Essays on the Historical Jesus* offers a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary engagement with historical Jesus studies that is focused around a carefully considered answer to the question of what makes for a "properly skeptical" approach to making a historical inquiry into Jesus of Nazareth.

### **What makes for a "properly skeptical" inquiry into the historical Jesus?**

A "properly skeptical" historical inquiry into Jesus of Nazareth is neither cynical nor naive about historical inquiry, and it not only considers the need to gather reliable evidence and to consider different explanations of that evidence, but it pays attention to the interaction between historical investigation and contemporary worldviews.

### **What worldviews are explored in *Behold the Man* in relation to the Quest for the historical Jesus?**

The first essay in *Behold the Man* critically examines a variety of premodern worldviews (especially theism and pantheism), the relationship between the modern and postmodern worldviews, and the contemporary search for a metamodern worldview.

### **What specific topics do the essays in *Behold the Man* address?**

After the introductory essay, *Behold the Man* presents essays on how the Epistle of James treats Jesus as Divine within decades of the crucifixion, a two-part evaluation of recent arguments about the dating of the fourth gospel, an essay debunking claims linking Jesus to "ancient aliens," and an essay furthering a published debate about the resurrection in which I participated. There are also two appendices touching on Bart Ehrman's arguments against the reliability of the New Testament gospels and rebutting a rarely considered alternative supernatural explanation for the evidence pertaining to Jesus's resurrection.

### **Why is there a picture of an old-fashioned television showing a black-and-white picture of Jesus on the front cover of *Behold the Man*?**

This image relates to an analogy I give in the book about how although historical inquiry can only give us a very limited 'picture' of the past it can nevertheless suffice to bring us face-to-face with consequential truths about the past.

**What impact do you hope *Behold the Man* will have on readers?**

I hope readers will see that a properly skeptical investigation into the historical Jesus reveals a singular man who invites them to participate in a contemporary “way of life” or “spirituality” that plausibly answers a variety of fundamental human needs that Western culture is currently rediscovering as it questions the sufficiency and sustainability of modernism and postmodernism.

## An Excerpt from *Behold the Man: Essays on the Historical Jesus*

### Excerpt from Chapter One, "A Skeptic's Guide to the Historical Jesus":

Philosopher and atheist Bradley Monton recognizes that:

a key part of Christian doctrine is that God became flesh in the form of Jesus Christ, and that Christ acted in the world in such a way that we can get evidence of his existence, and of his divinity.

The truth or falsehood of this doctrine is something that matters, and which therefore deserves to be the subject of some skepticism. The central concern of this book is what a properly skeptical historical investigation has to contribute to our thinking about this key part of Christian doctrine. To undertake such an investigation, we need to think critically about (a) collecting relevant historical evidence, (b) choosing the best explanation of that evidence, and (c) considering the worldview expectations that impinge upon these tasks.

Thinking critically about our worldview “expectations” (that is, our worldview beliefs and/or assumptions) is the most fundamental aspect of this project. We not only need to ensure that our investigative “expectations” will help to reveal, rather than to obscure, the historical truth about Jesus; we also need to allow the possibility that historical inquiry might lead us to adjust elements of our worldview, even to the extent that we end up holding a different worldview. Depending upon the reader and their current worldview, this may be an unsettling prospect, or an exciting one, or both. In any case, it is of paramount importance that our investigation is not aimed at any predetermined result, besides discerning the truth. (Any reader who chafes at the notion that “discerning the truth” is a goal to be held in high esteem might profitably consider the perilous state of democracy when those who possess or seek political power routinely flout the truth in its pursuit, especially when much of the electorate are taken in by their lies.)

A growing dissatisfaction with “modernism,” and its “postmodern” terminus, is currently stimulating a quest for a “post-postmodern” or “metamodern” worldview more in line with human experience and more conducive to human flourishing. Many of those engaged in this quest are deeply reticent about the idea that any contemporary “pre-modern” worldview, such as Christianity, might have the key answers they are seeking. Nevertheless, there’s an acknowledged existential hunger for things that modernism and/or postmodernism reject but which a Christian worldview can supply. In this context, a properly skeptical historical investigation into the truth of the Christian doctrine “that God became flesh in the form of Jesus Christ, and that Christ acted in the world in such a way that we can get evidence of his existence, and of his divinity” may be seen anew as a matter of both cultural and personal consequence.

### **Pre-Modern Skepticism**

As the website of *Skeptical Inquirer: The Magazine for Science and Reason* reminds us:

The word “skepticism” comes from the ancient Greek *skepsis*, meaning “inquiry.” Skepticism is, therefore, not a cynical rejection of new ideas, as the popular stereotype goes,

but rather an attitude of both open mind and critical sense [that requires] . . . mindful cultivation of critical thinking, and an honest attitude toward intellectual inquiry.

Hence, to say that Christian claims about Jesus deserve to be the subject of some skepticism is to say that they deserve an attitude of both open mind and critical sense, and should be the subject not of cynical rejection but of an honest attitude of critical thinking.

**Praise for *Behold the Man: Essays on the Historical Jesus***

“For those who care about evidence, Peter S. Williams here offers us some impressive arguments for the historical reliability of the New Testament account of Jesus. The treatments of the Epistle of James and the Fourth Gospel offer fresh and original points, and Williams summarizes a large swathe of evidence in a clear and responsible manner. Highly recommended.”

—**C. Stephen Evans, emeritus university professor of philosophy and humanities,  
Baylor University**

“Peter S. Williams is a quintessential researcher on the historical Jesus, and *Behold the Man* is the sort of high-quality, rigorous, and fascinating treatise we have come to expect from him. However, what makes this book absolutely unique is Williams’s expertise in philosophy and the deft way he interweaves the two disciplines. The result is a tour de force on the interplay between worldview assumptions and the task of explaining and interpreting historical facts in an objective way.”

—**J. P. Moreland, distinguished professor of philosophy, Talbot School of Theology,  
Biola University**

“In this impressive and richly documented volume, Peter S. Williams reexamines the historical Jesus. He draws on archaeological and textual evidence, but also shows time and again how we need rigorous philosophical theorizing to assess the arguments in this debate. His lucid work provides an important contribution to a conversation that merits attention from all those interested in the philosophy of religion and the tenability of the Christian faith.”

—**Rik Peels, professor of analytical and interdisciplinary philosophy of religion,  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam**

“Just when I thought that it was virtually impossible to say anything truly unique about the historical Jesus, Peter S. Williams’s book, *Behold the Man* made its way to me. This is an insightful book that not only demands reading but also rewards re-reading. If you have become jaded about the Quest of the Historical Jesus—as many of us have—I encourage you not only to buy Williams’s collection of essays, but also to read them! I highly recommend this unique book.”

—**Robert B. Stewart, professor of philosophy and theology,  
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary**

