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Jesus

Apocalyptic Prophet or Mythologoumenon?

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Researching a topic such as the historicity of Jesus is often a challenging effort. Not only it is a very sensitive subject, but also something that has been subjected to all kinds of points of view and studied thoroughly for over a century. Even though the methodologies of the search for the historical Jesus have been constantly evolving, this is a very trying topic if we want to perform an original study.

Even if, at this moment, it is hard to find an original theme to analyze within such subject, I believe it is crucially important to keep studying the historical figure of Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth is a complex character that most people look up to as an example, but, at the same time, do not know very much about. Even if we admit that Jesus is not someone that existed in history, the truth is, he is one of the most (if not *the* most) influential characters in humanity.

Despite growing up not being affiliated with any religion, I do find the field of religious studies through the lens of history extremely interesting. When I first joined my master's program in History and Culture of Religions, I did so, not to find God, but to study humankind through its worship of the gods. Once I had to choose my final work, I chose to better understand the life of one of the most important characters in history. To do so, I have applied for and been accepted into the Erasmus+ program that lasted from September 2021 to August 2022 to write my thesis in Amsterdam, at the *Theologische Faculteit – Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* (Faculty of Theology – Free University of Amsterdam), under the guidance of my advisors Professor Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte (Professor of New Testament studies), and Dr. Ana Travassos Valdez (Principal Investigator, CH-ULisboa/FLUL).

During my stay at the *Vrije Universiteit*, I have completed several courses that have helped me not only have a better general understanding of the field of the New Testament

studies, but also of Jesus of Nazareth and his life, such as: – Introduction to the New Testament; Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Text; Exegesis of the New Testament; and New Testament Greek (levels 1, 2, and 3). in addition to taking these courses, the writing of my thesis was also complemented by: 1) the knowledge provided by the Amsterdam New Testament Colloquium, a seminar occurring every other week, during the academic year, that held presentations on various New Testament studies topics, many of which about the historical Jesus; 2) the counsel provided by my advisors in our meetings; and 3) the mental escape (and means to pay the rent) provided by the mornings spent working with flowers and plants in my part-time job at Royal FloraHolland.

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On a final, and sadder, note, I would like to mention two other professors who had a very positive influence in my life, and whose teachings I will treasure forever, but passed away very recently. Dr. António Ramos dos Santos (1956-2020), who tutored me through several courses – during my bachelor's and master's programs – in the field of Ancient Near East History, and Dr. João Carlos Senna-Martínez (1948-2022), with whom I performed archaeological excavations at the Bronze Age site Fraga dos Corvos (Macedo de Cavaleiros). I thank them, from the bottom of my being, for their contribution in my academic journey.

ABSTRACT

Was Jesus of Nazareth a historical figure? When performing a horizontal reading of the Canonical Gospels, the contradictions that surface while comparing their narratives are significant. If we cannot know for sure what is the true history of Jesus, how can we even be sure that he ever existed? This thesis aims to offer an exploration of the scholarly views of the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. Starting from a base of ten New Testament scholars, this work seeks to understand the reconstruction of the traditions of Jesus that are more likely to go back to the period Jesus supposedly lived. I will also try to understand if the story of Jesus is more likely to be part of history, to be a legend, or to be a body of myths with little connection to reality. Following said analysis, I examine some of the problems related to the life of Jesus to which we do not yet have an answer or whose answers are not satisfactory. Lastly, I gather a collection of arguments for and against the idea of Jesus as a character of history, as a legendary figure, and as a mythological being.

Key words: Jesus, New Testament, historicity, legend, myth.

RESUMO

Terá Jesus da Nazaré sido uma personagem histórica? Ao ler horizontalmente os evangelhos canónicos, as contradições que surgem quando a comparação entre livros bíblicos é feita são significativas. Se não podemos ter a certeza qual é a verdadeira história de Jesus, como podemos ter a certeza de que Ele existiu? Esta dissertação tem como objectivo uma análise explorativa dos pontos de vista académicos da historicidade de Jesus.

Neste trabalho começo por analisar o estado-da-arte das investigações sobre o *Jesus histórico* desde os seus primórdios, há mais de duzentos anos, até aos dias de hoje. A história da investigação sobre o *Jesus histórico* tem lugar quando começaram a ser aplicados métodos críticos e históricos aos relatos bíblicos sobre Jesus, o que levou eventualmente a um progresso significativo nos estudos de Novo Testamento, criando novas formas de pensar Jesus da Nazaré, que continua a evoluir até aos dias de hoje. Grande parte da comunidade académica que estuda o Novo Testamento defende que estaremos agora a entrar no quarto período da história da investigação do *Jesus histórico*. O novo período aponta para uma maior atenção nas intenções de Jesus e no que ele esperava alcançar com seu ministério. Com os métodos de pesquisa actuais a ficarem desactualizados, procura-se neste novo período da investigação sobre o *Jesus histórico* uma nova metodologia mais alinhada com os métodos de investigação histórica, recorrendo assim a uma análise mais interdisciplinar com o auxílio de outras áreas como a arqueologia, antropologia e sociologia, entre outras.

Tentei também compreender se é mais provável que narrativa de Jesus faça parte da História, seja uma lenda, ou faça parte de um corpo de mitos, cuja ligação à realidade é discutível. Nesta secção do meu trabalho, exploro as definições dos termos de historicidade que se possam aplicar tanto a Jesus como à sua narrativa. As definições de histórico, lendário e mítico podem variar consoante os autores. Como tal nesta secção eu indico qual o significado

que considero mais correcto para estes termos e como são aplicáveis a Jesus da Nazaré. Nesta secção começo por analisar a distinção entre os termos *historic* e *historical* de acordo com John P. Meier. Segue-se a definição de *legend* e *legendary*, um termo que pode ser, segundo vários autores, usado como sinónimo de *myth* e *mythological*. Outros autores preferem distinguir entre *legend/legendary* e de *myth/mythological*, o que é a abordagem usada nesta dissertação. Quanto à última categoria, explico que, ao contrário do significado de lenda, um mito está mais relacionado com algo que não faça parte da realidade e sim de uma ideia um universo ficcional. Neste subcapítulo analiso a origem grega da palavra usando os trabalhos de Mircea Eliade e Raimon Panikkar, entre outros, para as definições de *myth* e *mythologumenon*.

Segue-se uma secção onde, partindo de uma base de dez académicos de Novo Testamento, este trabalho procura fazer um estudo da reconstrução das tradições de Jesus com maior probabilidade de ter surgido aquando da sua vida. Estes investigadores -- Morton Smith, Ben Witherington III, John Dominic Crossan, E.P. Sanders, Bart D. Ehrman, Dale Allison Jr., Burton L. Mack, Adela Yarbro Collins, Robert M. Price e Maurice Casey -- defendem várias posições distintas entre eles sobre a vida de Jesus da Nazaré. Apesar de a maioria concordar em vários aspectos (Jesus teria sido um curandeiro e um professor, um orador carismático, um pupilo de João Baptista que mais tarde terá tido os seus próprios seguidores, terá sido condenado à morte por Pôncio Pilatos e morrido crucificado, etc.). Acima de tudo, quase todos os estudiosos concordam que Jesus terá sido alguém que pregava a chegada iminente do Reino de Deus e a transformação radical da sociedade. No entanto, as opiniões acabam por eventualmente divergir. Para Yarbro Collins, James Allison Jr., Maurice Casey, E.P. Sanders e Bart D. Ehrman, Jesus seria um profeta apocalíptico. Outros autores defendem que Jesus não seria necessariamente um profeta apocalíptico. Ben Witherington III argumenta que Jesus terá sido um sábio, potencialmente a encarnação humana do conceito de “sabedoria”; John Dominic Crossan e Burton L. Mack defendem que Jesus terá sido um filósofo cínico; e Morton Smith

argumenta que o conceito de “mágico” se poderá aplicar à figura de Jesus da Nazaré. Por fim, Robert G. Price afirma que o caso mais provável é que Jesus da Nazaré não tenha existido de todo.

Segue-se uma secção onde debato três questões ainda em aberto em relação a Jesus de Nazaré. Na primeira questão analiso o cálculo da data da crucifixão ao cruzar dados astronómicos sobre um possível eclipse e dados geológicos sobre a provável ocorrência de um sismo na Judeia do século I que tenha sido sentido em Jerusalém. Os Evangelhos Sinópticos colocam a crucifixão no dia seguinte à Última Ceia, durante a festa da Páscoa judaica (15 de Nisan), enquanto o Evangelho de João a coloca no dia anterior (14 de Nisan). Na segunda questão, interrogo-me se terá tido um nome diferente à nascença, tendo apenas adoptado o nome Yêhôshua mais tarde na sua vida, potencialmente durante o seu ministério ou se os pais de Jesus realmente decidiram atribuir-lhe um nome teóforo. Na terceira questão tento compreender quais de entre os milagres atribuídos a Jesus nos Evangelhos Canónicos são passíveis de ter sido de facto efectuados pelo nazareno. Os relatos bíblicos de Jesus referem que este terá praticado uma grande variedade de milagres que envolviam a cura de pessoas, a exorcismos, a acções que desafiavam as leis da natureza. Esta secção inclui uma tabela com todos os milagres que Jesus executa ao longo dos quatro evangelhos canónicos. Em análise está até que ponto um registo de uma acção sobrenatural poderá ser fidedigno e ser visto como um evento histórico. Como podem estas acções sobrenaturais ter ocorrido no nosso mundo natural? Ao todo, o Evangelho de Marcos tem quatro instâncias onde ocorrem exorcismos, dez onde são curadas pessoas e quatro milagres onde Jesus interage sobrenaturalmente com a natureza; O Evangelho de Mateus apresenta quatro exorcismos, dez curas milagrosas e quatro de interacção com a natureza; Lucas apresenta, como Marcos e Mateus (apesar de não serem todos exactamente os mesmos) quatro exorcismos, doze curas milagrosas e três milagres “naturais.” Por fim, o Evangelho de João

apresenta uma lista bastante diferente dos sinópticos, ao não descrever nenhum exorcismo, quatro curas e três milagres “naturais.”

O objetivo da terceira secção do meu trabalho é reunir argumentos para as três categorias da historicidade de Jesus, ou seja, de argumentos a favor e contra a ideia de Jesus como personagem da história, como figura lendária e como ser mitológico. Nesta secção faço uma recolha de argumentos de vários autores como E.P. Sanders, Bart D. Ehrman, Maurice Casey, John Dominic Crossan, Richard Carrier e Robert M. Price. Estes argumentos abrangem uma grande variedade de tópicos. Desde argumentos sobre fontes bíblicas, a morte de Jesus na cruz, escritos de Flávio Josefo sobre Paulo de Tarso e Tiago, o irmão de Jesus, contradições bíblicas, elementos ficcionais e sobrenaturais presentes na Bíblia e relação entre o Novo e o Antigo Testamentos. Embora a historicidade de Jesus seja amplamente reconhecida pela grande maioria dos estudiosos de Novo Testamento e historiadores, a verdade é que existe um debate entre quem defende que Jesus é uma personagem histórica e quem defende a posição miticista, isto é, quem argumenta que Jesus não passa de uma personagem literária sem base no mundo real.

Palavras-chave: Jesus, Novo Testamento, historicidade, lenda, mito.

INTRODUCTION

There is little to no doubt about the existence of historical characters such as the first American president, George Washington, or the English monarch Queen Elizabeth I. Both have been exhaustively documented to the point where anybody can know almost as much about their rule, private life, and legacy as with any other well-documented character of the not-so-long-ago 20th century. Once one dives into the study of historical figures, however, one must be aware that not everything written about said characters can be taken as a fact. Some sources are better than others and it is the historian's job to try to decipher how much truth they hold.

Once we go further back in time, however, sources about historical characters start declining, both in quantity and quality. In many cases, even the term *historical character* starts to morph into the category of *legendary* or even *mythological*. Eventually, earlier figures such as the Norse explorer Erik the Red, the Gaul King Vercingétorix, or the Lusitanian leader Viriatus cease to be seen as historical as the earlier examples due to their deeds having lived on through stories shrouded in a mist of contradictions and fantastic narratives.

I have developed this thesis to help me better understand how authentic the existence of the biblical character known as Jesus of Nazareth is. It is factual that most of the life of the Jewish Messiah is unknown, especially when compared to the examples of George Washington or Queen Elizabeth I, themselves being uncontested historical characters. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that Jesus is more likely to be a historical character than other famous figures, such as Achilles or King Argantionius of Tartessos.

It is, therefore, necessary to ask how historical the character we know as Jesus of Nazareth is. To answer this query, I will be analyzing the reconstructions of the historical Jesus by ten authors, the arguments for and against his existence, which Jesus' traditions are most likely to go back to the time the Nazarene presumably lived and try to understand if the most

important character of the New Testament is: 1) historical, 2) legendary, or 3) mythological. Even though almost all the authors whose work I will analyze admit to some degree that Jesus is a historical character, they do not all agree which traditions come from the actual historical Jesus.

Furthermore, this study will examine several unsolved issues about Jesus, such as the date of the crucifixion of the historical Jesus, if Jesus' Hebrew name – Yĕhōšûa – is his birth name or a title that he or others attributed to him at a later stage in his life, and what are the most likely Jesus' traditions that portray miracles to have occurred in history.

Finally, I will debate several relevant arguments for each of the three categories mentioned above and decide which ones I agree with the most.

I.1 State of the Art

I.1.1 Works Used and Why

I have chosen to use exclusively authors whose main language is English for three reasons: 1) familiarity – when it comes to the literature regarding religion, the English language and English-speaking authors are by far the ones that I am more acquainted with; 2) access – when writing a thesis, especially during an unprecedented time in our lives, where we were unable to leave our houses and access a library for the better part of a year, one has to rely on every possible means to get access to our sources, and English literature on the subject of the historical Jesus has been, by far, the most accessible to me; 3) mainstream – I am well aware that German works have been groundbreaking in the field of the historicity of Jesus, and that French literature has also played a very important role, nevertheless, nowadays English has become the lingua franca of academic research,¹ and I am willing to fully embrace it.

Works by the Ten Authors

The scholars whose works I have used for this piece, and which represent recreations or biographies of the historical Jesus are Morton Smith, Ben Witherington III, John Dominic Crossan, E.P. Sanders, Bart D. Ehrman, Dale Allison Jr., Burton L. Mack, Adela Yarbro Collins, Robert M. Price, and Maurice Casey. I have ordered the authors by the chronology of their earlier works I have used (from the less to the most recent).

Morton Smith (1915-1991) – author of *Jesus the Magician* (first edition, 1978) – presents a distinct point of view from the rest of the authors, because he argues that Jesus was

¹ Elizabeth Rowley-Jolivet, "English as a Lingua Franca in Research Articles: Thescielf Corpus," *ASp: la revue du GERAS* 71 (2017), 145-146.

a magician, illustrating how the Nazarene could have been seen by his peers during his lifetime. I have chosen to use this book for the unique perspectives the author presents of Jesus of Nazareth, such as how Jesus was perceived by the people he lived among, and the work he has done with the sources analyzed – not only the usual Christian, Roman, and Jewish sources, but also the magical papyri from the third century the content of which may go back to the first century CE.² This is a side of Jesus that I felt was important to analyze in my current work about different possible realities of the Nazarene’s life.

Ben Witherington III (1951-) is a very prolific author who wrote two books that I am using for this work: *The Christology of Jesus*³ (1990) and *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*⁴ (first edition, 1995). I have also consulted two other of his volumes: *New Testament History: A Narrative Account*⁵ and *The Many Faces of Christ: The Christologies of the New Testament and Beyond*.⁶ From the books I used, the earliest contains the methodology and his conclusions regarding the historical Jesus, and the later presents not just the author’s version of the historical Jesus but, several other authors’ as well, which are preceded by the scholar’s comments in favor or against their arguments. Ben Witherington III pictured Jesus as a sage who reflects God’s wisdom, and, above all else, a Jesus that is a historical character.⁷ Just like Crossan, Witherington does consider Jesus as a wandering sage, however, the author also considers the Nazarene to be the embodiment of Wisdom. There are other authors I could have used that have a similar view on Jesus, such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who considers Jesus a prophet of wisdom (or of *Sophia*).⁸ However, Fiorenza also

² Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993), vii-viii.

³ Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

⁴ *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, Second ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

⁵ *New Testament History: A Narrative Account* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁶ *The Many Faces of Christ: The Christologies of the New Testament and Beyond* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

⁷ Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 185-196.

⁸ Ibid. 161-163.

underlines a point of view of Jesus from a feminist angle, a field to which I am not academically acquainted with and am not prepared to get into at this moment. Witherington's works are perfect, in my opinion, to complement Crossan's and my other choices within the context of this work.

Like *The Christology of Jesus* (1990, Ben Witherington III), I have to mention that the following three books – whose authors I shall mention later in this subchapter – *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993, E.P. Sanders), *The Historical Jesus, Then and Now* (2010, Dale Allison Jr.), and *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of his Life and Teaching* (2010, Maurice Casey) are some of the most complete and well researched reconstructions of the historical Jesus within the timeframe of the Third Quest. Other authors' works could have been used as examples of reconstruction of the historical Jesus, such as, for example, Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz's *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch* (in English, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*),⁹ or James D.G. Dunn's *Jesus Remembered*.¹⁰ I decided against using the reconstructions of the historical Jesus within the works of these authors – even though I did use the first one in other parts of my thesis – in the case of Theissen and Merz, on account of the constant updates on the German version (currently in the fourth edition), that were not yet translated to English.¹¹ In the case of Dunn and Carrier's works, the complexity and thoroughness of their work would require a whole master's thesis for itself.

The author John Dominic Crossan (1934-) has written two books I use in this work, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*¹² (1991) and *Jesus: A*

⁹ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1998). The German original version was published in 1996.

¹⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1, Christianity in the Making (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

¹¹ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch*, Fourth ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

¹² John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, Third ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

*Revolutionary Biography*¹³ (1994) show that the author believed that Jesus was a peasant Jewish Cynic, that taught and preached the coming of the Kingdom of God and was likely influenced to some extent to the Hellenic culture and philosophy.¹⁴ I have chosen Crossan's books because he is one of the most interesting defenders of the thesis that Jesus was a Cynic or a Cynic-like character. I have used both his works mentioned above for I understand they portray the perfect picture of John Dominic Crossan's Jesus, the peasant with a Cynic-like attitude and deeds and the author's methodology for understanding which traditions do go back to Jesus' time is also an important element of why I chose his works to study the historical Jesus. His triple triadic process applied to the historical Jesus is, in my opinion, an approach that still today should be applied to the study of the historical Jesus. While still relative, a method that analyzes all sources' historical contexts, contents, relations to other sources, and reliability, is a serious and academically sound method. Three levels compose the triple triadic process. The first triad is composed of three levels of research: on an anthropological and cross-temporal level (study of society and men on a larger scale), on a Hellenistic historical level (a more intermediate level), and on a literary level which focuses on more in-depth research of sayings, stories, and anecdotes. The second triad focuses on creating an inventory and ordering and dividing the texts in chronological groups (for example, years 30 to 60, 60 to 80, 80 to 120, and 120 to 150 CE), and apply the criterium of independent attestation. The third triad focuses on manipulating the inventory based on the chronological of stratification.¹⁵

Even though I ended up choosing only two books to gather the picture of Crossan's Jesus, I have also consulted some of his other works, such as *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the*

¹³ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, First ed. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

¹⁴ Ibid. 93; Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 421-422.

¹⁵ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, xxviii.

*Stones, Behind the Texts*¹⁶ and *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus*.¹⁷

Ed Parish Sanders' – known as E.P. Sanders (1937-2022) – work mentioned before, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, is a volume that provides a clear picture of the author's reconstruction of Jesus and his surroundings. I have also consulted two of his other books in preparation for this thesis, even though I have not used them. Those are *Jesus and Judaism*¹⁸ and *Paul: A Very Short Introduction*.¹⁹ *The Historical Figure of Jesus* is a very complete biography of Jesus which presents a very clear picture of the Nazarene as not just a man of his time and culture, as a peasant Jew, but also as a prophet that preached salvation of the meek and lowly, with whom he deeply identified. Sanders writes:

“(..) Jesus worked among his own: the residents of villages, people who were minor artisans, tradesmen, farmers and fishermen. He may have done this simply because they were his own. He identified with the meek and lowly, and they were the natural focus of his mission. Further, he, like many prophets and visionaries, did not calculate in our terms.”²⁰

I chose to read – and later use – this work from Sanders when I began the research for this thesis for it was recommended to me as, not only one of the most interesting and well-researched works on the reproduction of the historical Jesus, but also as a good book for an early reading on a thesis of this topic. Established authors from the area of the historicity of Jesus such as

¹⁶ John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts*, Revised, Updated ed. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003).

¹⁷ John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*, First ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1999).

¹⁸ E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, First ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1985).

¹⁹ *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁰ *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 1st ed. (London: Allen Lane: The Penguin Press, 1993), 106-107.

Bart D. Ehrman²¹ and Ben Witherington²² tend to quote Sanders' work several times throughout their own works.

Bart D. Ehrman (1955-) is a prolific author in the field of the Historicity of Jesus. In the making of this thesis, I have used his works *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*²³ (first edition, 1997), *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Contradictions in the Bible (and Why we Don't Know About Them)*²⁴ (2009), *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*²⁵ (2012), and *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*²⁶ (2014), I have also consulted the books *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*²⁷ (1999), *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*²⁸ (2005), *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament*²⁹ (2020), and the debate in book form *Can we Trust the Bible on the Historical Jesus?*³⁰ (2020) between Bart D. Ehrman and Craig A. Evans. This is the author I have read the most throughout my period preparing and writing this thesis, for it is the biblical scholar whose works I have more thoroughly enjoyed. I have chosen to use *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* throughout my work for it is an excellent study on the state of the art

²¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 212; and *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, First ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 345.

²² References to Sanders' *Historical Figure of Jesus* are made, for example, on pages 17 and 130, and many other references on Sanders and the Historical Jesus are made throughout Witherington's work. See Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*.

²³ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*.

²⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know About Them)*, First ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009).

²⁵ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*.

²⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*, 1st ed. (HarperOne, 2014).

²⁷ *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁸ *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (HarperOne, 2005).

²⁹ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*.

³⁰ Bart D. Ehrman, Craig A. Evans, and Robert B. Stewart, *Can We Trust the Bible on the Historical Jesus?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020).

of the New Testament studies. The other three volumes I mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph I have used to recreate the events of the life of Jesus according to Ehrman. I have also used *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* due to its arguments against the mythicist position.

I have used two of Dale Allison Jr.'s (1955-) works in this thesis. *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*,³¹ and *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*³² published in 1998 and 2010, respectively. The first of his books used here have helped me define the term *legend* and compare it to other authors' usage and was one of the first books on the historical Jesus I have consulted for this thesis, despite not applying it to the Allison's reconstruction. I preferred to use his 2010 book for that matter. His reconstruction of the Nazarene preacher displays an itinerant teacher, the leader of an apocalyptic ministry that spread his word through ancient Palestine. The author argues that it is easier to find the historical Jesus in the repeated patterns of his tradition than by reading his sayings and stories. Allison states:

“I have urged that we are more likely to find the historical Jesus in the repeating patterns that run through the tradition than in the individual sayings and stories.”³³

Allison Jr. believes there can be signs of corruption of the text throughout the times, even though such alterations were not as damaging as to completely turn everything we know about Jesus into a complete fabrication.³⁴ Allison states:

“In theory it is conceivable that Jesus uttered a very high percentage of the sayings the Synoptics impute to him. If such were indeed the case, then obviously we could know a good deal about him and perhaps even sort out some of the secondary additions. But it is also in theory conceivable that Jesus authored, let us say, only six of those sayings. In this second case the tradition would be so thoroughly corrupt that our knowledge about him would be minimal and surely insufficient for us to figure out what six sayings

³¹ Dale Allison Jr., *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998).

³² *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).

³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁴ Allison Jr., *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*, 33-34.

it was that he did utter. Sometimes we can scrape off corrosion and get to the metal; other times the corrosion is such that the metal is no longer there.”

The recently deceased Burton L. Mack (1931-2022) was a New Testament scholar with a great interest in the origins of Christianity and myth. Mack considered Christianity as a religion based on myth, as his book *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy*³⁵ (first edition - 2001) specifies. He writes:

The Christian myth has not been an object of scholarly investigation. The very idea of the gospel story being called a myth has been anathema to Christians and scholars alike. Although the gospel was the Christians' story of the gods, and although it was always in mind when scholars were working with the stories of the gods of other peoples, only the stories of the gods of other peoples were called myths. The gospel story, by contrast, was referred to as the gospel and it was imagined as 'true' in ways that other myths were not.³⁶

I have chosen his work mainly due to Mack being a widely accredited scholar in this field, with a sound and logic line of thought and, at the same time, being a controversial author. Mack defends that the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels is of a mythical nature and that mythical stories are within the origin of the Christian religion. Mack does, however, admit the possibility of the existence of a Jesus of Nazareth – a cynic-like philosopher – even though he states that it is not through the New Testament that we will find the historical Jesus.³⁷

Most of the scholars whose works I used in this thesis believe in the existence of historical Jesus to some degree. That is not the case of Robert M. Price (1954-), however. Price is an author whose current beliefs towards Christianity and Jesus have suffered a strong change, as Price has been for several decades not only a non-believer, but a defender of the Mythicist position as well. Being a Mythicist, means that you are someone who believes that the story of Jesus is nothing more than a myth, that the Nazarene's stories are nothing but literary creations

³⁵ Burton L. Mack, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy*. (New York: Continuum, 2003).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-46.

with no connection to reality.³⁸ Doherty states that the term “mythicism” has been defined in the mainstream as:

“The theory that no historical Jesus worthy of the name existed, that Christianity began with a belief in a spiritual, mythical figure, that the Gospels are essentially allegory and fiction, and that no single identifiable person lay at the root of the Galilean preaching tradition.”³⁹

At a first glance, one might feel that Price should not have been listed among the other nine scholars, since Mythicists are usually discredited in the fields of Religious Studies and Ancient History, usually due to their lack of academic background or poor use of methodology and argumentation.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, as both Ehrman and Casey explain, Robert M. Price is a Mythicist that does fit the scholarly parameters to have his work taken seriously by his peers in Academia.⁴¹ The pool for Mythicist authors with accredited works and scholarly background for a serious discussion on the historicity of Jesus is quite limited. However, I have considered several authors that could take the “anti-” Jesus position in this study, such as the late Dorothy Milne Murdock (also known as Acharya Sanning)⁴² – one of the most popular authors (outside of academia) in the Mythicist field,⁴³ who wrote volumes such as *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold*⁴⁴ and *Who was Jesus? Fingerprints of the Christ*⁴⁵ – and Richard C.

³⁸ Earl Doherty, *Jesus, Neither God nor Man: A Case for the Mythical Jesus*, First ed. (Ottawa, ON: Age of Reason Publications, 2009). vii-viii.; and Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 3.

³⁹ Doherty, *Jesus, Neither God nor Man: A Case for the Mythical Jesus*, vii-viii.

⁴⁰ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 14-21; Maurice Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 43.

⁴¹ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 20-21.

⁴² Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?*, 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴ The main argument within this book is debunking Jesus’ Christian narratives while portraying both the Nazarene, his mother, and God as mythical Sun gods, as seen in pages 154-165, 250-251, and 136-137, respectively. See D.M. Murdock, *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited, 1999).

⁴⁵ In this work, the author tries to debunk Jesus’ existence by studying the stories of the New Testament and rejecting them as propaganda, using, however, a simplistic and less than satisfactory methodology, when scrutinized under serious academic analysis. Murdock states, on the last page of her book, that Jesus was a “manmade, literary character devised for a

Carrier – author of *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus*⁴⁶ and *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt*⁴⁷ – notwithstanding, my choice was Price. I chose Richard Price over D.M. Murdock since her argumentation and methodologies appear to lack in quality and seriousness; and over Richard Carrier due to the mathematical nature of Carrier's arguments being too complex to tackle within the limited dimension of this master's thesis. Price's book, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*⁴⁸ (2007) is a compilation of arguments against the idea of a historical Jesus. In his work, Price presents a detailed spectrum of the historicity of Jesus that ranges from "The Son of God" (1) to "A pious fraud" (8).⁴⁹ The author places his position as number 6 on this range – "Mythical Jewish cult figure" – meaning that the Gospels were literary fabrications and Jesus was a character added from the mythical realm. The author states, "That Jesus did not exist, but rather developed from stories and beliefs, is the best explanation for these points and many other details of the Jesus story and early Christian history."⁵⁰

Adela Yarbro Collins (1945-) presents a widely accepted reconstitution of Jesus of Nazareth by mainstream biblical scholarship in her 2008 article "The Historical Jesus, Then

variety of purposes that no longer serve the greater good of humanity". It is with these words that D.M. Murdock ends her study. *See Who Was Jesus? Fingerprints of the Christ* (Stellar House Publishing, 2007).

⁴⁶ The author uses a mathematical theorem to calculate the probability of the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. *See* Richard C. Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012).

⁴⁷ In this following volume, Carrier defines the necessary parameters to calculate the probability of Jesus having existed and concludes (in page 606) that Jesus has at most, a one in three probability of having existed, therefore being more likely than not that the Nazarene was nothing but a literary character. *See On the Historicity of Jesus Christ: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014).

⁴⁸ Robert M. Price, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*, 3rd ed. (RG Price, 2007).

⁴⁹ The spectrum ranges from the mythicist to the historical position. A pious fraud; (2) Based on pagan myths; (3) Mythical Jewish cult figure; (4) A collection of anecdotes; (5) A minor figure; (6) An influential person; (7) The son of God. *See Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

and Now,"⁵¹ published in the online Yale journal *Reflections*. This article was among the very early works I have consulted in the research for this thesis, and I included it for the simplicity and easily summarized reconstitution of Jesus of Nazareth which fits perfectly within the current state of the art of the study of the historicity of Jesus. The reason Yarbrow Collin's work was chosen to be included in this thesis and other works such as Dunn's *Jesus Remembered* or Theissen and Merz's *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* were not is, not only for the reasons mentioned above, but also because it is a smaller and manageable source that I felt could contrast with the other chosen works of other authors while still being a quality work.

Maurice Casey (1942-2014) was a British New Testament scholar. He became one of the leading figures in the historical Jesus research when he published his 2010 book *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of his Life and Teaching*⁵² which I have used for this thesis. In his work, the author builds his arguments on the historical Jesus. This author thinks of Jesus as someone who believed that he was fulfilling God's wish to bring his people back to him, that was known by his peers as a teacher, and who was called *Messiah*, even though he did not use the term himself.⁵³ I also find important to add to the list of works to use in this thesis Casey's 2014's *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?*⁵⁴ Where the author exposes his arguments deconstructing the mythicist hypothesis of Jesus. This last book has been quite useful in understanding the arguments of the Mythicist authors criticized by Casey. He writes:

⁵¹ Adela Yarbrow Collins, "The Historical Jesus: Then and Now," *Reflections* (2008).
<https://reflections.yale.edu/article/between-babel-and-beatitude/historical-jesus-then-and-now>.

⁵² "Maurice Casey (Part 1 of 2): An Academic Life,"
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140618160025/https://sheffieldbiblicalstudies.wordpress.com/2014/05/15/maurice-casey-part-1-of-2-an-academic-life/>.

⁵³ Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 399.

⁵⁴ Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?*

“Mythicists have not the foggiest notion of historical method, and they do have a massive amount of bias and prejudice to put in its place. One of their major illusions is that New Testament scholars are completely ignorant of historical method.”⁵⁵

And

“This preference for old ‘authorities’ over against recent research is a serious fault normal among mythicists, as it is among the Christian fundamentalists whom they used to be.”⁵⁶

Among several other criticisms of the Mythicist position throughout his book.

Other works about the Historical Jesus

Even though I did not use the following works in the characterization of the historical Jesus by my chosen Ten Authors, I have used them for other elements of this thesis, such as telling the story of the Quest for the historical Jesus, the dating of the crucifixion, and definitions among other issues.

By order of publication, the first work is a 1983 paper by two Oxford University scientists: physicist, and engineer Sir Colin Humphreys (1941-) and W.G. Waddington called “Dating the Crucifixion,”⁵⁷ where the two calculate the most likely date for the day Jesus has died with the data provided by the Bible and the possible natural events it describes in the Gospels.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁷ Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington, "Dating the Crucifixion," *Nature* no. 306 (1983).

The 1996 book by Adela Yarbro Collins *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*⁵⁸ used in this thesis to exemplify how some authors consider the words *legend* or *legendary* to be synonym of *myth* or *mythology*, which is not the kind of definition that I have chosen to use for this thesis.⁵⁹

I have also used Gerd Theissen's works such as the beforementioned *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* and *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*⁶⁰ (originally, "Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung") (co-written by Dagmar Winter), published in 2002, to help me write chapter I.1.2, "History of the Different Quests" and to define the criterium of historical plausibility, respectively.

The book *Jesus, Neither God nor Man: The Case for a Mythical Jesus*⁶¹ is a 2009 book written by Earl Doherty (1941-) which I used to define the term "Mythicism".

The 2011's first volume of the *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* is a compilation of several works by different biblical scholars about the study of the historical Jesus. From this volume I have used two authors' essays – Ernst Baasland's (1945-) "Fourth Quest? What Did Jesus Really Want?"⁶² used to better explain the most recent iteration of the Quest for the historical Jesus; and the recently deceased⁶³ John P. Meier's (1942-2022) "Basic

⁵⁸ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1996).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 74; 145.

⁶⁰ Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring, First American ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

⁶¹ Doherty, *Jesus, Neither God nor Man: A Case for the Mythical Jesus*.

⁶² Ernst Baasland, "Fourth Quest? What Did Jesus Really Want?," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁶³ "In Memoriam: John P. Meier, Professor Emeritus of Theology,"

<https://al.nd.edu/news/latest-news/in-memoriam-john-p-meier-professor-emeritus-of-theology/>.

Methodology in the Quest for the historical Jesus,”⁶⁴ that helped me write the difference between the definitions of *historic* and *historical*.

I have also consulted several other works that helped me learning about the field of the New Testament studies and the Historicity of Jesus, that I eventually did not include in my thesis. Those works are my advisor’s Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte’s book *The Antecedents of Antichrist: A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents*⁶⁵ (1996), James G. Crossley’s books *The Date of Mark’s Gospel: An Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity*⁶⁶ (2004) and *Why Christianity Happened: A Sociohistorical Account of Christian Origins (26-50 CE)*⁶⁷ (2006), D.C. Parker’s *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts*⁶⁸ (2008), and Richard A. Horsley’s *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*⁶⁹ (2014).

⁶⁴ John P. Meier, "Basic Methodology in the Quest for the Historical Jesus," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2011).

⁶⁵ Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist: A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁶⁶ James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark’s Gospel: An Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004).

⁶⁷ *Why Christianity Happened: A Sociohistorical Account of Christian Origins (26-50 Ce)* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

⁶⁸ D.C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁶⁹ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014).

Works not directly related with the Historical Jesus

These are some of the works I have used that do not directly relate to the historical Jesus that, nevertheless, helped me write this study. Six sources of information that vary between books, articles, and a website.

In this work I used Flavius Josephus' (c.37-c.100) *Antiquities of the Jews*⁷⁰ to use the ancient Jewish-Roman author's information on James, the brother of Jesus.

The author, historian, and phenomenologist of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) wrote the 1963 volume *Myth and Reality*,⁷¹ (original in French, *Aspects du Mythe*) a book on the relation between myth and symbolism. This work was used to help me define the term *myth*.

The Catalan writer Raimon Panikkar (1918-2010) released in 1979 his book *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*,⁷² a work of inter-religious studies relating myth with the religions of the world from different cultural points of view. I have used Panikkar's work to define the term *mythologoumenon*.

The 2006 book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*⁷³ was written by the biblical scholar and Theologian Richard Bauckham (born in 1946). This book contains a list of the most common Jewish names in a period of approximately 500 years that spans from the late 4th century BCE to the early 3rd century CE. This list was used in my work to understand if Jesus' name was given at his birth or later in life, during his ministry.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.9.1.200.

⁷¹ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York / Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963).

⁷² Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1979).

⁷³ Richard Bauckman, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006).

⁷⁴ The list of Jewish male names calculated by Bauckman is composed by 1. Simon (243 people); 2. Joseph (218); 3. Eleazar (166); 4. Judah (164); 5. Yohanan (122); 6. Joshua (99). The list of names calculated by Tal Ilan, is composed by 1. Simon (257); 2. Joseph (231); 3. Judah (179); 4. Eleazar (177); 5. Yohanan (128); 6. Joshua (103). As we will see ahead in this

The 2011's article "An Early First-Century Earthquake in the Dead Sea," written by a group of three geological researchers – Jefferson B. Williams, Markus J. Schwab, and A. Brauer – study the possibility that one of the earthquakes felt in the early first century CE Galilee is related to the plausible description of an earthquake in the Gospel of Matthew during the crucifixion of Jesus.⁷⁵

The most recent work of this section is a 2017 article from the *Nigerian Biomedical Science Journal* titled "The Haematological Perspective of The Biblical Woman with issue of Blood,"⁷⁶ written by medical doctors and lecturers at the Rivers State University, Nigeria, Baribefe Daniel Koate and Serekara Gideon Christian.

Finally, the last source – without any date available – from this category comes from a website titled TimeAndDate.com. An article titled "What Are Total Solar Eclipses?" written by the web editors and journalists Vigdis Hocken and Aparna Kher. The content of this webpage explains in a simple but correct manner what exactly is a total solar eclipse and how it occurs.⁷⁷ I have used this information to write about the duration of the possible occurrence of a solar eclipse during Jesus' crucifixion.

work, Joshua or Jesus are the same in Hebrew. And Joshua is the sixth most popular male name. *See Ibid.*, 70.

⁷⁵ Jefferson B. Williams, Markus J. Schwab, and A. Brauer, "An Early First-Century Earthquake in the Dead Sea," *International Geology Review* no 54 (2012): 1, doi 10.1080/00206814.2011.639996.

⁷⁶ Serekara Gideon Christian and Baribefe Daniel Koate, "The Haematological Perspective of the Biblical Woman with Issue of Blood," *Nigerian Biomedical Science Journal* (2017).

⁷⁷ Vigdis Hocken and Aparna Kher, "What Are Total Solar Eclipses?," accessed 25 August 2022, <https://www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/total-solar-eclipse.html>.

On Style and Basic Sources

Finally, for this thesis I have used two manuals of style – the 16th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*⁷⁸ and the second edition of the *SBL Handbook of Style*.⁷⁹ Choosing a Bible to use is always difficult for the young student. Therefore, the Bible I have used for this thesis is the fully revised fourth edition of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*,⁸⁰ edited by Michael D. Coogan. This is the one I have used throughout my master’s program in History and Culture of Religions. Being initially recommended by Dr. Ana Valdez, who would eventually become my co-advisor, I have compared this version to other Bibles, and still never stopped using it. The annotations in this Bible are excellent and among the most reliable in the Biblical academic world and this version possesses very useful tools such as timelines and maps, among others, that helped me better visualize the content.

I.1.2 History of the Different Quests

For over 200 years a serious and methodical research for the historical Jesus, grounded on historical and textual criticism has been under constant development.⁸¹ Based on the English translation of Albert Schweitzer’s 1906 *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (originally titled *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*), this newfound impetus for the research for the historical Jesus gained its name.⁸²

⁷⁸ *Chicago Manual of Style*, Sixteenth ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁷⁹ *SBL Handbook of Style*, Second ed. (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014).

⁸⁰ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, Fully Revised Fourth ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸¹ Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. 5 and Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 9.

⁸² Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching*, 3.

It is mostly recognized that this *Quest* has passed through three distinct periods, even though some authors, such as Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, do prefer to divide it in more periods (five, in the case of these two authors).⁸³

The First Quest had its first steps with Hermann Samuel Reimarus' *Apologia or Defence of the Rational Worshippers of God* (posthumously published in seven parts in the late 1700s), David Friedrich Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu* (1835/36), the works of the German Liberal theologians of the late nineteenth century Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, Ferdinand Christian Baur, Gottlob Wilke and Christian Hermann Weisse, and Schweitzer's 1906 work. This early stage of the *Quest* was marked in its beginning by the evolution on religious thought, which is expressed clearly by Reimarus' notions of Deism and on the impact a non-strictly Christian world view can do have the study of the history of Christianity.⁸⁴ With Strauss comes the idea that one should be unbiased when doing research into the life of Jesus,⁸⁵ that the Synoptics should be prioritized in the study of the historical Jesus over the Gospel of John,⁸⁶ but mainly that one should apply the concept of myth to the New Testament, as it was already done with the Old Testament.⁸⁷

With the arrival of the twentieth century and Schweitzer's work, the end of the First Quest for the historical Jesus arrives as well. Schweitzer writes that Jesus was prompted by the apocalyptic belief that the Kingdom of God would arrive within his lifetime which ended up not happening. The idea of Jesus being a person with eschatological claims that were incorrect

⁸³ The five periods are the "Critical *Stimuli* to Research into Jesus" [or the "Critical Impulse Towards the Question of the Historical Jesus" as written on page 2]; The "Liberal Quest" of the Historical Jesus; the Collapse of the Quest of the Historical Jesus; the "New Quest" of the Historical Jesus; and the "Third Quest" of the Historical Jesus. See Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, 12.

⁸⁴ Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 9; and Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, 2-3.

⁸⁵ Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 9.

⁸⁶ Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

did not fit the Christian worldview.⁸⁸ The author also criticized his fellow scholars in the study of the historical Jesus since their work ended up becoming a projection of their ideals on to Jesus. The *First Quest* halted by this point in time.⁸⁹

From this first quest, some fundamental theories were developed and are still in use nowadays. With the establishment of the Markan priority (the understanding that the Gospel of Mark was the oldest of the gospels, as theorized by B.H. Streeter).⁹⁰ in the late nineteenth century, scholars were able to develop the notions of the Q source,⁹¹ the two-source hypothesis, and the four-source hypothesis (which I explain below). Ehrman writes:

“The source used by both Matthew and Luke for the stories they share, principally sayings, that are not found in Mark; from the German word *Quelle*, ‘source.’ The document no longer exists but can be reconstructed on the basis of Matthew and Luke.”⁹²

Q is a hypothetical gospel that uses combined material from where Luke and Matthew took their material from.⁹³ The two-source hypothesis (described in Theissen and Merz as *theory*,⁹⁴ however, in Ehrman, 2000 and the Anchor Bible Dictionary, it is classified as *hypothesis*)⁹⁵ was developed by Gottlob Wilke and C.H. Weisse.⁹⁶ It proposed that, a) since the Gospel of Mark was the earliest,⁹⁷ and all three Synoptics have common material, both Luke and Matthew drew that material from Mark, b) the material common only to Matthew and Luke

⁸⁸ Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*, 3.

⁸⁹ Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 9-10.

⁹⁰ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 77; and Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*, 4.

⁹¹ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 458.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 458.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹⁴ Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, 25.

⁹⁵ Marie-Émile Boismard, "Two-Source Hypothesis," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Vol. 6, 679.

⁹⁶ Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, 5.

⁹⁷ For further information on history of the Gospel of Mark see Yarbrow Collins *Commentary on Mark* in Hermeneia. Adela Yarbrow Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

comes from Q, and c) Luke and Matthew are independent from one-another.⁹⁸ The four-source (or four-document) hypothesis was an improvement made on the former hypothesis by Streeter in which two other hypothetical sources – M and L – are added to the mixture. Instead of Luke and Matthew being solely based on two sources (Mark and Q), they draw information from four sources instead (Mark, Q, M, and L) being M a source for the Matthew's material not featured in Luke, and L being Luke's material not featured in Mark. The latter, possibly being a first draft of Luke before adding the material from Mark and Q.⁹⁹

A period of about forty years separated the first two quests. Two World Wars later, the world was already not only chronologically, but also culturally well into the twentieth century. This period between the first and second quests is sometimes called the "Period of no Quest," but authors such as Maurice Casey prefer to call it the Nazi Period, where some scholars such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain wrote about the historical Jesus. Chamberlain, like other scholars from his time, sought to study Jesus from an anti-Jewish and Aryan extremely biased and erroneous perspective. This supposed interregnum of the Quest was primarily marked by two elements: 1) the definite establishment of the Markan priority among the gospels; and 2) the Nazi influence on literature, theology, and culture in general, which led to a normalization of the anti-Jewish sentiment, resulting in several attempts to disprove the Jewish background of Jesus.¹⁰⁰ The period of Nazi government, in particular, had an extremely negative influence on the German humanities, which have been recognized as being the best in the world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading to the loss of foreign scholars to other

⁹⁸ Boismard, "Two-Source Hypothesis," 679.

⁹⁹ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 76-77; 83; and C.M. Tuckett, "Synoptic Problem," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Vol. 6, 269.

¹⁰⁰ Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*, 4-5.

institutions abroad and to the participation of a wide range of German scholars in several projects that served the interests of the Nazi state.¹⁰¹

The Quest for the historical Jesus started its second chapter in 1953, because of a lecture given by Ernst Käsemann, at a time when the Quest was presumed dead. It was called “The Problem of the historical Jesus” and in it, Käsemann argued for the idea that the gospels could hold traditions that go back to the historical Jesus. One of the main focuses of the second Quest was on Jesus’ teaching. At this time Jesus started being portrayed more as an existentialist philosopher by Rudolph Bultmann, which would set the tone for a new way of thinking about the historical Jesus. With the Second Quest, one starts understanding that we cannot reach the absolute truth about the historical Jesus. At most, we can assume that some traditions are more likely to be part of history than others. This Second Quest lasted somewhere between twenty or thirty, thirty-five years. There was not a breaking point, like there was with the end of the First Quest, there was no interregnum or intermediate phase, the Quest simply evolved naturally until around the 1980s when some scholars began to understand that the Quest had reached a different level:

“One of the characteristics of the second, or new, quest was its focus on the present relevance of Jesus’ teaching. In many cases Jesus came off sounding like an existentialist philosopher, an emphasis that may be seen as the residue of Bultmann’s appropriation of existentialist philosophy in interpreting the New Testament.”¹⁰²

With the fading out of Käsemann’s generation, a renewed interest in finding Jesus from a sociologic – rather than theological – point of view arose. New areas within New Testament studies come to be, such as the social history of the Jewish society in the first century CE, Jesus’

¹⁰¹ Bernard M. Levinson and Robert P. Ericksen, "Introduction: The Betrayal of the Humanities under National Socialism," in *The Betrayal of the Humanities: The University During the Third Reich*, ed. Bernard M. Levinson and Robert P. Ericksen (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022), 2-4.

¹⁰² Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 11-12. Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching*, 12-13.

place within Judaism, and the increasing significance of the non-canonical writings as a field of study. At the same time, several criteria of authenticity are developed to classify as more or less historical the Jesus traditions. The idea of a Jesus that is not an eschatological figure starts to take place in the studies of several scholars, such as John Dominic Crossan and Burton L. Mack, who reached the conclusion that Jesus would have been a proponent of the philosophy of Cynicism, or at least influenced by several aspects of the Hellenic philosophy.¹⁰³

Nowadays, and since the late 2010s, New Testament scholars have been thinking of taking the Quest to the next level, where a new approach to the study of the life of the Nazarene is needed. This is, the Fourth Quest for the historical Jesus. Ernst Baasland seems to point into the direction of this new Quest toward Jesus' intentions. On what Jesus expected to achieve with his ministry.¹⁰⁴ Baasland argues that the methodology of the Quests seems antiquated and not on par with the current methodologies of the science of history. The Quest methods are too subjective and inconsistent.¹⁰⁵ The *Fourth* or *Next* Quest should attempt to rely on a more unifying and consistent methodology.¹⁰⁶ The author suggests several points that could serve as a base for the Next Quest, such as using a methodology more in tandem with the one used in general history, investigating motives, underlining the Jewishness of Jesus in a Hellenistic environment, emphasizing criteria that highlights the analysis of the coherence and motives of Jesus' actions as well as their consequences, the use of archaeology, anthropology, sociology, narrative analysis, and rhetorical criticism, using Mark and Q as primary sources, and prioritizing the analysis of Jesus' actions and vision.¹⁰⁷

I make Baasland's words my own when he writes:

¹⁰³ Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, 10-11; and Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Baasland, "Fourth Quest? What Did Jesus Really Want?," 31.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 49; 56.

The Old Quest, the New Quest, and the Third Quest all aspired to conduct their research on an unmitigated historic-scientific foundation. The effort in all three quests was and is to answer the question: What facts can Jesus' research deliver? The three quests aim to sort the undisputable facts about the historical Jesus.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 30.

I.2 Methodology

The intent of this study is to analyze to which degree the three categories – historical, Legendary, or Mythological – can best be applied to describe Jesus of Nazareth and how one can classify the narrative of Jesus – as part of history, as a legend, or as a mythologoumenon. To reach this goal, it is necessary to 1) consider, analyze, and organize the opinions and arguments of the ten authors mentioned above on their readings of Jesus of Nazareth and display them in a concise and simple manner; 2) study the details of three open issues surrounding the historical Jesus: the date of Jesus' death, if the name Jesus -- Yěhōšûa --¹⁰⁹ was given by his parents, or was acquired on his adulthood, during his ministry, and what is the likelihood that his miracles were historical; and 3) organize several arguments for each one of the categories in a debate form (argument *versus* counter-argument).

After considering all the data, opinions, and conclusions, at the end of this study, I address which of these three categories I believe that Jesus of Nazareth fits into: historical, legendary, or mythological.

¹⁰⁹ Ben F. Meyer, "Jesus (Person)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992). Vol 3, 773.

I.3 Categories

I.3.1 Historical Jesus

This study adopts the term *historical* and not *Historic* when referring to the historical Jesus. As John P. Meier explains in his chapter “Basic Methodology in the Quest for the historical Jesus” in the *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, the distinction between *historic* and *historical* is ambiguous and interchangeable depending on the author. Meier states:

Although this distinction of historical (*historisch*) and historic (*geschichtlich*) is often repeated in Jesus research (especially among those strongly influenced by the Bultmannian tradition), I remain doubtful of its usefulness for English-speaking scholars today, for four reasons. (1) After close to a century of use, the distinction remains ambiguous and varies in meaning or function from author to author, with even some Germans not observing it. (2) The distinction, while supposedly employed to facilitate objective research, often carries with it the extra baggage of theological or ideological agendas. (3) The twofold distinction does not do justice to the complexity of the situation. (4) While defensible in theory, it is useless in the real world—even the ‘real’ world of scholars.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, Meier refers to the author Norman Perrin’s three categories of historicity as a way to help solve the distinction. These categories correspond to the three levels of knowledge that one can have about Jesus of Nazareth. The first level is the “Historical knowledge,” being the information we can obtain by studying the descriptive information about Jesus. The second level is the “Historic knowledge,” which dictates solely the aspects of the historical knowledge that one can obtain that could still be relevant nowadays. The last level of knowledge is the “Faith knowledge” of Jesus, a level that requires not just information based on data, but also the active belief of Jesus as the Lord and Savior of the Christian world. The Faith knowledge level “in the eyes of the believer, is the unique and exclusive territory of Jesus; unlike the first and second levels, it cannot be applied to other figures of ancient history”.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Meier, "Basic Methodology in the Quest for the Historical Jesus," 300.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 305.

When relating to the topic of the historicity of Jesus, Meier argues that we must allow ourselves to let go – for the time being – of Perrin's third level. To abstract ourselves from the Christian Faith. That would not be a betrayal to the study of the Jesus of Nazareth. He writes:

“What can and must be bracketed for the time being, for the sake of the scientific method employed, is the third level, i.e., faith-knowledge. Bracketed, I say, not betrayed. We abstract from Christian faith because we are involved in the hypothetical reconstruction of a past figure by purely scientific means: empirical data from ancient documents, sifted by human minds operating by inference, analogy, and certain specific criteria. Both method and goal are extremely narrow and limited; the results do not claim to provide either a substitute for or the object of faith. For the moment, we are prescinding from faith, not denying it, although later on a correlation between our historical quest and the stance of faith may be possible. For the time being, we will be focusing on the theoretical construct I have called 'the historical Jesus,' with the realization that in practice one cannot adequately disentangle him from the 'historic Jesus.' In reality, the one flows too much into the other.”¹¹²

Meier states (and I agree) that this process is not a denial of faith – only a momentary abstraction – to focus our efforts on the reconstruction of a figure from the past using empirical data from ancient documents, using very specific criteria.¹¹³

According to Meier, both the historical and historic Jesus are not easily disentangled. Nevertheless, the author decides to focus on the historical Jesus in his text.¹¹⁴ As Meier considers Jesus to have, without a doubt, lived and walked the grounds of our world,¹¹⁵ his Jesus would have fit the historical category in this work. Subsequently, this thesis' definition of *historical*, based on Perrin's first level of knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth and Meier's conclusions on its distinction from *historic*, is: a person whose life we know of by consulting recorded information about them.

¹¹² Ibid., 307.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 292-293.

As such, the first category that Jesus of Nazareth can be included into is the “historical Jesus,” meaning that the traditions within the primary sources about Jesus are mostly accurate and true, and that he was, in fact, a living person that existed in history.

I.3.2 The Legend of Jesus of Nazareth

The word *legend* has conquered and solidified its space in the cultural *zeitgeist* of our era. A commonplace in fiction, sports, religion, history, among countless other examples, this concept is present in our daily lives as we exist within most societies in the early twenty-first century. In the modern Anglophone world, when hearing the word *legend*, most people would think of a very relevant individual in the current cultural medium. Someone such as Meryl Streep, Lionel Messi, or Elvis Presley, all examples of people, living and dead, younger and older, who achieved what the public colloquially calls a *legendary status* are considered legends because they have achieved an outstanding level of quality and recognition within their own fields of expertise. The term might also apply to the qualities of someone or something. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines *legend* both as the colloquial term meaning “an extremely famous or notorious person, especially in a particular field” and as “a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical,” giving as example “the legend of King Arthur.”¹¹⁶ Using the term colloquially, one can use interchangeably *legend* and *legendary* – for example, “She is a legend” or “She is legendary” – for the purposes of this thesis, however, the noun, *legend*, should describe a story, such as the King Arthur example before, or, in our case, the narrative of Jesus: “The Legend of Jesus of Nazareth.” As for the adjective *legendary*, it should be used to describe the character, e.g., “Jesus is a legendary individual.”

¹¹⁶ "Legend," in *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1000.

Nevertheless, when I classify Jesus as a legendary figure or character, even though he was, in fact, someone who achieved an outstanding level of quality and recognition within his own field of expertise, I do not mean it in the colloquial way or according to definition of the *Oxford Dictionary of English*.

Dictionaries, from the most academic, to the most mainstream tend to generally define *legend* in three ways: as an inscription, a person, or a story. The first of these three ways does not concern us for this study. Further on, we analyze *legend* as a story or a person. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* I see that the word *legend* is derived from the Medieval Latin “legenda,” meaning “things to be read”¹¹⁷ which means a “Collection of saints’ lives,” relating to the history and/or stories of Christian saints.¹¹⁸ From that point on, the evolution of this Medieval Latin word has taken a broader definition within the current English lexicon. The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s (not the *Oxford Dictionary of English* used before) definitions of *legend* do not suit Jesus of Nazareth, the person, but do fit his history within the context of this study, “An unauthentic or non-historical story, esp. one handed down by tradition from early times and popularly regarded as historical.”¹¹⁹ For the concern of this thesis, this definition is acceptable, since it is not Jesus himself necessarily who is inauthentic or non-historical, but his story. The *Merriam-Webster*’s meaning of the word can either be “A usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon” or “a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ "Legend," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. T.F. Hoad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 263.

¹¹⁸ "Legenda," in *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, ed. Jan Frederik Niermeyer (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1976), 595.

¹¹⁹ "Legend," in *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. JA Simpson and ESC Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 806.

¹²⁰ "Legend," in *The Dictionary, by Merriam-Webster* (Merriam-Webster), accessed 12 March 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legend>.

Working with the sources above, the definition of *legend* as used in this work that borrows heavily from the *Oxford English* and *Merriam-Webster* dictionaries shall be: The story of a person whose life as we know it is based on a likely fictional scenario or whose existence cannot be proved to be true. Therefore, unlike the definition of *myth*, this definition of *legend* does leave some room to believe that the *legend* of a *legendary* character can be a mostly real history about a person who very likely existed in real life.

As for the definition of *legendary*, as expected, it is interpreted as being “described in or based on legends,” by the *Oxford Dictionary of English*,¹²¹ and “one of which accounts are mostly of the nature of legends,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary.¹²²

When one considers the works consulted for this study, I understand that the definition of *legend*, as a noun, and in relation to Jesus of Nazareth, differs among the authors. For example, Adela Yarbro Collins,¹²³ Dale Allison Jr.,¹²⁴ Maurice Casey,¹²⁵ and Bart D. Ehrman¹²⁶ consider the terms *legendary* and *legend* to be somewhat synonyms of *mythological* and *myth*, respectively. Nevertheless, John Dominic Crossan, contradictorily, states that *legend* and *myth* are different terms, being the first closer to historical fact than the latter, which contemplates something much closer to the realm of fiction than fact.¹²⁷

In the E.P. Sanders’ book, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, the author notes that the four Canonical Gospels are, for the most part, historical, with some legendary traits. He also,

¹²¹ "Legendary," in *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1000.

¹²² "Legendary," in *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. JA Simpson and ESC Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 806-807.

¹²³ Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, 74; 145.

¹²⁴ Allison Jr., *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*, 207.

¹²⁵ Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching*, 526-527.

¹²⁶ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 78.

¹²⁷ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 167.

however, states, that most of the Apocryphal Gospels are almost predominantly legendary and mythological.¹²⁸ Sanders' idea of what is historical, legendary, and mythological seems to be on par with the definitions used for this thesis.

In conclusion, the second category where Jesus of Nazareth could be part of is the "Legend of Jesus," meaning that I consider his life story as very likely with some fictional elements.

I.3.3 Jesus' Story as a Mythologoumenon

Unlike the meaning of *legend*, a *myth* is nowadays related with something that is from outside the realm of possibilities, something that does not adhere to reality. If, in the case of a person with a *legendary* status, one can establish that the person is among the very best of their peers within a real-world situation, someone with a *mythical* status would always rise above the natural world. If someone is said to have a *mythical* quality, that person would possess a non-realistic quality. The same would hold true for a *mythical* character or a *mythical* story.

If we imagine a Venn diagram (an illustration involving two or more circles to represent the relation between two or more sets of items, overlapping said circles or not)¹²⁹ describing the relation between "myth" and "reality," the circles within said imaginary illustration would not touch each other. Below, there are a couple of images (Figure 1 and Figure 2) demonstrating the relation between myth and reality and *mythos* (μῦθος) and reality.

¹²⁸ Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 64.

¹²⁹ "Venn Diagram," in *The Penguin Dictionary of Mathematics*, ed. David Nelson (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 460-461.

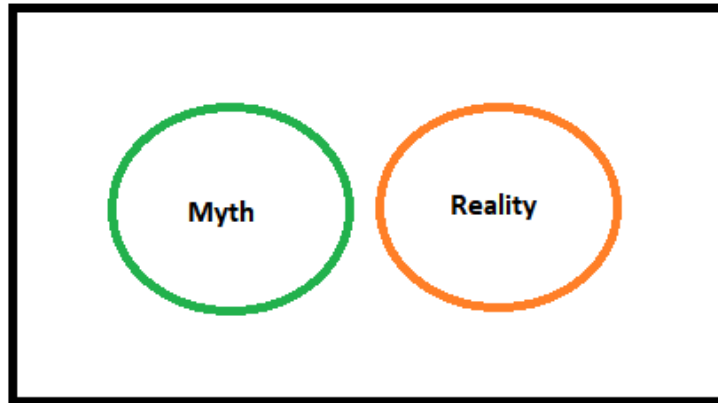


Figure 1 – Current relation between Myth and Reality

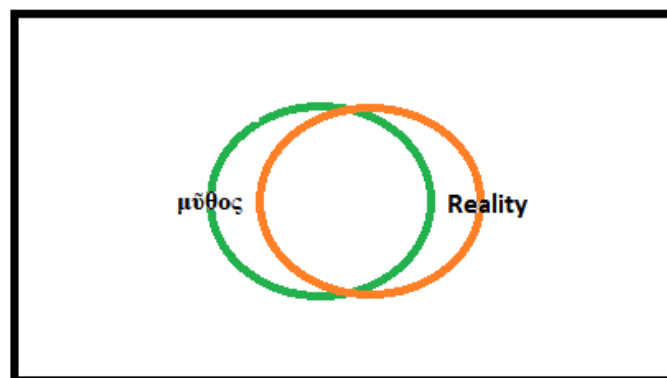


Figure 2 – Ancient relation between μῦθος (mythos) and Reality

However, that was not always the case. The term is based on the Ancient Greek word μῦθος, which simply held the original meaning of “word, speech, message.” Later, around the Fifth century BCE, the term started to become something more akin to a story that was not necessarily based on reality. Nevertheless, the word would only be coined with its modern meaning in the Eighteenth century, with its better accepted definition being provided by Walter Burkert: “A traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance.”¹³⁰ Despite this good definition of this word, as Mircea Eliade said, “it would be hard to find a definition of *Myth* that would be acceptable to all scholars and at the same time intelligible to non-specialists.”¹³¹ For Eliade, the “least inadequate definition” of *Myth* would

¹³⁰ Jan N. Bremmer, "Mythology," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 991-992.

¹³¹ Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 5.

be a narration of a sacred history, something that relates to an event that took place in primordial Time.¹³²

Even though Walter Burkert's suggestion is perfectly acceptable, a definition that better suits this thesis is the one that follows the Oxford English Dictionary which explains that a *myth* can both be "a purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions, or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena" or, in the case of characterizing someone, "a fictitious or imaginary person or object."¹³³

As for the term *mythology*, the dictionaries *Merriam-Webster*,¹³⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*,¹³⁵ and *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*¹³⁶ agree with it being defined as a "body of myths," meaning that it tells a tale that contains events, places, or characters that hold a fictitious place in our world.

At this point, I can establish that a potential Jesus of Nazareth, legendary character, would be very different from a Jesus of Nazareth, mythological character. The former would be recognized as someone who potentially lived among our ancestors, even though his actual life and deeds are clouded in mystery, whereas the latter would be seen as little more than a literary figure who gained immortality in our collective imaginary despite very likely never having lived in the first place.

Instead of *mythology* or *myth*, the best word to try to classify the story of Jesus as a literary creation would be *mythologoumenon*. According to Raimon Panikkar – there is a

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ "Myth," in *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. JA Simpson and ESC Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 177.

¹³⁴ "Mythology," in *The Dictionary, by Merriam-Webster* (Merriam-Webster), accessed 12 March 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mythology>.

¹³⁵ "Mythology," in *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. JA Simpson and ESC Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 179

¹³⁶ Bremmer, "Mythology," 991.

difference between mythology, myth, and mythologoumenon. The latter term is the λέγειν (*legein*, Greek term for narration/voice), the telling, the narration of the myth. Panikkar writes:

“By *myth*, I understand the horizon of intelligibility, or the sense of reality. Disclosed by a certain *mythologoumenon*. The *mythologoumenon* is the *legein* of the myth, the living voice. The telling of the myth. If the myth is the truth, the reality, then the *mythologoumenon* is the expression, the speaking, the language. Finally, a myth expressed by a *mythologoumenon*, i.e., by the themes (mythic and not necessarily conceptual) the myth elucidates.”¹³⁷

The question of whether Jesus’ traditions are historical, legendary, or a mythologoumenon remains an important topic of debate. Throughout the rest of this work, I shall present the views of the ten scholars who wrote extensively about Jesus of Nazareth and approach several arguments in favor and against the three positions.

¹³⁷ Panikkar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*, 101.

PART ONE

TEN AUTHORS, TEN JESUSES

1.1 History, Legend, or Myth?

This chapter explores in detail all the recreations of the historical Jesus by the ten authors I have studied more thoroughly for this thesis. This is done by explaining their methodologies, followed by their views on the traditions, what their arguments were, and on which sources they are based on when it comes to the reconstruction of the Galilean prophet.

I have decided to order the ten authors by the same chronology I have used in the subchapter I.1.1.

1.1.1 Morton Smith

Morton Smith's book *Jesus the Magician* shows us a different Jesus of Nazareth from any other work analyzed in this thesis. Smith believes that one should pay attention to sources such as the magical papyri fragments that have survived until our days and not just the gospels. Even though the earliest papyri relevant for the life of Jesus are from the 3rd century CE onwards, some of them contain information that is as old as the gospels themselves.¹

According to Smith, to be a magician, you would have to necessarily be a miracle worker, except the source of your powers would not have a divine source. Jesus is accused, when performing an exorcism, that he is doing the deed of Beelzebul – “He casts out demons by the ruler of demons.”² Nevertheless, the line between magic and miracle-worker is somewhat thin and difficult to discern.³

¹ Morton Smith *Jesus the Magician*, 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993), VIII-IX.

² *Ibid.*, 81.

³ *Ibid.*

The early gospels, written between 40 and 70 years after Jesus' death and the writing of the Pauline letters, written by someone who lived during Jesus' lifetime make Jesus of Nazareth one of the best documented people from the 1st century, Morton Smith explains. The author concedes, nonetheless, that these sources also contradict each other.⁴ They were not written only to record events, but, as he states:

To produce and confirm faith in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God – not a historical figure, but a mythological one: a god who came down from heaven, assumed a human body, (...) died, went back to heaven, and is now sitting up there, awaiting the time set for his return to raise the dead, judge all men, destroy this world and produce a new one.⁵

Notwithstanding, the author assumes that “general probability and specific evidence” tell us that Jesus must have been the first one to believe that he was the Messiah himself. As such there should be no difference between the “historical Jesus” and “Jesus of Faith.”⁶

Morton Smith describes Jesus how he could have been seen by people of his own time that considered him not as the Son of God, but as some sort of “magician” (meaning something along the lines of dealing with spirits with unholy forces, being possessed by a demon, or even necromancy).⁷ In the author's description, gathered by analyzing the data from his sources from outside the gospels (later Christian sources, Pagan sources such as Lucius, Celsus, and Claudius, and Jewish sources such as the Rabbi Eliezer and Josephus among others)⁸ he concluded that Jesus would have been seen as the son of a soldier named Panthera and a peasant woman married to a carpenter who was brought up in Nazareth.⁹ Jesus would have taken up carpentry but eventually left his trade, his family, and his town.¹⁰ It is unknown what Jesus did

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Ibid., 77-78.

⁸ Ibid., 45-67.

⁹ Smith, "Jesus the Magician," 67.

¹⁰ Ibid.

after, even though he eventually arrived in Egypt and learned magic, becoming an expert in the field, and even getting tattoos of magic symbols and/or spells. Jesus left Egypt and returned to Galilee, where he became famous for performing rituals of “magic” (by the definition mentioned above).¹¹ Jesus then convinced the masses of being the Jewish Messiah and/or being the Son of God, something that was untrue. The Nazarene then faked following the Jewish law, surrounded himself with disciples who were eventually taught to despise said law and to practice “magic.”¹² The rituals Jesus and his disciples performed included sexual promiscuity and cannibalism. His ministry of “magic” travelled from town to town, getting sometimes rejected by the local people. When Jesus returned to Nazareth, he was rejected as well by his people and family. He was constantly opposed and challenged by the scribes.¹³ When he went to Jerusalem, he was arrested and charged with the practice of magic, which eventually resulted in his crucifixion at the hands of Pilate. After Jesus died, his followers stole his body from the grave, claimed that he had risen from the dead, and continued his practices.¹⁴

As for the evidence portrayed in the gospels, there is a quite different Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus would have been a Galilean Jew with no formal education (as passages such as, for example, in Matthew 13:54-56 or John 7:15 might indicate). His ministry started after he was baptized (Matthew 4:1-17; Luke 4). He would have been seen as a drunkard and glutton (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). He performed miracles that invoked fear and astonishment (Mark 15-17; Matthew 14:25-26).¹⁵ Jesus, who was probably not the son of Joseph,¹⁶ was rejected by his townspeople and his family tried to restrain him, for they thought he was out of his mind (Mark 3:20-21). There was certainly some hostility there between Jesus and his brothers.¹⁷ If

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

Jesus' birth was irregular, he would have been ridiculed as a child back in his hometown.¹⁸ He had reasons to leave Nazareth. That could also explain the lack of material of his family in the gospels.¹⁹ The Nazarene was sometimes called "teacher" or "rabbi" (Matthew 22:36), even though those terms were more expressions of respect, especially since the idea that Jesus taught Jewish law are of dubious historicity.²⁰ It is also historically questionable whether Jesus was really so strongly opposed by the Herodians and the Pharisees.²¹ The group of people that was actually hostile to Jesus was the scribes (or "lawyers,")²² even though some might have followed him.²³ During his final days, the Nazarene was seized at the beginning of Passover, in Jerusalem.²⁴ The High Priests arranged his arrest, interrogated him, and gave him to the Romans, securing his execution.²⁵ After Jesus' arrest, the crowds turned from him, petitioned for the release of another prisoner, demanded that he would be crucified, and mocked him, before he died on the cross.²⁶

1.1.2 Ben Witherington III

In his book, *The Christology of Jesus*, Ben Witherington explains that one should not just pay attention to the sayings that tend to be considered authentic and come back to the historical Jesus, but also that we should try to not filter too much the traditions that are presented in the sources, for they cast a more complete image about Jesus as a whole. If we want to know

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 23.

²¹ Ibid., 28-29.

²² Ibid., 30.

²³ Ibid., 30-31.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁵ Ibid., 36.

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

how the historical Jesus viewed himself, the best pathway is to study the sayings material, since it seems to be the earliest material that we have about Jesus.²⁷

Despite not having nearly enough reliable data from Jesus of Nazareth to be able to make an analysis of Jesus from a psychological standpoint, Witherington states that we can try to understand what the Galilean thought of himself.²⁸ As such, one should focus on the Synoptic gospels while avoiding any speculation about Jesus' life before the baptism and what succeeded after his passing. The ministry led by the Nazarene should then be the focus of the study when trying to understand Jesus' life and thoughts.²⁹

Ben Witherington III believes that one should use some criteria of authenticity if we want to go back to the historical Jesus, such as dissimilarity,³⁰ coherence,³¹ and multiple attestation,³² followed by other secondary criteria such as style and scholarly consensus.³³ The criterion of dissimilarity (also known as discontinuity, originality, or dual irreducibility) is based on analyzing the words or deeds of Jesus that would not make sense within the context of first century Judaism in Palestine or from the early years of the Christian church;³⁴ The criterion of coherence establishes that the sayings and deeds of Jesus that fit within the preliminary set of Biblical data gathered has a good chance of being historical;³⁵ The criterion of multiple attestation (also known as cross section) focuses on the deeds and sayings of Jesus that are attested within the sources more than once.³⁶

²⁷ Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus*, 22-23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

³⁰ Meier, "Basic Methodology in the Quest for the Historical Jesus," 314-315.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 320-321.

³² *Ibid.*, 318.

³³ Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus*, 28.

³⁴ Meier, "Basic Methodology in the Quest for the Historical Jesus," 314-315.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 320-321.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 318.

When it comes to Witherington's historical Jesus, one thing the author is certain is that the Nazarene had some sort of relationship with John the Baptist. That much, according to Witherington, is historical fact.³⁷ John would have been essential for Jesus in the beginning of the Nazarene's journey towards the goal of sharing the final eschatological message from God to the people of Israel.³⁸ Jesus would compare himself to John during his whole ministry. According to this author, the Baptist was the person who molded the Nazarene's identity and sense of mission.³⁹

Once John was arrested, Jesus seems to decide to take a different direction within his ministry. He started thinking of John as a transitional character in the grand scheme of their eschatological beliefs and himself as a new kind of prophet, possibly the final prophet for God.⁴⁰

Jesus would have seen himself as "divine Wisdom in the flesh, or at least as carrying out the tasks and roles that the Wisdom literature portrays Wisdom as doing."⁴¹ Consequently, Jesus thinking of himself as a sage explains, in the rationale of Witherington, Jesus' exorcisms and healing in general, his speech in aphorisms, parables, and beatitudes, and the authority that he held, many times independently from the Jewish law, that he did not quote extensively throughout his ministry. He saw himself as a prophet and, when speaking about the "Son of Man," Jesus spoke of himself.⁴² According to the author, Jesus probably saw himself as the incarnation of God's Wisdom. He believed that he was to reveal God's plan to mankind, such as the secrets of his Kingdom.⁴³

³⁷ Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus*, 22-23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴² *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 185-187.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 192.

Jesus not only healed the flesh, but also the spirit. He would have shared meals with sinners to teach them a wisdom that could be their salvation in the end times.⁴⁴

Witherington explains further that Jesus dying on the cross is also a historical fact:

“Although I agree that certain undisputed facts—such as Jesus' crucifixion and his relationship with the Baptist—can serve as the lynchpins of an argument that otherwise depends on examining the words, deeds, and relationships of Jesus, these undisputed facts are too few to provide an adequate foundation on which to build much of a case. In fact, as the recent criticisms of E. P. Sanders's *Jesus and Judaism* have pointed out, accepting only sayings that seem to cohere with these few accepted facts of Jesus' life are likely to produce a somewhat distorted view of Jesus. The vast majority of Jesus' sayings, including the ones that most scholars consider authentic, do not have to do with matters such as the Baptist, or Jesus' crucifixion, or his final trip to Jerusalem and the events that ensued.”⁴⁵

Before dying the Galilean was very likely aware that he was going to perish for the good of his people. Jesus reached that conclusion once he realized that his ministry was not achieving the goal of calling the “lost sheep of Israel back to God.”⁴⁶

1.1.3 John Dominic Crossan

John Dominic Crossan uses a layered methodology which employs triple triadic process to discern which traditions go back to the historical Jesus.⁴⁷

According to Crossan, Jesus was a peasant Jew. Since he lived in Nazareth, near the Hellenic city of Sepphoris, the author believes that that fact might have led Jesus into contacting with the philosophy of Cynicism. Nevertheless, his ministry was done solely in the rural parts of lower Galilee, where he preached the coming of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁸ Even if the author

⁴⁴ Ibid., 187-188.

⁴⁵ *The Christology of Jesus*, 22-23.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 262.

⁴⁷ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, XXVII-XXVIII.

⁴⁸ *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 198.

defends that the Nazarene was a Cynic, there is always the possibility that he was not following the philosophy strictly or even that he was aware about it. Nevertheless, both Jesus and Cynic preachers “are populists appealing to the ordinary people; both are life-style preachers, advocating their position not only by word but by deed, not only in theory but in practice; both use dress and equipment to symbolize dramatically their message,”⁴⁹ which helps the case that Jesus was one. There are some differences, though. Cynics practiced their oration mostly in urban areas and he travelled mostly through villages, Cynics were individualists and Jesus was part of a community, and Jesus and his followers did not use knapsack or staff, which were used by Cynics. This, according to Crossan, could have been a Jewish version of Cynicism.⁵⁰

Despite being an acclaimed preacher and well familiarized with the Jewish traditions, Jesus was very likely illiterate like almost the totality of his people. As Crossan states:

I emphasize that any decision on Jesus’ socioeconomic class must be made not in terms of Christian theology but of cross-cultural anthropology, not in terms of those interested in exalting Jesus but in terms of those not even thinking of his existence. Furthermore, since between 95 and 97 percent of the Jewish state was illiterate at the time of Jesus, it must be presumed that Jesus also was illiterate.”⁵¹ Jesus was baptized by John, an apocalyptic preacher, in the Jordan river, eventually, very likely, breaking up with John’s apocalyptic vision, following his own path. Crossan adds that John lived in – and I quote – “apocalyptic asceticism, and Jesus did the opposite.”⁵²

Jesus practiced what he preached. Besides being an egalitarian, unlike John, the Nazarene feasted with sinners and women, which could have led people to see him as a drunk and a glutton.⁵³

Crossan believes Jesus did heal people but makes a distinction between “curing diseases” and “healing illnesses.” The former regards the practice of medicine for treating the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 25-26.

⁵² Ibid., 45-48.

⁵³ Ibid., 66-74.

body whilst the latter refers to the ostracization and stigma that comes attached to the disease by “refusing to accept the disease’s ritual uncleanness and social ostracization. Jesus thereby forced others either to reject him from their community or to accept the leper within it as well.”⁵⁴ According to the fourth chapter of Crossan’s, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, the author explains that, even though he does not believe in spirits or the interaction of other worldly beings with us, he does understand that, under certain conditions, the human mind might produce what some could interpret as supernatural experiences such as being possessed, and under a certain ritual – an exorcism – that pathology might be healed. Crossan stresses that Jesus must have performed actions such as healing and exorcising people. Otherwise, if he only limited his actions to promoting the Kingdom of God in discourse, he might have been ignored and, to do so, would “leave his life meaningless and his death unexplainable.”⁵⁵

Before Jesus’ trial, there are three actions that could have occurred in Crossan’s understanding: Jesus entered, triumphally, in Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–11; Matthew 21:1–11; Luke 19:28–44; and John 12:12–19); The Last Supper, where Jesus predicted his death (Mark 9:30–32; Matthew 17:22–23); and the cleansing that Jesus performed in the Temple (Mark 11:15–19; Matthew 21:12–17; Luke 19:45–48; and John 2:13–16), where he interfered with its “fiscal, sacrificial, and liturgical operations” (in Crossan’s words).⁵⁶ Crossan believes that the only event that is likely to have belonged to history is the “destruction” of the Temple. Since it was very likely that this was the only time that Jesus visited Jerusalem, he would have felt resentment with the fact that what was practiced in the Temple – “nonegalitarian, patronal, and even oppressive on both the religious and the political level”⁵⁷ – was diametrically opposed to

⁵⁴ Ibid., 80–82.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 84–93.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 133.

what he believed, preached, and practiced. Such actions in the Temple would have led to his arrest,⁵⁸ during the festival of Passover, while his disciples fled.⁵⁹

Jesus died between 26 and 36 CE, during Pilate's rule of Judaea.⁶⁰ Crossan does not believe that the Nazarene's closest followers knew anything about the crucifixion, death, and burial. We do not know exactly what would have happened, since the author concludes that any information that has reached us about the passion "is not history remembered, but prophecy historicized."⁶¹ It is historically accurate, according to Crossan, that Jesus was crucified:

"My proposal is that Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing whatsoever about the details of his crucifixion, death, or burial. What we have now in those detailed passion accounts is not history remembered but prophecy historicized."⁶²

1.1.4 E.P. Sanders

Sanders does not discuss the methodology of his reasoning for the authenticity of the Jesus traditions that he finds to have come from history. He does state, however, that the primary intention of the evangelists when Jesus was first referenced in writing was, not to write a narrative of his life, but to preserve his sayings and deeds.⁶³ Sanders believes that, to reconstruct the history of Jesus, one needs to look at the historical and biblical context and content that the sources provide us to fill the gaps of our knowledge about the Nazarene.⁶⁴

According to E.P. Sanders, a large part of what is said about Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament is historically accurate and we can ascertain a general course to his life. What

⁵⁸ Ibid., 127-133.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 22-23.

⁶¹ Ibid., 145.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 57.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 76-77.

Sanders believes to be history from Jesus' infancy starts with his birth, chronologically near the death of Herod, in c. 4 BCE and would spend his childhood and early adulthood in Nazareth, even though we do not know for sure if he was born there.⁶⁵ Later, the Nazarene would be baptized by John, start his own ministry, and take several disciples under his wing.⁶⁶ He would promote his ministry, teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God around the countryside of Galilee, but probably not in big cities. In his final days, around the year 30 CE, Jesus went to spend the Passover in Jerusalem, where he caused some sort of disturbance in the Temple, shared a last meal with his disciples, was arrested and interrogated by the highest Jewish authorities, and was eventually sentenced to die by Pontius Pilate. After Jesus' death, his disciples fled. Later, after having a vision of their late teacher, they formed a community whose goal was to await the return of Jesus from the dead.⁶⁷

1.1.5 Bart D. Ehrman

In Bart D. Ehrman's work, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (2000), the author explains in detail in chapter 13 – “The historical Jesus: Sources, Problems, and Methods”⁶⁸ – the way a scholar should proceed when it comes to reconstructing the historical Jesus.

Ehrman argues that for reconstructing a past event – that deals with Jesus, or any other historical character – one should look for numerous sources, for comparison among each other that are ancient enough to be as chronologically close as possible to the event.⁶⁹ Those sources

⁶⁵ Ibid., 10-11.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 10-11.

⁶⁸ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 194-207.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 194-195.

should be as independent from each other as possible, not contradicting each other, internally consistent, and not biased.⁷⁰ With this base established, the sources used by the author in the pursuit of the historical Jesus should be, as a starting point, the earliest that mention Jesus himself – Pagan, Christian and Jewish.⁷¹

The methodology Ehrman argues that is required to reconstructing the historical Jesus should be based on certain criteria of authenticity, such as (1) independent attestation, (2) dissimilarity, and (3) contextual credibility.⁷²

Ehrman states clearly that he believes that Jesus existed even though the Galilean might not bear a great resemblance to the Jesus most people “know.”⁷³ According to Bart D. Ehrman, it is not known exactly when Jesus was born. He was very likely not born in Bethlehem,⁷⁴ nor was he born from a virgin mother.⁷⁵ Jesus did have a connection to Nazareth, where he likely spent his childhood and early adulthood.⁷⁶ The Nazarene was born into a Jewish working-class family and raised as a Jew, had brothers and sisters, and was likely a *tektōn*.⁷⁷ Jesus might have ended up being someone of relevance during his later years, even though he was very likely a normal child that developed into a normal adult during his early adulthood. It is even extremely unlikely that he was literate. Quoting Ehrman:

It seems more probable that he was not writing-literate, and in fact we have no early record of him writing anything or even knowing how to write. Whether or not he learned to read is an interesting and difficult question. The older view among scholars that Jewish boys were almost always taught how to read has been shown to be wrong.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Sources – Pagan: Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Tacitus; Jewish: the Mishnah, Josephus, Ananus; Christian: Thomas, Peter and the New Testament books. See Ibid., 195-201.

⁷² Ibid., 201-207.

⁷³ *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 143-144.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 294.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 295.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 269.

⁷⁷ According to Ehrman, *tektōn* is usually translated as “carpenter,” even though it can relate to anyone who works with his hands (like a stonemason or a blacksmith). See Ibid., 295.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 295-296.

At the very least Jesus might have been semiliterate, which apparently did not affect his singular abilities later in life.⁷⁹ Jesus of Nazareth would have become an adult during the decade of 20 of the Common Era, when he would become a follower of John the Baptist,⁸⁰ a teacher,⁸¹ and an apocalyptic prophet who proclaimed that the Kingdom of God would soon arrive,⁸² with a reputation of being an exorcist and a healer, i.e., a miracle worker.⁸³ During his ministry, Jesus got disciples, visited Jerusalem soon before dying, during Passover, and did something to provoke the local Jewish leaders during his stay in the Holy City.⁸⁴ For those actions, that happened around the year 30 CE, Jesus ended up being sentenced to death by crucifixion under the orders of Pilate.⁸⁵

1.1.6 Dale Allison Jr.

Allison's "approach" (the author prefers to use this term other than "method" or "methodology")⁸⁶ is built upon several steps. The first is to consider a series of fourteen passages from the Canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Thomas, and Q, as can be observed below.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 269.

⁸¹ Ibid., 268-269.

⁸² Ibid., 305.

⁸³ Ibid., 315-316.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 269.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 268-269.

⁸⁶ Allison Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*, 17.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

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1. *The temptation narrative, in which Jesus bests the devil (Matt 4:1-11 // Luke 4:1-13 [Q]; Mark 1:12-13)*
 2. *The exorcism of a mute demon (Matt 12:22-23 // Luke 11:14-15 [Q])*
 3. *The saying about Satan being divided (Matt 12:25-27 // Luke 11:17-19 [Q]; Mark 3:23-26)*
 4. *The declaration that Jesus casts out demons by the finger/Spirit of God (Matt 12:28 // Luke 11:20 [Q])*
 5. *The parable of binding the strong man (Matt 12:29 // Luke 11:21-22 [Q]; Mark 3:27; Gos. Thom. 35)*
 6. *The exorcism of an unclean spirit in a synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28)*
 7. *The passing editorial notices of successful exorcisms (Mark 1:32, 34, 39; 3:22; Matt 8:16)*
 8. *Jesus' authorization of disciples to cast out demons (Mark 3:15; 6:7 [cf. 6:13]; Matt 7:22; Luke 10:19-20)*
 9. *The healing of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20)*
 10. *The casting out of a demon from the daughter of a Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30)*
 11. *The healing of a boy who has a spirit that makes him unable to speak (Mark 9:14-29)*
 12. *The story of someone other than a disciple casting out demons in Jesus' name (Mark 9:38-41)*
 13. *The healing of a mute demoniac (Matt 9:32-34)*
 14. *The report of Jesus' vision of Satan falling like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18)*
 15. *The account of Jesus healing a woman "whom Satan bound for eighteen long years" (Luke 13:10-17)*
 16. *The autobiographical comment "I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow" (Luke 13:32)*
 17. *The announcement that the ruler of the world has been driven out (John 12:31; 16:11 [cf. 14:30])*
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Table 1 – Allison's seventeen traditions⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Dale Allison Jr. does not believe that the gospels were written by someone who was close to Jesus or even by people who dealt with those close to the Nazarene, adding, within the first words of his 2010 book, “Because human memory ‘leaks and dissociates,’ all of us are, to one degree or another, fabulists, even when we try not to be. As modern research abundantly documents, memory often leads us astray.”⁸⁹

Even taking into consideration the seventeen traditions from the previous page, the author doubts that we can find the origin of most of these biblical quotes. Some traditions are more likely to have been historically accurate than others, who seem to belong to a more legendary realm, according to Allison. What matters most is the bigger picture that those traditions show: “Jesus was an exorcist who thought of himself as successfully combating the Devil,”⁹⁰ according to the author’s interpretation of the sources. As we look at the bigger picture, we might not be reasonably sure that Jesus expelled demons, but we can be reasonably sure that he was some sort of healer.⁹¹

In the last chapter – “Memory and Invention: How Much History?” – of Allison’s 2010 book, the author questions whether the Evangelists believed in what they were writing. As seen before, he agrees with the lack of a great deal of historicity within the gospels.⁹² Nevertheless, even though one cannot reply with absolute certainty to the question, it is very likely that the people who wrote the gospels tried to write the truth based on the sources they had available at the time and filled the gaps with the essence of what they thought had occurred. Allison defends that even though the Evangelists knew well the difference between a truth and a lie, they probably had a less developed sense of the distinction between history and myth.⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁹¹ Ibid., 18-19.

⁹² Ibid., 435-441.

⁹³ Ibid., 456.

We also need to consider that the gospels were meant to be read aloud, not to be studied in silence. The effect of reciting the scriptures to a crowd, possibly in a similar way to Jesus' speeches, elevates the experience from a simple storytelling to an almost ecclesiastic scenario. As such, there might have been some cues that were meant to indicate that some passages were intended to be read in a way that portrayed a fable, instead of a historical recreation.⁹⁴

As the author writes, "Early Christians took for granted that miracles enveloped the life of their Savior" and "They believed that 'with God all things are possible' (Mark 10:27)." As such, the Evangelists likely thought they were telling a true story.⁹⁵

What, then, are the traditions that Dale Allison Jr. believes to have come from the historical Jesus? First of all, Jesus came from Galilee, as did most or all of his followers that composed his ministry, and ended his days in Jerusalem, crucified as the "King of the Jews."⁹⁶

Allison does believe that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet, in the sense that the Nazarene believed that God would one day get rid of the evils that affect humankind and, after a period of great tribulation, restore Israel to its former glory and bring peace upon earth.⁹⁷ He was baptized by John the Baptist⁹⁸ and became a teacher with the gift of being a great orator.⁹⁹ According to the seventeen traditions Allison uses on his approach, one can determine that Jesus was an exorcist and a healer that lead a ministry that, as attested by others, fought the "forces of Satan."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Ibid., 458-459.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 457-458.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 50; 233-234.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 31-32.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 305.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 18; 22.

1.1.7 Burton L. Mack

In Burton L. Mack's 2003 work, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy*, the author takes a different approach to the study of the historical Jesus than most scholars. He raises several points where he criticizes several aspects of the Jesus Quest. Mack believes that (1) results and criteria of authenticity are far from being consensual; (2) different sources account for different profiles of Jesus since the author claims the quest has failed for its goal became to simply remove the "fantastic and miraculous features of the Christ myth and gospels from the 'real Jesus of History'";¹⁰¹ (3) the lack of logical connection between the teachings of Jesus and his crucifixion, concluding that the data that we have about Jesus is, at best, inadequate for a reconstruction of the historical crucifixion; and finally, (4) the author criticizes the purposes of the Quest for the historical Jesus itself that seem to serve as a path to rejuvenate the Christian faith.¹⁰²

The author believes that scholars who focus on the historicity of Jesus should not use the New Testament in their research, for that source only provides data for the Christian mythmaking and not for analyzing the life of the Nazarene. Mack states:

"The questions appropriate to these texts should be about the many Christian groups and movements in evidence, their particular social circumstances and histories, and the various social reasons they had for imagining a teacher in so many different ways. To read these texts only in the interest of the quest to know the historical Jesus has been to misread them, to misuse them. They simply do not contain the secrets of the historical Jesus for which scholars have been searching. Early Christians were not interested in the historical Jesus. They were interested in something else. So the question is whether that something else can be identified."¹⁰³

(...)

¹⁰¹ Mack, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy*, 37.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 34-38.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 40.

Given that Mack considers the Synoptic Gospels as a merger of the Jesus and *Christos* traditions,¹⁰⁴ the sources that should be used to study the Jesus of History should be unmerged from the earliest three books of the Canonical Gospels. Therefore, one should focus on the *pregospel* traditions of Jesus,¹⁰⁵ on Q,¹⁰⁶ and the Gospel of Thomas.¹⁰⁷ And why would one need to focus necessarily on these sources? According to the author, Mark pictured Jesus as a charismatic and prophetic proclaimer of an apocalyptic message that included the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem and the imminent appearance of a new social order called ‘the kingdom of God.’ Mark’s picture has been accepted by everyone, whether Christian by confession or not, mainly because there has been no other story or portrayal of the ‘historical Jesus’ with which to compare it, and it does agree with the traditional Christian imagination.”¹⁰⁸

Such traditions would be free from Mark’s influence and, as recent research suggests, there has been some scholarly challenge of the Markan image of Jesus as his true historical form.¹⁰⁹

The recreation of the Jesus of Nazareth that the author finds in his sources is someone who seems to follow the philosophy of Cynicism. Traits such as “critique of riches; critique of hypocrisy; voluntary poverty; renunciation of needs; fearless and carefree attitude; etiquette for

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁶ “Q” is the name of a hypothetical Gospel that, according to the Four Source Hypothesis (explained in the same pages of this citation) or the “Two-Document Hypothesis” (with the same definition, but under a different name, explained on pages 42 and 43 of Mack 2003) was the source of stories of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that are not featured in the Gospel of Mark. See Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 76-77.

¹⁰⁷ Collection of Jesus’ sayings from the 4th century translated to Coptic from an earlier Greek version, found in Egypt, in 1945. See Ron Cameron, “Thomas, Gospel Of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Vol 6. 535.

¹⁰⁸ Mack, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy*, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 42-43.

begging; etiquette for responding to reproach; severance of family ties; sense of vocation; authentic discipleship”¹¹⁰ are all traits of a Cynic who lived during this period of history in Galilee.

1.1.8 Adela Yarbro Collins

Adela Yarbro Collins does not expand on her methodology for recreating the historical Jesus in her work of 2008, “The historical Jesus, Then and Now,”¹¹¹ chosen for this thesis. Nevertheless, she presents a plain picture of what she believes to have been the Jesus of history. In the section “Teacher, Prophet, Exorcist, Risen Lord” from her article, the author describes the Nazarene as having been a teacher, and an interpreter of Jewish Scripture and law. He ought to have been such an authoritative master - so much that may be linked to the fact that he was seen as a prophet – that he attracted a significant number of followers (Mark 3:7-8; Matthew 4:25). Yarbro Collins writes:

“During his lifetime, then, Jesus attracted some followers as an authoritative teacher, others as a prophet proclaiming the kingdom of God, and others as an exorcist who had the power to overcome evil spirits. It is likely that some drew the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah during his lifetime.”¹¹²

Before his ministry, Jesus would have been baptized by John the Baptist, however, the Galilean chose a different path, stepping away from the Baptist’s ascetic ways, by not dressing as frugally as John the Baptist, and not teaching his followers to fast, to the point of being accused of gluttony and being a drunkard:

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 45.

¹¹¹ Yarbro Collins, "The Historical Jesus: Then and Now."

¹¹² Ibid.

“John was ascetic in other ways too. He ate locusts and wild honey and was famous for fasting. In contrast, it was known that Jesus did not teach his disciples to fast. In fact, he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. This contrast suggests that Jesus’ self-understanding and message were different from John’s in important ways. Rather than emphasizing sin, punishment, and moral renewal, like John did, Jesus portrayed God as reaching out to those who had turned aside. His was a message of love and joy, and he embodied it in table fellowship, sometimes even feasting, that prefigured and symbolized the rule of God.”¹¹³

Also, in collision with John’s teachings, according to Yarbrow Collins, Jesus did not give too much emphasis to punishment to those who did not follow him, delivering instead a message of godly love (Matthew 5:43-44). Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and performed actions that could be considered exorcisms and other miracles. It is far from being a certainty that Jesus saw himself as the Messiah of Israel and it is also unknown if he was seen as such during his lifetime, although possible. His actions and the effect of the crowds that he usually gathered eventually led to him being known by the authorities, which, later, led to his execution. Yarbrow Collins affirms that the idea that Jesus’ death was the preordained death of the Messiah of his people is surprising, even though it was generalized between Jesus’ followers following the crucifixion. It is seen as surprising due to it not being common the idea of a defeated Messiah to rise to greatness following his death. Guided by Psalm 22, Psalm 69, and Isaiah 53 (particularly, the passage about the suffering servant WHICH IS?), the followers of Jesus believed these passages to be a prophecy of the exaltation of their leader. Adela Yarbrow Collins adds:

“It is much more surprising, from a historical point of view, that other followers of Jesus interpreted his death as the preordained death of the Messiah, since this idea was not only new but against the grain of contemporary expectations about the Messiah of Israel. Instead of giving up the idea that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel because he suffered and died (rather than a Messiah who led the people to victory over the Romans), this group of followers reinterpreted the concept of the Messiah after some of their number had experienced Jesus as risen from the dead. They looked to Scripture for guidance and became convinced that the psalms of individual lament, such as Psalm 22 and 69, and the passage about the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 showed that the suffering and death of the Messiah was part of the divine plan. They concluded that it

¹¹³ Ibid.

was the risen Jesus, not the earthly one, who would rule over all creation as God's agent. Jesus, they believed, had already been exalted to heaven and had begun to rule. His reign would be fully manifest in the future when he would be revealed as the Son of Man, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14."¹¹⁴

1.1.9 Robert M. Price

Robert McNair Price is, like Dorothy Milne Murdock, a manifest Mythicist. His work, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth* (2007) is a work that argues that Jesus was very likely not a real person. He concludes:

The proposition that 'Jesus Christ' never existed relies on much more than simply stating that we don't have evidence for his existence or that the Gospels are unbelievable. Showing that the story of Jesus Christ is not based on a person in any meaningful way requires showing that the story of Jesus Christ is better explained as having developed through non-historical methods than it is through historical methods. We can identify literary sources and traditions that are not only capable of providing all of the material for the Jesus story, but indeed it is clear that the Jesus story is developed from these source materials, and this fact undermines the possibility that the stories are based on observed historical events. If the crucifixion of Jesus were based on an observed historical event then we should not expect virtually every line of the crucifixion narrative to come from existing Hebrew scriptures. Not only does the scriptural basis of the Jesus stories undermine their historical credibility, but we also have historical facts, or lack thereof, which corroborate his absence of existence.¹¹⁵

Price adds that Christianity can – and even would – be better explained without the existence of the historical Jesus.¹¹⁶ The methodology that led Price to arrive to said conclusion relies on the author's analysis, first, of the mainstream scholarship on the historical Jesus, and further on, the analysis of the gospels,¹¹⁷ other sources, especially from a Jewish background,¹¹⁸ and other New Testament and Christian sources.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Price, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*, 283.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 284.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 51-53.

Richard Price has defined a spectrum where Jesus of Nazareth would be located that ranges from the most favorable position for the Christian side up to the most favorable position for the Mythicist side. Within this spectrum, the extremes are labeled as “Jesus was the Son of God” – and “Jesus was a pious fraud” – The positions in between the extremes of the spectrum are labeled, from the Christian position to the Mythicist as, “Jesus was: an influential person; a minor figure; a collection of anecdotes; a mythical Jewish cult figure; and based on pagan myths.”¹²⁰

The author argues that the correct position for the Jesus of history is the sixth (“Jesus was based on Pagan myths,”) with possible influences from the fifth (“Jesus was a mythical Jewish cult figure”) and seventh (“Jesus was a pious fraud”). The sixth position is described as:

“The gospels are completely fabricated stories based on scripture, legends, and the mystical beliefs of existing Jewish cults. There is no human figure at the center of the gospel stories at all. The gospels were generally written in the same manner that most scholars claim, during the late 1st century to early 2nd century, but there is no person at the core of them, whether all of the writers themselves knew it or not.”¹²¹

Price’s Mythicist position relies heavily on the fact that many of Jesus’ stories borrow elements from other stories from other cultures and beliefs and the central position that many of those elements take when it comes to Jesus’ story.¹²² For the author, the core problem for Jesus’ story is the following:

1. If Jesus was the Son of God and the Biblical accounts are accurate, then why is Jesus so glaringly absent from the other historical accounts of the time? 2. If Jesus wasn't the Son of God, but rather just a person, then how did nothing more than a ‘marginal Jew’ become elevated to the status of God so shortly after his death and earthly burial?¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹²¹ Ibid., 15.

¹²² Ibid., 279-280.

¹²³ Ibid., 282.

Price argues that the story of Jesus Christ is a part of the Jewish literary tradition that crossed over from Jewish to non-Jewish communities that were not aware, or at least, not as aware, of the Jewish traditions and were largely misunderstood and mixed with other local elements. There is a reason, according to the author, that many prophecies from the Old Testament were fulfilled with the gospels – because the gospels were literary works of fiction that fulfilled those prophecies¹²⁴

1.1.10 Maurice Casey

Maurice Casey's methodology for unraveling the historical Jesus in his work *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching* (2010) is based on several criteria, namely, multiple attestation,¹²⁵ dissimilarity,¹²⁶ coherence,¹²⁷ embarrassment (actions or sayings of Jesus that would have been cause for embarrassment and worked against the will of Jesus and/or the Church),¹²⁸ and historical plausibility¹²⁹ – this last one being the most important criterion.¹³⁰ The criterion of historical authenticity has two sub-criteria: 1. (Jewish) contextual plausibility requires that – quoting Theissen and Winter – “What Jesus intended and said must be compatible with the Judaism of the first half of the first century in Galilee” and that “What Jesus intended and did must be recognizable as that of an individual

¹²⁴ Ibid., 283-284.

¹²⁵ Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*, 101-102.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 104-105.

¹²⁷ Ibid.,

¹²⁸ Ibid., 104.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 106-108; Theissen and Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*; 211.

¹³⁰ Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*, 141.

figure within the framework of Judaism of that time.”; 2. Plausibility of effects requires that “those elements within the Jesus tradition that contrast with the interests of the early Christian sources, but are banded on in their tradition, can claim varying degrees of historical plausibility.”¹³¹

The author also makes the use of the Aramaic language as a focal point in his methodology.¹³² The use of this methodology is applied by Casey in an attempt to understand which elements of the Jesus tradition are more likely to be based on true stories and which are no more than fictional tales that serve an ethical purpose or were rewritten to serve some sort of purpose in the community it was shared with.¹³³

The historical Jesus, as far as Casey understands, is certain – or almost – to have been born in Israel and was brought up and lived a great part of his life in Nazareth. He was from a traditional Jewish family who was expecting the salvation of Israel (Luke 2:22-32).¹³⁴ Casey writes:

“Jesus was born in Israel, into an observant Jewish family. He was always said to have come from Nazareth, in Galilee, so there is no doubt that this is where he was brought up.”¹³⁵

The mother was named Mary and the father, Joseph. Yēshua‘(Casey’s transliteration) was Jesus’ birth name, meaning loosely “YHWH saves.” “‘Jesus Christ’ is a composite name made up of the personal name ‘Jesus’ (from Gk *Iēsous*, which transliterates Heb/Aram *yēšû*, a late

¹³¹ Ibid., 106-108; Theissen and Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, 211.

¹³² Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching*, 101.

¹³³ Ibid., 102.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 143.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

form of Hebrew Yĕhōšūa, the meaning of which is ‘YHWH is salvation’ or ‘YHWH saves/has saved’).”¹³⁶

Besides his four brothers, Jesus had three sisters whose names we do not know.¹³⁷ Casey argues that none of the birth stories are true.¹³⁸

During Jesus’ ministry, his mother was still, at least in some form, in his life. His father was not. The family and the people in Jesus’ society spoke Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of Galilee at the time. He taught in Aramaic and kept his ministry away from cities with a more Hellenic influence.¹³⁹ Besides having his ministry, Jesus was working as a *tektōn*, meaning that he worked with stone or wood.¹⁴⁰

Jesus was familiarized with the works of the Jewish prophets¹⁴¹ and was baptized by the one that was considered the most important at the time, John, who baptized him.¹⁴² When teaching during his ministry, the only major city that Jesus is known to have visited is Jerusalem.¹⁴³

After his baptism, Jesus spent some time in the wilderness, and even taught there. After the death of John the Baptist, Casey states that Jesus was certain that John was the incarnation of the prophet Elijah:

“After John’s death, Jesus had no doubt that John was Elijah. During his Galilean ministry, Jesus’ disciples asked him why the scribes said that Elijah must come ‘first’, so making another reference to Mal. 4.5. Jesus responded by saying that ‘Elijah has

¹³⁶ Meyer, "Jesus (Person)." Vol 3, 773.

¹³⁷ Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching*, 163.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 163.

come', referring to John's death and his own as well (Mk 9.11-13). This can only be a reference to John as Elijah."¹⁴⁴

Even though it is not known exactly the length of Jesus' ministry, we do know that it overlapped with John's ministry, that lasted until the Baptist died.¹⁴⁵ Jesus' ministry had an inner circle of twelve of his closer followers, of which the author affirms to only know with certainty that Simon, Jacob, John, and Judas were part of it.¹⁴⁶ Some women also had a great deal of importance within the ministry of Jesus,¹⁴⁷ such as "Joanna, wife of Herod's steward Chouza, Mary the wife of Jacob the little and mother of Joses, Salome and Susanna."¹⁴⁸

Jesus taught about the coming of the Kingdom of God and the idea of God was central to his ministry.¹⁴⁹ He also practiced exorcism and healing in some form.¹⁵⁰ During his ministry, Jesus held disputes with Pharisees and other groups.¹⁵¹

According to Casey, Jesus of Nazareth expected to die in Jerusalem and that his death would be an atoning sacrifice for the sins of Israel.¹⁵² He went to Jerusalem for Passover,¹⁵³ when he "cleansed the temple," which eventually led to his death. What was also historically accurate, according to the author is the treachery of Judas.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 178-180.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 180-181.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 186-192.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 192-193.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 198.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 234-235.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 278.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 161.

¹⁵² Ibid., 407-408.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 425.

Eventually, the Nazarene was arrested, faced trial, and was sentenced to death by crucifixion.¹⁵⁵ Later episodes that appear in the gospels such as the empty tomb and the resurrection are fictional, according to Maurice Casey.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 438-445.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 102.

1.2. Who Was Then Jesus of Nazareth According to the Ten Authors?

Jesus of Nazareth, as described by the ten authors mentioned in the last chapter was many things and nothing at all at the same time. He was a cynic, a prophet, a magician, and a wise man. He was born in Nazareth or somewhere else in Israel. However, most authors that believe in the historicity of Jesus agree on some issues. He was born, he had followers, he was sentenced to die.

1.2.1 Childhood

Only Robert M. Price has reached the conclusion that Jesus was not born. Price affirms:

“The proposition that ‘Jesus Christ’ never existed relies on much more than simply stating that we don't have evidence for his existence or that the Gospels are unbelievable.”¹⁵⁷

For Price, the Nazarene came to be as a figure of Jewish traditions based on myth. The other nine authors agree that Jesus was born in real life in Ancient Israel, a little over two thousand years ago. Bart D. Ehrman states that Jesus was very likely born into a Jewish working-class family and raised within the faith and was probably a normal child with no extra ordinary traits. Maurice Casey argues that we cannot know almost anything about Jesus’ childhood, since none of what is written in the gospels about his early life is true. What most authors agree on is that he grew up speaking Aramaic, the lingua franca of the region he lived on before he began his ministry.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Price, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*, 283.

¹⁵⁸ Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 144; and Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 46.

1.2.2 Family

Maurice Casey states that Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph, had four brothers – James, Judah, Joseph, and Simeon – and three sisters. Most authors agree with this assertion to some extent. Morton Smith argues that people in Jesus' life could have thought that he was the son of a Roman soldier and the wife of a carpenter, creating some stigma during his childhood.

1.2.3 Life Before John the Baptist

Both Maurice Casey and Bart D. Ehrman argue that Jesus very likely was a *tektōn*. Morton Smith argues he was a carpenter. As for his literacy, John Dominic Crossan and Bart D. Ehrman argue that Jesus very likely did not know how to read, even though he did know well the Jewish traditions. According to Ehrman, Jesus would have become an adult during the decade of 20 CE.

1.2.4 John the Baptist and Jesus' ministry

That Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist it is universally acknowledged by all non-mythicist authors. Most scholars also agree he was a mentor to Jesus and had a great influence on his later ministry. Nonetheless, according to Ben Witherington III, Adela Yarbro Collins, and John Dominic Crossan, Jesus eventually chose a different, non-ascetic, path to help him spread the message of the coming of the kingdom of God.

It is not disputed that Jesus had twelve followers. Maurice Casey postulates that within this closed inner circle some of his followers were Simon, Jacob, John, and Judas. Casey also

agrees that some women helped to sustain Jesus' ministry. Their names, according to Casey are Joanna, Mary the wife of Jacob, Salome, and Susannah.

Jesus' ministry promoted the coming of the Kingdom of God. That is also not in dispute among the selected non-mythicist scholars. Most authors agree as well that Jesus was, in some way, a miracle-worker, that healed people and performed exorcisms.

According to Yarbro Collins, Casey, Allison Jr., and Sanders, Jesus was a teacher and a great orator, and it is not controversial that he spread his message throughout the rural areas of Galilee, always keeping some distance from the larger cities.

1.2.5 Last Days

Not all authors agree on how Jesus came to the end of his journey, however, all but Price agree on his final destiny: he caused a commotion at the Temple – in Jerusalem – he was judged, and crucified, in a time when Pilate was the Governor of the Roman province of Judaea, between 26 and 36 CE.

1.2.6 Prophet, Cynic, Embodiment of Wisdom, or Magician?

Adela Yarbro Collins, James Allison Jr., Maurice Casey, E.P. Sanders, and Bart D. Ehrman all believe that Jesus was an Apocalyptic Prophet who shared his eschatological message that the end times is coming, and God would save his chosen people and restore peace upon earth. There is a distinction between the notion of a prophet and an apocalyptic prophet. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of a deity or a divine message to convey important truths or warnings to people. In the Bible, prophets were chosen by God to deliver messages of

judgment or hope to the Israelites, and they often called on people to repent and turn back to God. An apocalyptic prophet, on the other hand, is a prophet who foretells the end of the world and the coming of a new age. The term *apocalypse* comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means *unveiling* or *revealing*. Apocalyptic prophets typically describe a future cataclysmic event, such as a war or natural disaster, that will usher in a new age of peace and righteousness. They often use vivid and symbolic language to describe these events, which can be interpreted in different ways. While both prophets and apocalyptic prophets share a focus on communicating divine messages and warning people of impending judgment, apocalyptic prophets tend to emphasize the eschatological or end-times aspects of their message more strongly. They often use dramatic and symbolic imagery to convey their message, and their messages are often characterized by a sense of urgency and an emphasis on the imminent arrival of the end of the world.

John Dominic Crossan and Burton L. Mack argue that Jesus would have been either a Cynic, or at least a philosopher with both Cynic and Jewish influences, since he did infer in some non-Cynic-like activities, such as not practicing an ascetic lifestyle. Nevertheless, Jesus did criticize the rich, was voluntarily poor, and severed ties to his family. To Crossan, Jesus was very likely influenced by the Hellenic culture of the near-by city of Sepphoris.

Ben Witherington III presents us with a different point of view; the idea that Jesus was the embodiment of wisdom. The author argues that the Nazarene must have thought of himself as both a sage and the incarnation of God's wisdom.

Morton Smith's picture of what the people in Jesus' life must have thought of him is the most distinct of this group. According to this author, Jesus was seen as someone who, before starting his ministry went to Egypt to learn magic and performed rituals throughout Galilee that

eventually caused several issues with his family, his townspeople, and several groups, such as the scribes.

PART TWO

OPEN ISSUES

Thus far, I have taken into consideration every author's point of view on the historical Jesus. In the second part of this work, I explored three issues that I find very important when I try to understand in which category – historical, legendary, or mythologoumenon – the story of Jesus fits best. In the first place, calculating the date of Jesus' death, based upon real life events. If one can specifically match the dates of said events with the evidence from the gospels, the likeliness of Jesus being a historical character is much bigger than otherwise. Secondly, I introduced a subject that, as far as I know, has not been studied: the possibility of the Hebrew name of Jesus not having been given by his birth parents, but being given by himself or his peers, later in life. If the latter conclusion is reached, then I have found yet another inaccuracy within the gospels. Finally, I explore the concept of Jesus' miracles and how likely they are to have occurred in real life.

There is a very large number of topics that could be discussed as open issues relating to Jesus of Nazareth. Issues relating, for example, to the cleansing of the Temple, where in the Synoptics describe the event as preceding Jesus' arrest, while John uses describes it during the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Or the role of the women in Jesus' ministry. While the gospels describe several women who were followers of Jesus, their roles and contributions to his ministry are not always clear. However, I have decided to study the three open issues mentioned above for several reasons. One of the aspects of the story of Jesus that I have always considered interesting, long before I decided to study religions at an academic level was the sudden darkness, the apparent eclipse, that occurred during the crucifixion of the Nazarene as shared by the Synoptic Gospels. The following subchapter – “Calculating the Date of the Crucifixion” – is my attempt to analyze the state of the art concerning this issue. The following subchapter – “The Issue with the Name Yĕhōšûa” – provides a question that I would like to see asked within by New Testament scholars: is “Yĕhōšûa” Jesus' birth name or a title that was given to him later in life? During my time writing this thesis I have considered the possibility that

“Yĕhōšûa” could have been a name given to Jesus later in life, during his ministry. As far as I am aware, no serious scholar has asked this question so far and, therefore, no work has been done in that direction. The third, and more generalized open issue, concerns the likelihood that Jesus’ miracles are to have happened in real life and which ones is a topic that I think should be referred to in a work about the historical Jesus.

2.1 Calculating the date of the Crucifixion

To try to understand if it is possible to determine the day, month, and year that Jesus died on the cross, I shall proceed to present the most relevant parts of the last day of Jesus as described in the four Canonical Gospels. Then, I will relate the gospel information to both the events used in this subchapter to calculate the date Jesus died.

The Synoptic Gospels place the crucifixion on the day after the Last Supper, the first day of the Jewish festival of Passover (Mark 14:12-16; Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22:7-13). According to this chronology, Jesus was arrested on the evening of the Last Supper (14th of Nisan) and crucified the following day (15th of Nisan). In contrast, the Gospel of John places the crucifixion on 14th of Nisan, the day before the Last Supper (John 13:1-2). According to John's chronology, Jesus was crucified while the Passover lambs were being slaughtered (John 19:14-16), which would have been in preparation for the Passover meal that evening. Earlier within the Gospel of John, Jesus is depicted as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) who is sacrificed for the sins of humanity. I believe the timing of his crucifixion is significant in this regard.

2.1.1 The Last Day of Jesus: Gospel of Mark

According to Mark 15:1-15, the morning begins with Jesus being taken to Pilate by the High Priests. Jesus is judged and sentenced to death (Mark 15:1-15). He then is taken to the Golgotha and crucified (Mark 15:16-20), at nine in the morning (Mark 15:25). At noon the sky went dark for three hours (Mark 15:33-34). At three in the afternoon, Jesus dies, and the curtain of the temple is ripped in two, from top to bottom (Mark 15:34-38).

2.1.2 The Last Day of Jesus: Gospel of Matthew

Jesus is taken to Pilate in the morning (Matthew 27:1-2). Jesus faces trial and sentenced to death (Matthew 27:11-26). The Nazarene is taken to the Golgotha and crucified (Matthew 27:33-35). At noon, darkness engulfs the “whole land” (or “whole earth,” depending on the reading) (Matthew 27:45). Jesus dies three hours later, and, at that moment, the curtain of the Temple is torn into two pieces, top to bottom, the earth shook, and the stones fractured. During that time, the tombs were open and bodies of saints that had fallen were raised (Matthew 27:50-53).

2.1.3 The Last Day of Jesus: Gospel of Luke

The day starts (during the morning, even though it is not mentioned) with the gathering of the elders, the High Priests, and the scribes, bringing Jesus to their council (Luke 22:66). Jesus is sent to be trialed by Pilate, who sends him to Herod (who was in Jerusalem at the time) (Luke 23:1-7). Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate, who eventually sentences him to death (Luke 23:8-25). Jesus is sent to “The Skull”¹ to be crucified (Luke 23:33). At noon, darkness came over all the land (or “earth,” depending on the reading) and, as the sun faded, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two. As these events occurred, Jesus died (Luke 23:44-46).

¹ According to V. Corbo, “The Skull” or “The Place of the Skull” is the English name of Golgotha. See Virgilio C. Corbo, “Golgotha,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Vol 2, 1071.

2.1.4 The Last Day of Jesus: Gospel of John

It is unclear when the day starts, however, Jesus is taken during the night by soldiers and sent, presumably, during the late evening, to Annas – father-in-law of the High Priest – who questioned him (John 18:13-19), and later to the high priest himself (John 18:24). When it was already the morning of the day of preparation of Passover (John 19:14), Jesus was taken to Pilate, who also interrogated him (John 18:33-38). Pilate finds him innocent, but Jesus' opponents demanded that he dies (John 18:38-19:12). Jesus is taken to the Golgotha and crucified (John 19:18-23). Then, he said he was thirsty, was given sour wine to drink, and passed away (John 19:28-30).

2.1.5 Date of the Crucifixion

It is relevant to note that, during the period of darkness, when the Temple's curtains are ripping apart, or the earth is shaking, stones splitting, and bodies of saints are rising, the Canonical Gospels show almost no reaction to these events from the people present at the execution. Jesus is mocked, possibly grieved, but only the Centurion shows any kind of behavior that might be a reaction to those events – even though is probably a reaction to Jesus' last words – when he says in: Mark 15:39 and Matthew 27:54, “Truly this man was God's son”;² or in Luke 23:47, “Certainly this man was innocent.” Matthew includes a unique detail about the earthquake and the resurrection of some of the dead saints after Jesus' death. In Matthew 27:51-53, it is written:

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies

² Or, according to a different reading in Matthew 27:54, “Truly he was a son of God.”

of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.”

From the information that one can gather from the Synoptic Gospels, we are given two possible scenarios that could help us determine the day Jesus died: one from an astronomical event, and one from a geological event.

The first scenario, the possible astronomical event that took place the same day and time as the crucifixion, is an eclipse. According to Mark, Matthew, and Luke,³ the sky turned black around noon and the effect lasted for three hours. According to Luke 23:45 it is even stated that the “the sun’s light failed,” which can be comparable to the events of a solar or lunar eclipse. The duration also seems to be accurate. Even though the duration of a total eclipse is, at most, around seven and a half minutes, the darkness of the sky can last for much more time, making therefore possible the claim that an eclipse occurred during Jesus’ crucifixion.⁴ According to Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington, the day Jesus died, based on their Biblical and astronomical evidence was very likely Friday, 3rd of April of 33 CE. The authors write:

“The date of the Crucifixion has been debated for many years, but there has been no agreement on the year nor the day. Astronomical calculations have now been used to reconstruct the Jewish calendar in the first century AD and to date a lunar eclipse that biblical and other references suggest followed the Crucifixion. The evidence points to Friday 3 April AD 33 as the date when Jesus Christ died.”⁵

The day of the crucifixion had to be located inside the following parameters: the 10 years of the ruling of Pontius Pilate (c. 26-36 CE), after John the Baptist’s ministry started (c. 28-30 CE), and before Paul of Tarsus started following Jesus (c. 34 CE). Crossing these restrictions with the possible dates for the crucifixion from the Canonical Gospels (14th Nisan – Friday 11th April

³ Mark 15:33; Matthew 27:45; Luke 23:44-45.

⁴ Hocken and Kher, "What Are Total Solar Eclipses?," Accessed 25 August 2022, <https://www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/total-solar-eclipse.html>.

⁵ Humphreys and Waddington, "Dating the Crucifixion," 743.

27 CE, 7th April 30, or 3rd April 33, or 15th Nisan – Friday 11th April 27, or 23rd April 34 CE) and the dates of the twelve lunar eclipses visible from Jerusalem between 26 and 36 CE, we are left with one single date that obeys all parameters: 3rd of April of 33 CE.⁶ This conclusion makes perfect sense, assuming we are dealing with historical evidence. Nevertheless, one must keep in mind, as we have seen throughout this study, that neither New Testament scholars, nor historians universally agree on the historicity of the events of the last day of Jesus excluding the crucifixion itself.

The second, the geological scenario, is the possibility of an earthquake having happened around the time Jesus passed away, or about to. Like the eclipse, it is possible that the events of Matthew 27:51-52 signify the occurrence of an earthquake. The tearing of the curtain in Luke and Mark might also indicate the presence of a geological disturbance, but it is unlikely in my opinion.⁷ This event caused the curtain of the Temple of Jerusalem⁸ to be torn in two, according to all Synoptics, and to have caused the ground to shake, the rocks to split, and the tombs to break open (and, supposedly, the bodies of many holy people to be brought back to life), according to the account of Matthew (Matthew 27:51-66). This scenario is more unlikely to have occurred than the eclipse since Mark, the earliest Gospel, seems to not indicate the presence of an earthquake.⁹ However, according to the geologists Jefferson Williams, Markus Schwab, and Achim Brauer, there was a seismic event in the Dead Sea between 26 and 36 CE.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., 743-746.

⁷ Mark 15:38; Matthew 27:51-52; and Luke 23:45.

⁸ The curtain of the Temple was used to block the view and access to the Holy of Holies (sacred room where sacrifices were performed by the High Priest during the *Yom Kippur* – Day of Atonement – once a year, to atone for the sins of the people. See Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 72.

⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰ The earthquake event is described to have taken place approximately around the year 31 CE, with an accuracy of ± 5 years, meaning that it very likely occurred between the years 26 and 36 CE, coincidentally matching the reign of Pontius Pilate, who is believed to have been the Governor of Judaea during that exact period of time. See Williams, Schwab, and Brauer, "An Early First-Century Earthquake in the Dead Sea," 7.

The ten authors claim that the date of Jesus' death is well known (either 14th or 15th Nisan)¹¹ and we only need to agree on the year. Yet, they are assuming, like Humphreys and Waddington in the eclipse scenario, that the Biblical evidence is accurate and not tampered with. Nevertheless, the geologists reach three possible conclusions: 1) the earthquake as described in Matthew 27:51-52 was somewhat accurately reported; 2) the earthquake as described in Matthew 27:51-52 did occur around that period of time, but was introduced in the story of Jesus by the Evangelist; and 3) the earthquake as reported on Matthew 27:51-52 is fiction, and the earthquake that occurred in the period of 26 to 36 CE was not reported and would have been lost to history and it was not studied geologically.¹²

These two scenarios give us four possible conclusions to the initial question about the date of the death of Jesus: 1) if we admit that the event narrated in the Synoptics that took place from noon to around three in the afternoon was, in fact, the eclipse, and the subsequent destruction as depicted in Matthew 27:51-53 was meant to describe the earthquake, then Jesus died on the 3rd of April of the year 33 CE; 2) if we admit that the earthquake was accurately reported in Matthew 27:51-53, but the period of three hours of darkness was either an invention (or it did occur, but in another time, being "borrowed" by the Evangelist for the sake of the narrative), then we can only ascertain that Jesus died during Pilate's reign (once again, the same time frame of the earthquake, i.e., between 26 and 36 CE; 3) if we admit that the period of darkness during Jesus' crucifixion in the Synoptic Gospels was accurately reported and was the eclipse, but the events that can relate to the earthquake were either fictional or happened on a day different than the crucifixion of Jesus, then the Nazarene died on the 3rd of April of 33 CE; and 4) If both the events that are reported to have occurred during Jesus' last moments were

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 8.

mere literary constructions made by the Evangelists, assuming that that Jesus was judged by Pilate, then Jesus should have died between 26 and 36 CE.

Given that there were, in fact, an eclipse and an earthquake around the time of the last years of Jesus' life, I believe there is a relevant possibility of both events having been reported within the gospels. However, they still can both be nothing more than literary motifs. There are no assurances on whether the three events (eclipse, earthquake, and crucifixion) all occurred in very different periods of time and the Evangelists fit them all in the same narrative for purposes other than recording historical events accurately. Neither that they occurred at the same time.

2.2 The Issue with the Name Yěhōšûa

Jesus of Nazareth is the widely recognized name of the biblical character of Yěhōšûa translated to the English language. On the other hand, titles like “Christ,” “Messiah,” or the “Son of Man” are titles that represent his status within the given context. There is room, however, to pose the following question: - if Jesus/Yěhōšûa was a historical character, was he born with a different name and only later did he adopt the moniker that we know of today?

I consider this a valid question since Yěhōšûa is a verbal derivative from “YHWH¹³ saves/has saved” or “YHWH is salvation.” Even though I do not know Hebrew, the author’s reasoning appears valid. Since Jesus’ mission on earth, according to the New Testament, was to be the savior of humanity¹⁴ maybe the Nazarene’s parents naming him Yěhōšûa was not a coincidence.

Using the Synoptic Gospels (in this case Mark and Matthew) as the most relevant sources, Jesus had four brothers. According to Mark 6:3¹⁵ and Matthew 13:55,¹⁶ they are called James, Joseph (or Joses), Simon, and Judas. According to the same sources, in Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:56¹⁷ they also have sisters, however, their names, and how many they are, is never

¹³ YHWH (Hebrew: יהוה), also called the Tetragrammaton, is the four-letter sequence that names God in the Old Testament. In English it can also be written as Yahweh. *See* Henry O. Thompson, “Yahweh (Deity),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Vol 6, 1011.

¹⁴ “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.” Mark 16:16; “She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21; and “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:17.

¹⁵ “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary (1) and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense (2) at him.” (1) Other relevant texts read “Is not this the son of the carpenter and of Mary”; (2) Other relevant texts read “stumbled” instead of “took offense.”

¹⁶ “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?”

¹⁷ “And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?”

mentioned. The names of the brothers in Hebrew are: Ya'aqobh (Jacob, the root James comes from), meaning, "One that takes by the heel" (Genesis 25:26) or "Supplanter";¹⁸ Yehoseph (Joseph), meaning, "He has added" or "[God] shall add [another son]";¹⁹ Shim'on (Simon), meaning, "Hearkening";²⁰ and (Judah, the root Judas comes from), meaning, "Praised.", which, according to Genesis 29:35 is a theophoric name.²¹ From the five brothers, three bear a theophoric name,²² meaning that Jesus was far from being a unique case between his siblings, which adds credence to the idea that he could have gotten his name from his parents, and "YHWY Saves" is not a title he gave himself or was given later in life.

Further analyzing the possibility that Jesus' name was attributed to him later in life, one must wonder if Yĕhōšûa was a common name within the period around his lifetime. According to the Anchor Bible Dictionary, "The most common divine name found in Israelite theophoric personal names is a form of YHWH,"²³ which includes Jesus' name. In Richard Bauckham's 2017 book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, the author uses Tal Ilan's list of most common Jewish names that appear in literary and epigraphic sources between 330 BCE and 200 CE, where Joshua (Jesus/Yĕhōšûa) appears in sixth place. Therefore, Yĕhōšûa seems to be a very common name around the time Jesus lived.²⁴

¹⁸ Douglas Harper, "Jacob," in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed 28 August 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/Jacob>.

¹⁹ "Joseph," in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed 6 March 2023. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/Joseph>; and "Joseph," in *A Dictionary of First Names*, ed. Patrick Hanks (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 181-182.

²⁰ Douglas Harper, "Simon," in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed 28 August 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/simon>; and "Simeon," in *A Dictionary of First Names*, ed. Patrick Hanks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 304.

²¹ Douglas Harper, "Judah," in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed 28 August 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/Judah>. 183.

²² A name which possesses an element of the divine. See Dana M. Pike, "Names, Theophoric," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Vol 4, 1018.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bauckman, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 67-92.

Knowing that the majority of Joseph and Mary's male progeny held theophoric names (Jesus, Joseph, and Judas), and that Yěhōšûa was a common name within the last centuries before the Common Era and the first centuries after, one must consider if Jesus would have felt compelled to change his name in order to better fit his description. Unfortunately, within my research I have found no-one to pose or answer this possibility. At this point, we are only speculating, given that the most likely answer would be that Jesus was born as Yěhōšûa.

When we think of where the name Jesus Christ comes from, we might obtain an answer that tends to increase the probability that Jesus was given his name at birth, for he already got his *title*, as Christ, later in life. There is no reason to assume, in my opinion, that he would have gotten both *Jesus* and *Christ* attributed to him during his adulthood.

2.3 Miracles or Myths

Was Jesus a “miracle-worker” or a character whose deeds are deeply rooted in myth? Let us assume there was a charismatic teacher named Yēhōshūa during, living in first century CE ancient Palestine who eventually was sentenced to death by crucifixion. Was that man able to revive dead people or perform exorcisms? Did Jesus use supernatural powers to feed a multitude with almost no resources? Or are those actions part of a myth? That is what I am willing to analyze in this subchapter to the best of my knowledge.

By trying to understand if Jesus performed miracles, one should first understand what miracles are exactly, from the Christian point of view. A miracle should be something that both causes wonder and cannot be explained or understood in natural terms, being something that must come from the realm of the supernatural.²⁵ The concept of miracle is rooted in several Latin and Greek words: *mirari*, meaning “to wonder at”; *thauma*, “wonder” (from where we get the term Thaumaturge, “miracle-worker”); *dunamis*, “might work,” “miracle,” or “wonder”; *terata*, “wonder,” or “portent”; *sēmeion*, “sign,” or “miracle”; and *paradoxon*, “strange thing.” All these terms were used in the New Testament to denominate some sort of miracle.²⁶

What we know from *Anchor Bible Dictionary*’s definition of “Miracle” is that a miracle must be provided by God or by gods or from a divine source (such as angels, for example). Both in the Bible and in classical literature, prophets that practice miraculous deeds receive their power from the realm of the divine.²⁷ Jesus is no exception. Taking the earliest sources that we have at our disposal, such as the Synoptic Gospels, we understand that the miraculous power of Jesus is rooted in God. For example, in Mark 2:10-12:

²⁵ Harold E. Remus, "Miracle (New Testament)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Vol 4, 856.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 856-857.

²⁷ Yair Zakovitch, "Miracle (Old Testament)," ed. David Noel Freeman. Vol 4, 849.

“‘But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ – he said to the paralytic – ‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’ And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”

In Matthew 28:18: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”

And in Luke 4:14-21:

“Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

I argue that there can be no Jesus who performs deeds from the realm of the supernatural without a supernatural entity enabling his powers. Therefore, trying to explain Jesus’ miraculous deeds from a non-supernatural point of view has been challenging those who study the life of Jesus without taking into consideration the influence of supernatural deeds, beings, and occurrences. According to Bart D. Ehrman, Jesus probably did not perform actual miracles. He states, “Any attempt to establish beyond reasonable doubt what Jesus did during his ministry is inevitably frustrated by the nature of the accounts that have come down to us. On page after page of the Gospels we are confronted with reports of the miraculous, as Jesus defies nature, heals the sick, casts out demons, and raises the dead. What is the historian to make of all these miracles? The short answer is that the historian cannot do anything with them. I have spelled out the reasons at greater length in another context and do not need to belabor the point here. Suffice it to say that if historians want to know what Jesus probably did, the miracles will not make the list since by their very nature—and definition—they are the most improbable of all occurrences. Some would say, of course, that they are literally impossible; otherwise, we would

not think of them as miracles. I do not need to enter into that question here but can simply say that even though the majority of Jesus's activities in the Gospels involve the miraculous, these stories do not provide much grist for the historians' mill."²⁸ The New Testament's formula of the actions of Jesus seems to be simple. Like it is written in the subchapter "D. Form and Rationale of Miracle Accounts" within the Anchor Bible Dictionary's definition of Miracle (New Testament), the miracle worker (Jesus) becomes aware of an unnatural situation, he deals with that situation using supernatural powers, and witnesses are astonished, and their testimony serves as evidence of the occurrence of the miracle.²⁹

²⁸ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 315-316.

²⁹ Remus, "Miracle (New Testament)," 859.

Type	Miracle	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
Exorcism	Jesus Exorcizes man in Capernaum	1:21-28		4:31-37	
Exorcism	Jesus exorcises a gentile from "Legion" demons	5:1-20	8:28-34	8:26-39	
Exorcism	Jesus exorcises a demon from a gentile child	7:24-30	15:21-28		
Exorcism	Jesus exorcises boy with evil spirit with prayer	9:14-29	17:14-21	9:37-43	
Exorcism	Jesus heals a possessed mute		9:32-34		
Exorcism	Jesus exorcises a crippled woman			13:11-17	
Healing	Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law's fever	1:29-31	8:14-15	4:38-39	
Healing	Jesus cleanses a leper	1:40-45	8:1-4	5:12-16	
Healing	Jesus heals a paralytic	2:1-12	9:1-8	5:18-26	
Healing	Jesus heals a man with a withered hand	3:1-6	12:9-14	6:6-10	
Healing	Jesus heals a hemorrhaging woman	5:25-34	9:20-22	8:43-48	
Healing	Jesus brings back to life Jairus' daughter	5:35-43	9:23-26	8:49-56	
Healing	Jesus heals people from Gennesaret	6:53-56	14:34-36		
Healing	Jesus heals a deaf and mute man	7:31-37			
Healing	Jesus makes a blind man see	8:22-25			
Healing	Jesus heals the blind at Jericho	10:46-52	20:29-34	18:35-43	
Healing	Jesus heals centurion's servant		8:5-13	7:2-10	
Healing	Jesus heals two blind men		9:27-31		
Healing	Jesus brings back to life widow's son			7:11-17	
Healing	Jesus heals a man with dropsy			14:1-6	
Healing	Jesus cleanses ten lepers			17:11-19	
Healing	Jesus heals soldier's ear			22:50-51	
Healing	Jesus heals son of Royal Official				4:43-54
Healing	Jesus heals a paralytic in Jerusalem				5:1-18
Healing	Jesus heals a man blind from birth				9:1-41
Healing	Jesus brings Lazarus back from the dead				11:1-44
Nature	Jesus stops a storm at sea	4:35-41	8:23-27	8:22-25	
Nature	Feeding the 5000	6:34-44	14:13-21	9:10-17	6:1-14
Nature	Jesus walks on water	6:44-52	14:22-33		6:16-21
Nature	Feeding the 4000	8:1-9	15:32-39		
Nature	Jesus makes fishermen catch a large quantity of fish			5:1-11	
Nature	Jesus turns water into wine				2:1-11

Table 2 – Miracles performed by Jesus within the Gospels

The table above represents all the miracles performed by Jesus of Nazareth documented in the gospels. They are divided into three categories: Exorcism, Healing, and Nature. The first two categories might get confused since Jesus is told to “heal” people from exorcisms. Every

exorcism is a healing, but not every healing is an exorcism. Nevertheless, I think it is important to discriminate that special kind of healing.

There are six miracles that fall into the category of Exorcism. Only four of those miracles are part of the oldest source – Mark – and only two are appear in all the Synoptics: Legion and the boy exorcized with prayer. From all the exorcisms that Jesus performs in the gospels, this last one seems to be the most credible to have been part of history.

When analyzing the data in Table 2 we understand that, not counting with exorcisms, Jesus has miraculously healed twenty times according to the Canonical Gospels. A larger percentage (eight miracles, 40% of the twenty) of these events are present in three sources (the Synoptics) in comparison to the exorcisms, where only 33,33% of the events are present in Synoptic Gospels. No Exorcism or healing that are present in the Synoptic Gospels are present in John. From the twenty healing miracles performed by Jesus, also only eight are present in the oldest gospel. Taking into consideration the likelihood of anything like these miracles happening and the number of times they show up in the gospels, I assume that events such as the cleansing of the leper, the healing of the fever of Simon’s mother-in-law, and the healing of the hemorrhaging woman can very possibly go back to Jesus’ time and have some sort of historical accuracy. Each one for a specific reason. When it comes to the cleansing of the leper, I agree with John Dominic Crossan’s opinion when he states that the first century CE disease called “leprosy” is not the one that we call by that name nowadays. According to this scholar:

“Ancient *sra’at* or *lepra*, on the other hand, covered several diseases, all of which involved a rather repulsive scaly or flaking skin condition—for example, psoriasis, eczema, or any fungus infection of the skin.”³⁰

³⁰ Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 78-79.

The treatment that Jesus would have provided the “leper” would have been toward the illness, not toward the disease. In other words, Jesus would have healed the social stigma he was suffering from, by rejecting the “leper’s” social ostracization.³¹ The case of the healing of the fever of Simon’s mother-in-law, depending on the gravity of the situation, could have been dealt with by someone who was used to treat those kinds of very usual ailments. Jesus has been throughout history not just highly recognized as a miracle worker, but as a healer. It is very likely that the Jesus of history was, in fact, a healer without the additional need of supernatural or divine intervention. Lastly, the situation with the hemorrhaging woman could have happened, even though she might not have her disease necessarily healed. The hemorrhages that have been lasting for twelve years could have been the result of menorrhagia, a disease that causes abnormal menstrual bleeding and causes stronger and more lasting cramping. As Serekara Gideon Christian and Baribefe Daniel Koate explain:

“One of the probable causes of the issue of blood could be ‘prolonged menstruation’ and today this woman probably would have been diagnosed with menorrhagia, which is an abnormally heavy and long menstruation that causes enough cramping and blood loss, such that it makes normal daily activities impossible. It may also be right in calling it a “hemorrhage” because the amount of blood lost is significant, such that it is enough to fill a maxi pad at least every hour for several weeks (not to mention 12 years!).”³²

With that condition, it would be very likely that the woman was considered impure and, as such, would be a societal outcast.³³ It is highly unlikely, in my opinion, that she could have cured her condition by touching Jesus’ garments. Like with the leper’s case, Jesus might have helped her be cured of her social stigma, at least for the moment.

Finally, the last group of miracles: “Nature.” The miracles where Jesus interacts with his natural surroundings in order to achieve a supernatural result. Like the exorcisms, there are

³¹ Ibid., 80-81.

³² Christian and Koate, "The Haematological Perspective of the Biblical Woman with Issue of Blood," 2.

³³ Ibid., 2-3.

only six Nature miracles throughout the Canonical Gospels. The only miracle that appears in all gospels seems to be one of the most surreal at a first glance. The feeding of the five thousand. It either occurred in a very different way than is portrayed in the gospels or is a complete fabrication, in my opinion. Jesus, his followers, and a group of five thousand people are in an apparently deserted place, far from the local towns, and almost without food. Nonetheless, they manage to divide the very little food they had and satiate the whole crowd. However, not only, as I said before, this is the most well attested miracle within the Canonical Gospels, but an extremely similar event happens, even though it is only attested once (showing up in Mark 8:1-9 and Matthew 15:32-39): the feeding of the four thousand. If we take into account the possibility that both stories might have been derived from a single event, then we might have the only miracle that is mentioned six times within the Canonical Gospels.

2.4 My Conclusions

In my opinion, the topics analyzed in subchapters 2.1 to 2.3 lead me to conclude that Jesus was a legendary figure, as it is defined in this thesis, in subchapter I.3.2, “The Legend of Jesus of Nazareth.” In 2.1, “Calculating the date of the Crucifixion,” the Synoptic Gospels mention a natural cosmological or seismological event, while John does not. That the earthquake and the eclipse happened and were seen and felt somewhere in the vicinity of Jerusalem seems to be a historical fact. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that they occurred exactly in the time that they are described in the gospels, which, in my opinion makes it more likely than not that the events were later added to the gospels even though they very likely occurred in different days.

In 2.2, I felt the need to explore the possibility that Jesus’ name was not attributed at birth. It is a coincidence that a man who would become known as the savior of mankind by billions would have been called “YHWH saves.” Even though I reached the conclusion that Yěhōšúa was, in fact, very likely his birth name, I had to initially consider the possibility that it might not have been.

In 2.3, I once again stress that there can be no Jesus who performs deeds from the realm of the supernatural without a supernatural entity enabling his powers. Meaning that Jesus’ miracles either are exaggerated or simply made up. Exaggeration in miracles such as the healing of leprosy and the feeding of the four thousand and/or five thousand is the most likely scenario, in my opinion.

PART THREE

WAS JESUS A CHARACTER OF HISTORY?

3.1 Debate

In the third part of this work, my goal is to gather the arguments I find most compelling for each one of the three categories of historicity of Jesus. The historical Jesus, the legend of Jesus of Nazareth, and the story of Jesus as a mythologoumenon. All positions have solid arguments and, even though it is known that most scholars defend the position that Jesus is a character of history, I do believe there is room for an interesting and needed debate.

3.1.1 Arguments on the Historical Jesus

1. Sources:

For someone who did not have an impact in the social, political, or economic circumstances of their world, Jesus is one of the most historically attested people in ancient history by both Christian and non-Christian sources within the relatively short period of time of his existence. The evidence of the existence of Jesus is stronger than for other people from history, such as Alexander the Great. As E.P. Sanders writes:

“The sources for Jesus are better, however, than those that deal with Alexander. The original biographies of Alexander have all been lost, and they are known only because they were used by later - much later - writers. The primary sources for Jesus were written nearer his own lifetime, and people who had known him were still alive. That is one of the reasons for saying that in some ways we know more about Jesus than about Alexander.”¹

Counterpoint: The earliest sources that we have about Jesus are devotional, which implies that they are more likely to be tampered with than not. If one wants to reach the Jesus of history, one must try to understand what part of his traditions are mythological, or literary constructs,

¹ Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 3-4.

and which are not.² At what point one should start considering that maybe, if we are choosing which bits of history, we can pick out in a narrative that is emerged in myths, all the narrative is purely mythological? As for Alexander, the evidence of the existence of the Macedonian is far greater than the evidence of the existence of the Galilean. Firstly, the earliest existing sources concerning Alexander³ are not theological narratives but disinterested historical records. Secondly, even though the earliest sources we have for Alexander are chronologically further away than Jesus', the historian Arrian's account of the life of Alexander is extremely well sourced. Finally, there are mentions of contemporary people and even eyewitness accounts of Alexander in the speeches of numerous relevant Hellenic contemporaries of the Macedon, while when it comes to Jesus, the closest contemporary source that mentions the Nazarene is Paul of Tarsus, who says nearly nothing about Jesus, the man.⁴

2. Crucifixion:

As the crucifixion is regarded as a terrible punishment, reserved for only the more serious crimes, and, for the people who wrote the gospels, it would be embarrassing to admit that Jesus, the Messiah, would have died such a terrible death. Therefore, the crucifixion must be real, and Jesus should have been a character of history.⁵ Bart D. Ehrman says that "We do not have a shred of evidence to suggest that any Jews prior to the birth of Christianity anticipated that there would be a future messiah who would be killed for sins—or killed at all—let alone one who would be unceremoniously destroyed by the enemies of the Jews, tortured and crucified in full public view. This was the opposite of what Jews thought the messiah would be. Then where

² Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus Christ: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt*, 19-20.

³ Including works such as Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, Arrian's *The Campaigns of Alexander*, and 1 Maccabees 1:1-7.

⁴ Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus Christ: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt*, 21-22.

⁵ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 167-170.

did the idea of a crucified messiah come from? It was not made up out of thin air. It came from people who believed Jesus was the Messiah but who knew full well that he had been crucified.”⁶

Counterpoint: This is, admittedly, a strong argument to which I can find but only one rebuttal: Its conclusion is too definitive. In my opinion, when one side uses such a human and relative feeling as the feeling of embarrassment to justify that someone is a historical character, and the opposite side is merely trying to argue – not that that said someone did not exist – but that there might be grounds for questioning that person’s existence, the better argument should be the latter one.

3. Paul and James

Even though Paul of Tarsus claims to only have known Jesus after the Messiah died and was resurrected, it seems to be a historical fact that Paul did know James, Jesus’ brother, someone who is also mentioned in the writings of Josephus, alongside other historical characters. If James was a living, breathing, person, his brother surely must have been.⁷ Josephus writes:

“Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified.”⁸

⁶ Ibid., 170.

⁷ Ibid., 145-146; and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.9.1.200.

⁸ Ibid.

Counterpoint: The earliest mention of James, the brother of Jesus is found, as far as we know nowadays, in the Epistles of Paul, where it is written that he met James, who was “the Lord’s brother.”⁹ Does that mean that he literally met the brother of Jesus? Not exactly. Since the term “brother” has been applied to Jesus’ followers and members of the church, this might have been a similar use of the term, being this James not necessarily a brother of blood. As Price states, “This seems pretty cut a dry, Paul says that he met James, who was ‘the Lord’s brother’, and we know that Paul called Jesus ‘the Lord’, so this must mean that Paul met the literal brother of Jesus, right? Not so fast. Many people, including Earl Doherty and Arthur Drews, have pointed out that the term brother or brothers was regularly applied to apostles and members of the church in general and conclude that this is how it was being used here as well.”¹⁰

As for the passage in Josephus where James is mentioned as the brother of Jesus, “who was called Christ,”¹¹ something is not right either. For someone as important as Jesus of Nazareth, who was considered “the Messiah,” to receive such a small reference - as the brother of someone who got killed – it does not appear very natural. The most likely scenario is that Josephus had never heard who Jesus was. It is very likely that this was an alteration of the text made long after the original writings were put down to paper for the first time, by the hand of Josephus himself. As Robert Price argues:

“It has to be recognized that the Testimonium is quite short, and given the nature of what it says, it would be astonishing that Josephus would make such a short commentary. We are, after all, talking about a miracle working wise man, who had many followers, was executed and came back to life, and was at least considered to be “the Messiah”. Why would Josephus relegate all of this to a few sentences and then never say anything else about it, either in *Antiquity of the Jews* itself or in his other works? Furthermore, why would Josephus never explain what a messiah is? The answer to all this makes much more sense if we consider that Josephus never heard of Jesus Christ at all.”¹²

⁹ Galatians 1:19. “but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother.”

¹⁰ Price, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*, 153.

¹¹ See previous page, footnote 8.

¹² Price, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*, 201-202.

3.1.2 Arguments for the Legend of Jesus of Nazareth

1. Countless contradictions:

It is clear, to someone who reads at least two random gospels of the New Testament, that we are dealing with contradicting information. Bart D. Ehrman writes, in his book *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Contradictions in the Bible (and Why we Don't Know About Them)*:

“The Bible is filled with discrepancies, many of them irreconcilable contradictions. Moses did not write the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) and Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John did not write the Gospels. There are other books that did not make it into the Bible that at one time or another were considered canonical—other Gospels, for example, allegedly written by Jesus’ followers Peter, Thomas, and Mary. The Exodus probably did not happen as described in the Old Testament. The conquest of the Promised Land is probably based on legend. The Gospels are at odds on numerous points and contain nonhistorical material. It is hard to know whether Moses ever existed and what, exactly, the historical Jesus taught. The historical narratives of the Old Testament are filled with legendary fabrications and the book of Acts in the New Testament contains historically unreliable information about the life and teachings of Paul. Many of the books of the New Testament are pseudonymous – written not by the apostles but by later writers claiming to be apostles. The list goes on.”¹³

From Jesus’ infancy where his family runs away from Herod to Egypt in Matthew due to the slaughter of all boys under two years-old (Mark 2:13-16) and staying in Galilee while no mention of slaughter of toddlers is mentioned in the second chapter of Luke, to Jesus beginning his ministry both before (Mark 1:13-14) and after (John 3:22-24) John the Baptist’s arrest, to the death of Jesus in the cross, which occurs in all four Gospels. As such, even though this fact does not prove that Jesus did not exist, it tells that we cannot know for sure what we read in the Gospels about Jesus in the gospels is correct. According to Bart D. Ehrman, “There are only two accounts of Jesus’ birth in the New Testament, the opening chapters of Matthew and of Luke. Mark and John say nothing about his birth (the virgin birth, his being born in Bethlehem, and other elements of the Christmas story); in Mark and John, he appears on the scene as an

¹³ Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know About Them)*, 5-6.

adult. Nor are the details of his birth mentioned by Paul or any of the other New Testament writers. What people know—or think they know—about the Christmas story therefore comes exclusively from Matthew and Luke. And the story that is told every December is in fact a conflation of the accounts of these two Gospels, a combination of the details of one with the details of the other, in order to create one large, harmonious account. In fact, the accounts themselves are not at all harmonious. Not only do they tell completely different stories about how Jesus was born, but some of the differences appear to be irreconcilable (some others do not pass the test of historical plausibility either, but that is a different matter).”¹⁴

Counterpoint: Even though some criteria of authenticity are more consistent than others in determining which Jesus’ traditions go back to history, they do manage to determine much more than the idea there was a man named Jesus in Palestine two thousand years ago. Not just the criteria of authenticity, but New Testament scholars that endure the difficult task of trying to recreate the Jesus of history, such as John Dominic Crossan’s with his triadic layered method, where the earlier traditions are the most relevant in determining which elements written about Jesus are the closest to his own lifetime, are an extremely useful method of determining some elements of the life of the Nazarene.¹⁵

2. Religious texts:

One must not forget that, when looking for the Jesus of history, one has almost no sources to use other than the adaptation to written format of oral stories that served the purpose of telling the tale of a mythical character – the Jesus of Faith, the anointed one. It is clear from every

¹⁴ Ibid., 29-30.

¹⁵ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, XXVII-XXVIII.

single early source that we are dealing with a person apparently with powers beyond the human nature – one could say nowadays that said person had superpowers – who lived in a reality where God tends to intervene in the lives of the people (less so in the New Testament than in the Old Testament). A reality where an angel descends upon the house of a woman and announces that she will be pregnant without the need for conception (Luke 1:26-38 and Matthew 1:18-25). A reality where, during what seems like a combination of an eclipse and an earthquake, no-one seems to care, and people focus their attention to a man that is dying on a cross. Jesus Christ comes from an apparently similar, but very different world of ours. Where the characters, such as Pilate and both Herods (the Great and Antipas) were characters of history, but, at the same time, a world with miracles and angels and demons. Like Herod the father, Herod the son, and Pilate, Jesus might also have come from history, but the story that lives on in the gospels and the other early sources, might come from the imagination of people from the early to mid-first century.

Counterpoint: It is accurate that the earliest primary sources are Christian and – therefore – are mostly faith-based documents, and it is also accurate that they come from oral sources. Nevertheless, Jesus was a first century prophet. The people who had interest in preserving the message of Jesus throughout the times were not state historians or rhetoricians that discussed the political message of that person. The people who wanted to keep Jesus' memory alive were his followers. It is natural that the gospels have a very strong undertone of religiosity, for Jesus was a religious figure.¹⁶

¹⁶ Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?*, 64-66.

3.1.3 Arguments for Jesus' Story as a Mythologoumenon

1. All gospels come from a source that was written as fiction:

Mark is the earliest source for Jesus, from which all others are dependent on.¹⁷ The four gospels are not four distinct stories, but their sources come from different versions of one story that circulated orally before being written down among different communities of Christians that had minor disagreements among themselves.¹⁸ Mark was likely written between 66 and 100 CE, on a period known among scholars of ancient literature as an era of allegorical writing, meaning that the main point behind the production of Mark was to share moral, social, political, and religious teachings through characters that were little more than personification of abstract ideas, such as charity, greed, or envy. The one source for the life of Jesus is little more than a symbolic narrative.¹⁹ Price writes, “The fact that the Gospel of Mark is the first narrative story of the life of Jesus that was written, and the three other stories about the life of Jesus are dependent on it either directly or indirectly, makes the Gospel of Mark the lynch-pin of the entire Jesus story. Understanding Mark is the key to understanding the whole story of Jesus. Most scholars today agree that the Gospel of Mark was written either during or after the destruction of Judea by the Romans, which occurred around 70 CE. The most widely accepted dates for the writing of Mark range from between 66 CE to 100 CE, with a fringe of scholars claiming times outside of this range on both sides. The period in which the Gospel of Mark was written is well known among scholars of ancient literature as an era of allegorical writing.”²⁰

¹⁷ For more information, See Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*.

¹⁸ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 43. “That is to say, these writings were based to some extent on oral traditions, stories that had circulated among Christians from the time Jesus died to the moment the Gospel writers put pen to paper.”; and *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 150. “The similarities between John and the Synoptics in such stories may simply derive from related oral traditions in circulation in their respective communities.”

¹⁹ Price, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*, 87-93.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

Counterpoint: The fact that Mark is the earliest gospel, and it is the base for a large amount of the information of the following gospels draw from, and the fact that the other gospels borrow from at least other oral sources to form their own narratives, negates the idea that Mark is the sole original source for the life of Jesus. Even if the narrative is partly fictional, that does not mean that it is not rooted in real people and events.

2. The Gospels Are Interpretive Paraphrases of the Old Testament

The New Testament gospels borrow very heavily from passages of the Old Testament in order to apply them to Jesus. As Ehrman writes:

“A number of mythicists argue that the New Testament Gospels are little more than reworkings and paraphrases of passages of the Old Testament applied to an invented figure Jesus. Within Jewish tradition this approach to interpreting a text by paraphrasing, expanding, and reapplying it is called Midrash; if the text is a narrative rather than a set of laws, the Midrash is called haggadic (as opposed to halakhic). And so Robert M. Price has recently argued that ‘the whole gospel narrative is the product of haggadic Midrash upon the Old Testament.’ The logic behind this assertion is that if the stories told about Jesus in the Gospels have been modeled on those of Old Testament figures, we are dealing with literary fictions, not historical facts, and that Jesus, as a result, is a made-up, fictional character.”²¹

At this point, one must wonder if the whole persona of Jesus is not simply a construction made from stories and prophecies originated from the Hebrew Bible.²²

Counterpoint: Yes, the New Testament does contain nonhistorical materials and many do come from the Old Testament. That does not mean that Jesus did not exist. According to Ehrman,

²¹ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 197-198.

²² *Ibid.*, 197-199.

there is plenty of evidence for the historicity of the Nazarene.²³ Such evidence can be, for example, the mentions of Jesus by Josephus and Tacitus. Ehrman writes:

“We should first return to the writings of Josephus and Tacitus. Tacitus almost certainly had information at his disposal about Jesus, for example, that he was crucified in Judea during the governorship of Pontius Pilate. Josephus appears as well to have known about Jesus, both some major aspects of his life and his death under Pontius Pilate. What I did not stress earlier but need to point out now is that there is absolutely nothing to suggest that the pagan Tacitus or the Jewish Josephus acquired their information about Jesus by reading the Gospels. They heard information about him. That means the information they gave predated their writings. Their informants were no doubt Christians, or—even more likely—(non-Christian) people they knew who themselves had heard stories about Jesus from Christians. It is impossible to know whether these Christians had been influenced by the sources we have already discussed, but it is completely possible that they themselves had simply heard stories about Jesus. Indirectly, then, Tacitus and (possibly) Josephus provide independent attestation to Jesus’s existence from outside the Gospels although, as I stated earlier, in doing so they do not give us information that is unavailable in our other sources.”²⁴

3. Lack of information in the earliest sources:

The earliest written sources (Epistles – or letters – of Paul)²⁵ seem to ignore almost the totality of facts about Jesus that are later mentioned in the gospels,²⁶ which came out at least a couple of decades later than the earliest letters.²⁷ If Paul was the first one to write about Jesus, if he actually knew Jesus’ brother, James, and dedicated his life to being his follower and one of the most important people, if not the most important person, of the first years of Christianity, he could have known more and written more about the events of the life of Jesus:

“Whether Paul viewed Jesus as incarnate in some fashion or having made an appearance on earth itself is difficult to say, but it really makes little difference, since most of the gods and heroes and angels of the time were portrayed as incarnate. The issue is that Paul provides us with no knowledge of a life of Jesus, nothing that places him in space and time, which is rather bizarre if Jesus was a man who had just recently

²³ Ibid., 207.

²⁴ Ibid., 97.

²⁵ *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 252.

²⁶ Price, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*, 85

²⁷ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 262.

been alive. In addition, Paul said things that outright contradict the notion of Jesus as a man who recently lived.”²⁸

Counterpoint: In reality, Paul has a lot to say about Jesus, especially when it comes to his death and resurrection. Not only that, but he does quote Jesus several times, he is aware of several of his sayings and teachings.²⁹ Adding to this answer, I quote Casey’s argument:

“Moreover, we have seen that while Paul did not have reason to cite the life and teaching of Jesus very often in epistles written to deal with problems in (mostly Gentile) churches, major points such as Jesus’ crucifixion were extremely important to him, and he evidently regarded Jesus’ teaching as authoritative.”³⁰

²⁸ Price, *Jesus: A Very Jewish Myth*, 86.

²⁹ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 24; 29; 31-33.

³⁰ Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching*, 40.

3.3 My Opinion

There is a near unanimous agreement among most scholars of history and religious studies when it comes to the historicity of Jesus: The Galilean prophet was a living, breathing human being that walked this earth in the early first century CE. I agree that most of the arguments on the Mythicist position are lacking, ineffective, and sometimes, mean spirited and employing an agenda that looks to serve, not the truth, but the bias of the person who is making the claim. The only agenda that a historian must serve is the pursuit of the most accurate version possible of past events. Even though history is not an exact science, but a social science, one must strive to be as accurate as possible.

In the subchapters I.3.1 to I.3.3 I define what I mean by a historical character, a Legendary character, and a Mythological character. Jesus is not a Mythological character, and his history is not a mythologoumenon. Jesus is one of the most relevant characters in humanity, has several independent primary sources, and is the starting point of a religious movement, Christianity, that became – and still is – the largest religion in the world. Even though the same could have occurred if Jesus was but a literary character, that scenario is much less likely. In the end, I cannot consider Jesus of Nazareth as a fully historical character if all the aspects of his life that we are aware of are debatable and so many scholars – and all the scholars whose works I have used in this thesis agree that his story is affected by at least some elements of myth. According to the definitions of *historical*, *myth*, and *legend* that I am using for this thesis, the life as we know it of Jesus fits perfectly in the category of *legend* - “The story of a person whose life as we know it is based on a likely fictional scenario or whose existence cannot be proved to be true.”

It is correct to say that Jesus’ life as it is presented by its sources has several elements of myth. With the contradictions about his life as depicted in the gospels and the miracles that

no human being can achieve, one should admit that a substantial amount of information about Jesus' life is not accurate. When the more important events of the life of Jesus are supernatural to some extent, one can immediately assume that if that person existed in history, it certainly did not exist in the way it is portrayed.

In the end, even though I consider Jesus to be a legendary character, at the same time, I do agree to some extent with the large majority of the academic community that the number of sources on Jesus is quite elevated for someone from the first century. What changes is the definition of what is historical and what is legendary. In my opinion, for someone to be a historical character, that someone must have its life registered in the annals of history with the maximum precision. And that is not that we can claim about Jesus of Nazareth. Or about most people from Jesus' time. Such is the reality of history.

3.4 Conclusions

At the end of this study, one obvious conclusion that is reached is that the Jesus of history was a complex character. The Jesus most people know nowadays is the Jesus of Faith. Jesus Christ is the prophet who died on the cross for the sins of mankind about two thousand years ago. That is not the Jesus I analyze here. That Jesus was purposely avoided with the goal of being able to focus all the attention on the man that really existed.

To know with a decent amount of certainty information about the life of Jesus is a complicated and controversial task. Each author that tries to create a biography of the Nazarene, tends to end up with different results from other authors that take upon the same task. The ten authors here represented that attempted to understand and uncover his life from the Christian scriptures, ended up with ten different Jesuses, some more different than others. A mythological Jesus (Price). Jesus, the embodiment of Wisdom (Witherington). A wandering cynic Jesus (Crossan and Mack). Jesus, the apocalyptic prophet (Yarbro Collins, James Allison Jr., Maurice Casey, E.P. Sanders, and Bart D. Ehrman). And, finally, Jesus, the magician (Smith).

What I know for a fact is that, with the conflicting evidence that we currently have – that is very significant, for a peasant that lived two millennia ago – it is impossible to create an undisputed biography of the man that is behind the biggest religion in the world.

FINAL THOUGHTS

“Finally, I should emphasize that with respect to Jesus, or indeed any historical person, the historian can do no more than establish probabilities.”¹

When I started my research for this work, Bart D. Ehrman’s *The New Testament* was one of my first reads. When I stumbled upon the sentence I just quoted, I saved it, for it would certainly be useful in the future. That small sentence means to me one of the most important features of being a historian: never taking anything that we read from the past for granted or as absolutely accurate. Nonetheless, one cannot be too inflexible and needs to be open to the possibility. It is important to keep a skeptical mindset, but one must have some awareness that if there is a probability of 99% that a certain event happened or that a certain person performed some action, one should act as if that is a historical fact.

When it comes to Jesus of Nazareth, I do not think that there is a probability of 99% that the central figure of Christianity was a historical character, but I do believe, faced with the evidence listed in this work, that it is more likely than not that two thousand years ago, there was a Palestinian Jew named Yēhōšūa, who was special enough for his name to survive in the annals of history, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

In all the Synoptics Jesus asks his disciples the question, “But who do you say that I am?” In all three Gospels Simon Peter replies with almost the same sentence, “The Messiah” (Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20; Matthew 16:15). I would not have answered the same as Simon Peter.

¹ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 207.

Jesus was very likely a son of two Jewish parents and lived in Nazareth. Eventually he started gathering followers and gaining notoriety, probably to the point of annoying the local powers. Eventually he would be sentenced to death. Yet, his legend carries on.

The authors whose works I used in this thesis would likely have different answers than mine. Or more complex. Or more assertive. He would be a Hellenized wanderer, a teacher with an apocalyptic message, a fragment of our imagination, a magician, or a sage.

Jesus might have been a man who died on the cross on the 3rd of April of 33 of the Common Era. However, remembering the words of Bart D. Ehrman at the beginning of this chapter, the historian can do no more than establish probabilities. And the most likely scenario is that he died between 26 and 36 CE.

Jesus is recognized nowadays by most scholars as a miracle-worker.² Ironically, the miracles themselves are both the cause for adoration and for skepticism. Jesus was cemented into history with his apparent super-natural abilities while at the same time, those same abilities are one of the biggest reasons for the existence of skeptics.

In the end, if Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet or a mythologoumenon, the truth is that the Nazarene is one of the most influential people in history and the movement that started with him revolutionized the world we live in. If there is someone's history worth knowing, it is Jesus'.

² *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. 261-262; and Smith, "Jesus the Magician," 81.

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