

Did Jesus Even Exist?

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Author, *Sense and Goodness without God*

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1. Preliminaries

A. We Cannot Assess Sources Until We Fully Understand Them

- The Release of Barabbas (Mark 15:6-15)
- Mark on Parables (Mark 4:11-34)
- Paul on Hagar and the Babes (Gal. 4:22-5:1; 1 Cor. 2:4-4:1, Rom. 16:25, Eph. 3:3-5)
- Christianity as a Mystery Religion

B. Basic “Jesus Myth” Theory

20 – 40 AD – Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection believed to take place in heaven; recorded secretly in the Old Testament; secret is now communicated by ‘revelation’ to a select few.

40 – 60 AD – Paul converts, preaches widely, writes letters; church schisms, false gospels arise.

30 – 70 AD – Message about the heavenly Jesus is gradually mythicized, as other mystery cults did for their gods, represented symbolically in seemingly-historical narratives.

64 – 70 AD – Neronian persecution of 64 AD devastates church in Rome, Jewish War of 66 AD ends church in Jerusalem, the two main centers of Christianity; Gospel of Mark is written (?).

70 – 100 AD – Many new Christians start to believe myths are real, assume Jesus was real person, and preach and embellish this view; Gospel of Matthew is written (?).

95 – 110 AD – No references to a historical Jesus exist before this time; probably Gospels of Luke and John are written in this period, along with Acts and some epistles, including 2 Peter.

100 – 325 AD – ‘Historicizing’ sect gains political & social advantage, declares itself ‘orthodox’, condemns others as ‘heretics’, preserves only texts that agree & forges, alters texts in support.

2. The Evidence Warrants Disbelief

A. The Prior Probability of Ahistoricity and ‘Euhemerization’ is not Small

- Euhemerus and *The Sacred Scriptures*
- The *Life of Aesop*
- Probability of ahistoricity increases with “hero score”
- Jesus scores extremely high

B. The Evidence is More Likely on Ahistoricity than Historicity

- Strange Silences in Paul
- Paul's "Sources"
- Early False Gospels in Paul (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Cor. 11:4-13; Rom. 16:17; Hebr. 13:8-9; 2 Thess. 2:2-15, e.g. "3 Corinthians"; 1 Tim. 1:3-4, 4:7; Tit. 3:9: cf. Mt. 1, Lk. 3:23-38)
- The First Christian Dark Age (62 – 95 AD)
- Unreliability of the Gospel Narratives
- Strange Silences in Acts
- All Other Evidence Post-Dates Historicization (nothing before 95 AD), and much is dubious (other Gospels & Acts; *Testimonium Flavianum*; etc.)

C. Jesus as a Revealed Mystery

- Analogy: How Euryalus became Entellus (*Iliad* 23.624-99 vs. *Aeneid* 5.387-484)
- Christ as the New Romulus, and Christ as the New Osiris
- The "Gospels" of Daniel, Isaiah, and Philo

Books by Contemporary Scholars Defending Historicity:

R. T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (1986)
Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (1996)
Robert Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament* (2000)
† Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (1996)
† Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (1987)

Books by Contemporary Scholars Defending Ahistoricity:

Arthur Drews, *The Christ Myth* (1998)
Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ?* (1999)
Harold Liedner, *The Fabrication of the Christ Myth* (2000)
Robert Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (2000) and *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man* (2003)
Thomas Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (2005)
George Wells, *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (1988); *Who Was Jesus?* (1989); *The Jesus Legend* (1993); *The Jesus Myth* (1998); *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (2005)

Other Essential Reading:

Charles Talbert, *What Is a Gospel?* (1977)
Robert Segal, et al., *In Quest of the Hero* (1990)
Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (1999)
Burton Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?* (1996) and *The Christian Myth* (2003)
Randel Helms, *Who Wrote the Gospels?* (1997) and *Gospel Fictions* (1990)
Frederick Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo: Rewriting the Bible* (1993)
Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1987)

See also: Richard Carrier, "Did Jesus Exist? Earl Doherty and the Argument to Ahistoricity" (2002) at:
www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesuspuzzle.shtml

† WARNING: Habermas & Blomberg contain numerous omissions, distortions, and obsolete or naive historical conclusions.