

JESUS EXISTED! : DENYING CHRISTIANITY AS BEING ENTIRELY PAULINE

BY

MOHAMMAD M. GHASSEMI

A Thesis submitted to the University Honors Program

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for graduation with

University Honors

Majors: Electrical Engineering and Applied Mathematics

Minors: Computer Science

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Joseph Robert Denk

New Mexico State University  
Las Cruces, NM  
Spring 2008

Approved By:

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Director, University Honors Program

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Thesis Advisor

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## VITA

Mohammad M. Ghassemi

### Education

2003– 2008: New Mexico State University

- ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING MAJOR
- APPLIED MATHEMATICS MAJOR
- COMPUTER SCIENCE MINOR

### Honors & Activities

- Goldwater Scholarship, Fall '07 – Spring '08
  - The Goldwater Scholarship is considered the most prestigious undergraduate award of its kind in the fields of mathematics, the natural sciences, and engineering.
- Presidential Service Award
  - Volunteered over 400 hours of community service.
- API Four Corners Embrace Award, April '07
  - Award for excellent presentation and research ability regarding sustainable energy and the environment.
- National Dean's Honors List, Spring '05 - Present
  - Top .5% of the entire nation's college student body.
- NMSU Dean's Honors List, Fall '04 - Present
  - Top 15% of academic student body.
- NMSU Crimson Scholar, Fall '04 - Present
  - Named as one of the most academically outstanding students in NMSU
- Phi Mu Epsilon, Spring 05' - Present
  - National Math Honors Society, Vice President
- Tau Beta Pi, Fall '05 - Present
  - National Engineering Honor's Society.

### Experience

- Laptop City Owner, El Paso, TX July '07 – October '07
  - Increased business profit by approximately 20%.
  - Managed networking, advertisement, and employees.
- Agilent Technologies, Pleasanton, CA May '07 – August '07
  - Designed and contributed toward the implementation of a driver for Agilent's 35900E analog to digital converter.
- C.A.R.E. Speech Contest, Santa Fe, NM April '07
  - Awarded for excellence in presentation and research ability.
- Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA May '06 – August '06
  - Investigated, improved and redesigned components of Agilent's Mass Spectrometer line.
  - Increased the speed of the device by approximately 1000 times after introducing redesigned components to the device.
  - The redesigned components are currently being developed into a new product.
- Research Assistant, New Mexico State University December '05 – May '07

## FOREWORD

Sometime over the course of my academic career, I decided to take a course studying the New Testament as literature. As a result of the class, I developed a very deep interest in the early history of Christianity and continued to perform research well after the semester had concluded. Jesus is such an important figure in the lives of so many people that when I first heard the claim that there was simply not enough evidence to even prove his existence I began research right away, a process which eventually led to an undergraduate honors thesis.

As a Muslim, I come from background that neither views the New Testament, or any other early Christian documentation, as holy, nor heretical. I believe this will allow me to be unbiased in my approach toward studying the New Testament and other early Christian texts in an effort to demonstrate that there is enough evidence to support the existence of a historical Jesus.

Jesus is either the most influential person, or the greatest hoax in history. Over four centuries of biblical scholars have embarked on a quest in an attempt to discover the historical Jesus and define the details regarding his existence. The most important first step for this thesis is to acknowledge those countless experts of biblical scholarship who have devoted their entire lives in an attempt to answer such questions. Indeed, it is beyond my level of knowledge, or comprehension to even attempt to search for the historical Jesus in the way that these great scholars have. Acknowledging this fact, while these giants have quested for the historical Jesus in his entirety, this thesis will take on a simpler task which should prove more than adequate for a semester-long research project. This thesis will attempt to find evidence for exclusively the physical existence of Jesus.

There is a specific reason why the quest for such evidence is important. As already mentioned, past research on the historical Jesus has mainly been about the whole person and message of Jesus, not limiting itself to analyzing exclusively his existence. While the early giants of biblical scholarship in the 1700s, from Reimarus to Schweitzer, challenged the historical accuracy of the gospels and other early Christian literatures, very few were so bold as to deny the existence of Jesus. Despite their conclusions, many scholars were careful not to deny Jesus' existence because of the social implications it would have had at the time. In such times, it was not unlikely that one could even be executed for claiming that Jesus may never have existed. By the twentieth century, with a slightly growing tolerance in society, major scholars such as Bultmann and Barth came to the conclusion that the historical Jesus was not accessible because the sources which discuss him are mythical in nature. However, Bultmann still does not deny the existence of Jesus and declares clearly that Jesus "is a real figure of history" (Bultmann 44). In the late twentieth century, the Jesus Seminar evaluated the authenticity of Jesus' words, verse by verse, in the gospels. However, even they did not question the historical existence of Jesus. It is primarily within the past 50 years that atheists and modern scholars have made the assertion that Jesus is a fraud in his entirety, being merely an invention of Paul the Apostle (Freke and Gandy 150, Wells, Jesus Myth 95, Doherty Jesus Puzzle 23, Wells, Can We Trust 3).

While this thesis is by no means intended to be revolutionary, or atheistically hostile in any sense, it will serve to challenge the views held by such groups and scholars, here forward referred to as the *anti-Jesus group* (AJG), on the particular question of the existence of the historical Jesus.

Once again, I acknowledge the enormity of this issue as well as my own inexperience but nevertheless, I feel this is an important thesis due to a number of reasons. Whether it is due to a

recent rise is humanism, intellectualism, atheism or any other lines of thought there is most certainly a growing belief, as indicated by the Jesus Seminar, that anything within the New Testament and other early works must be proven as historical as opposed to assuming it. Couple this with the fact that a growing number of people believe that Paul's kerygma (Christ died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again, and soon) created a mythical savior figure as opposed to a real Jesus. The vital question which comes to mind is the same that undoubtedly came to the mind of the anti-Jesus group authors like Doherty, Wells and Price: Is there any solid evidence to prove the existence of Jesus himself? Given the global implications of the answer, this question requires openness to the subject, and a commitment to neutrality to which I am willing to commit myself.

Before anything else, it is extremely important for the reader to understand exactly what is meant by the search for a *historical Jesus* referred to by this thesis, as well as this thesis' overall stance on the anti-Jesus group's arguments. Put simply, this thesis seeks to find any historical proof for the existence of a carpenter with some revolutionary ideas that lived approximately two thousand years ago.

It is important that up-front this thesis acknowledges and applauds the extensive work done by the AJG in crafting their arguments and gathering evidence to support their claims. In certain aspects, this thesis agrees with the arguments presented by the AJG; however, where this thesis departs from AJG acceptance is that while it agrees that many biographical and historical aspects of Jesus are fabrications, it stops short of assuming that the person of Jesus was also a fabrication in his entirety. Indeed, the AJG's arguments have a strong historical base which cannot be debunked in their entirety. As said by the well-known scholar Helmut Koester:

“No direct and first-hand information about Jesus survives. Information from outside Christian sources is not available. One must therefore rely exclusively on Christian sources” (Koester 78).

However, while there is indeed no first hand evidence of Jesus’ existence, there are many indicators which would lead one believe that a historical Jesus is very plausible, if not likely. This thesis will focus on such indicators which have a historical basis within the first century for the sake of improved historical integrity.

## SUMMARY

Given that Paul is the earliest historical source to mention Jesus, the nature of his vision, his silence on the historical aspects of Jesus' life, his admission of no contact with Jerusalem, the resemblance of Jesus to other dying savior god figures, the widespread first century belief in multiple dimensions of reality, a lack of biographical information mentioned in earliest layers of the "Q" document, the mythological nature of the New Testament and no hard historical evidence to support otherwise, the AJG has come to the conclusion that Jesus, as a real person, never actually existed. Rather, Jesus was created by Paul the Apostle as a savior god, combined with other mythological figures such as the author of the "Q" document and given life through clever rewordings of stories in the Old Testament to finally create the Christian Jesus (Price 76, Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 184)

While this thesis acknowledges that the historical grounds and basic claims of the AJG arguments are indeed sound, it rejects the AJG's assumptions which are based on speculations. While Paul the Apostle is indeed silent on the biographical details of Jesus' life, it is certainly not surprising given the limited scope of his letters, their intended audience, Paul's unfriendly relationship with Jerusalem, and his emphasis on more mystical aspects of Jesus. There is certainly enough evidence to deny the bold claim made by the AJG that all segments of the seven uncontested Pauline letters which allude to a physical Jesus should be interpreted spiritually as opposed to physically (Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 99). In actuality, there are many indicators within the seven uncontested letters of Paul which imply the description of a physical person (Phil. 2:8, 2 Cor. 8:9, Rom. 5:15, 2 Cor. 13:4, Rom. 9:31-33, Rom. 9:4-5, Gal. 4:4, Rom. 15:8 and Rom. 8:3).

Furthermore, the assumptions made by the AJG about the nature of “Q” are unfounded. While it is indeed true that the current extrapolation of the “Q” document contains no mention of Jesus’ life, there is no way to know if the original document contained any such information (or even existed, for that matter). Due to its highly theoretical nature, the AJG’s claims regarding the “Q” document do little to strengthen the argument against the existence of a historical Jesus.

Members of the AJG tend to shrug off the “Jesus said” portions of the Gospel of Thomas as scribal insertions without the slightest amount of proof to back their claims. Being that the earliest layers of Thomas have been dated by some scholars as being written at about 50 CE, and the lack of solid evidence to prove that the “Jesus said” portions of the text were scribal insertions, the Gospel of Thomas surely provides evidence to support the existence of a Historical Jesus. (Harris 240)

Lastly, the existence of Jewish-Christian groups, who certainly viewed Jesus as an earthly figure provides some evidence to support the existence of a historical Jesus.

While there is no direct evidence to support the existence of a historical Jesus, the indirect evidence for his existence is enough to allow one to claim that he is indeed a plausible historical figure, if not likely.

## THE PROBLEM OF JESUS' EXISTENCE

When historians flip through the mass of dusty first century Christian historical documents in an attempt to find Jesus, they are likely to come to an awkward predicament. Despite the seemingly vast array of words and wise sayings that later texts attribute to him, Jesus himself never wrote anything down. Unfortunately, the problems do not end with a lack of documents written by Jesus. As far as we can tell, not even the people who physically met, communicated with and followed Jesus wrote anything down about him (Price 36).

Curiously, the earliest historical document to mention Jesus appears 20 years after his disappearance. The document was written by a Jewish tent maker, who acknowledges within his own writings that he never actually met Jesus. His name was Paul, the self-proclaimed Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13, 15:16-18 Gal. 2:2). The situation worsens further when one comes to the realization that Paul's writings are not at all comprehensive in their description of the historical Jesus, leaving out, for instance, details of Jesus' birth, death and ministry.

By this point, historians may turn their attention to the gospels in the New Testament; after all, they seem to be brimming with details on everything from the birth, to the ministry, to the death of Jesus. Unfortunately, although a majority of Christians believe that this on its own is enough to prove beyond any doubt the existence of the human Jesus, many scholars believe otherwise. In his book on the early history of Christianity, Helmut Koester says:

“No direct and first-hand information about Jesus survives. Information outside Christian sources is not available. One must rely exclusively on Christian sources. The semibiographical framework of the gospel stories, however, is the result of the editorial work of the gospel writers and cannot therefore be used for the reconstruct of the ministry of Jesus.” (Koester 78)

Many sources estimate that the earliest gospel, Mark, was written sometime around 66-70 CE (Harris 119). Even if a best case scenario is assumed, there is still practically a decade between the first letter written by Paul, and the oldest gospel in the New Testament, Mark. It follows that the Gospels do little to counteract the problem of Jesus' existence.

In desperation, historians may turn their attention back towards Paul, hoping that by scourging through his works, they may find some hint of the historical Jesus; however, the more one reads through the letters, the more obvious it becomes that the nature of Paul's letters are more inclined toward spirituality as opposed to biography.

Finally, after having exhausted all efforts, historians in search of Jesus set aside their mass of first century Christian documentation and begin to search through Pagan historical sources. Yet no matter how hard they look, they cannot seem to find any trustworthy Pagan sources discussing or even mentioning a man named Jesus. The only Pagan documentation which seem to discuss anyone remotely similar to Jesus are mythological accounts about savior god figures such as the Persian god Mithras, or the Egyptian god Osiris (Jackson 39)

Closing the books in front of them, the historians are bound to come to conclusions similar to the AJG, such as Bertnard Russell who came to the conclusion that "Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if he did we do not know anything about him," (Russell 16).

Given the lack of historical documentation, one is likely to come to the conclusion there are serious problems surrounding the existence of a historical Jesus.

## SOURCES AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

As one may have already gathered by this point, there is immense difficulty in finding any direct, first-hand evidence to support the existence of the historical Jesus. Being that Paul is of almost no help and the gospels, which date later than Paul's letters, are theologically motivated, at best, there appears to be only indirect evidence to support the existence of Jesus and most certainly not any form of verifiable historical support from outside of Christian documents (Koester 78).

Due to their place as the oldest available Christian documents, Paul's letters will be an important primary source for this thesis. While they do not provide much help due to their silent nature, Paul's letters are still an important source of indirect information in the search for a historical Jesus

Josephus, a Jew and a Roman citizen, is the only first century non-Christian historical source that supports the existence of the historical Jesus. His work that is relevant with regard to the research question is *Antiquities of the Jews*. The existing versions of this work, including the recently recovered Arabic version, contain within them two passages regarding Jesus. The first passage discusses Jesus directly and is known as the Testimonium Flavianum (TF). Although the second passage does not deal directly with Jesus, it does make a mention of him as the brother of James the Just.

The First passage, which is shown below, appears in the Greek version of *Antiquities of the Jews* xviii 3.3 and is translated in *The Historicity of Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*:

“Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who did surprising deeds, and a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, hand condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place came to love him did not give

up their affection for him, for on the third day he appeared to them restored to life. The prophets of God had prophesied this and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, have still to this day not died out” (Theissen and Merz 65-66).

In the second passage attributed to Josephus, he introduces James as “the brother of Jesus who is called Christ”, thereby suggesting Jesus was an actual person who existed at that time (Theissen and Merz 65). While anti-Jesus authors such as Freke and Gandy claim both passages to be unauthentic, Christian forgeries (Freke and Gandy 136, Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 213), the majority of scholars take the position that the TF is likely a Christian interpolation (Theissen and Merz 70), whereas the second is accepted as authentic by most scholars today (65).

Some of the works of the early apostolic Church fathers, although admittedly biased in nature, are also vital to the development of the thesis. The most important, and ancient works which will be evaluated include, Clement of Rome (*c.* 100), Ignatius of Antioch (*c.* 107-110), Justin Martyr, and others. Of all the Patristic sources, the most significant for the purposes of the thesis are those which contain references to Papias (one of the early leaders of the Christian church) and Quadratus (who is said to have been a disciple of the Apostles), both of which tell of eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ ministry and healings (Bauckham 15-21)

Although the gospels are indeed mythological in nature, they may still be mined for traces of a historical Jesus. The Jesus Seminar and its work in attempting to identify the actual sayings of Jesus can provide support for the thesis. The Jesus Seminar is a group of approximately 200 people that include "scholars with advanced degrees in biblical studies, religion or related fields [as well as] published authors who are recognized authorities in the field of religion" (Westar Institute). The Seminar evaluates the gospels as historical artifacts, attempting to filter the inventions and elaborations by the early Christian community from the

likely actual sayings of Jesus. They do not concern themselves with canonical boundaries and have even asserted that the Gospel of Thomas contains more authentic information about Jesus than the Gospel of John (Westar Institute). The Seminar is important for the purposes of the thesis in that it builds the case that some of the source materials for the gospels, such as Thomas and Q, have a tone which is very plausible of a preacher of the time, which therefore indirectly indicates the plausibility of Jesus' existence

## ARGUMENTS AGAINST JESUS' EXISTENCE

This section of the thesis will deal with the central arguments presented by the AJG against the existence of a historical Jesus. The awkward silence of Paul the Apostle's letters on the biographical details of Jesus life is paramount to the AJG's argument of silence. The New Testament attributes a total of thirteen letters to Paul the Apostle, of which seven are uncontested by scholars as to Paul's authorship. The letters are considered by scholarly consensus to be the oldest pieces of Christian literature available, dating from 50-62 CE (Harris 308). It is within these seven uncontested letters that the essential essence of Christianity was formulated: Christ died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again, and soon. However, as members of the AJG point out, the letters of Paul are strikingly silent on even the simplest biographical details of Jesus such as his birth, life and so on (Wells, Can We Trust 62).

AJG authors generally cite a total of twenty-one Pauline letters: seven uncontested Pauline letters, seven post-Pauline letters and seven universal Pauline letters. They point out the silence of the letters on the historical aspects of Jesus and set it as the basis for their argument against Jesus' existence. Members of the AJG have pointed out this silence of the letters in the New Testament and the Didache (Theissen and Merz 19) on the nature and biography of Jesus, making the claim that such silence indicates the absence of a historical Jesus. These authors have searched said documents, alongside references from the early apostolic fathers, for any mention of the life and death of Jesus. The early apostolic fathers were a small group of Christian authors who lived from the second half of the first century into the first half of the second century (Theissen and Merz 19). They then summarized their findings and presented it as evidence to support the idea that Jesus was a mythological entity in his entirety, being nothing more than an

amalgamation of other similar dying-savior god figures present in the Greco-Roman mystery religions such as Dionysus and Mithras to name a few (Freke and Gandy 237, Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 109).

While Paul's letters are indeed silent on the biographical details of Jesus, there are instances where they seem to mention him. However, AJG authors point out the general nature of Paul's letters as being more inclined toward spirituality and assert that every mention that Paul makes in his letters which could lead one to believe he was describing a physical Jesus can, and most certainly should, be interpreted as a description of a spiritual Jesus.

Authors Freke and Gandy for instance, claim that Paul shows no knowledge of a historical Jesus; rather, he is writing exclusively about a mythical Christ. Paul, like other Christians at the time, understood the Jesus story to be symbolic rather than literal (Freke and Gandy 155).

Members of the AJG such as Doherty, Freke and Gandy further argue that the spiritual interpretation of Paul's writings make much more sense for three main reasons. Firstly, Paul did not personally know the physical Jesus. Secondly, it is much more likely that Paul would be describing a spiritual being as opposed to a historical being due to the widespread first-century belief in multiple realities or dimensions of existence (Freke and Gandy 155). For those who believed in such multiple realities, the universe functioned similar to a stack of Styrofoam cups stacked on top of one another with holes in all but the bottom cup. The physical world was the bottom cup, God's residence was the top cup and all other cups were realms of "higher beings", demi-gods, angels, demons and so forth. It was believed that the actions of any higher worldly beings could trickle into lower worlds and affect the lives of lower realm residents (Doherty, "Christ as 'Man'", Freke and Gandy 211). Thus, Paul's idea of the sacrifice of Jesus did not

necessarily have to correspond to a person in our physical realm of existence, but rather, one above us. As explained by Doherty,

“Paul and the earliest Christians thus lived at a time when the world of matter was viewed as only one dimension of reality, the observable half of a larger, integrated whole, whose other—invisible—half was regarded as the “genuine” reality, accessible to the intellect. It was characteristic of mythological thinking that the heavenly counterpart was more real and permanent than the earthly one, and prior to it in order of being...Such an outlook must be taken into account in all interpretations of the earliest Christian writings.”  
Doherty, “Christ as ‘Man’”).

Third and lastly, The AJG points out that the concept of a righteous upper worldly god suffering for the salvation of the people in our physical realm was nothing new. Many Greek, Roman and Egyptian Pagan god figures were known to have performed identical sacrifices for their people. The AJG draws a parallel between Jesus and the other dying savior gods (such as Mithras, Osiris and Isis to name a few) and asserts that Jesus was simply a mixture of the many Pagan religious cult figures already present in the first century (Freke and Gandy 24)

The “Q” document or Q (from the German Quelle, "source") is a theoretical lost textual source for the Gospel of Matthew and Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Thomas was a collection of sayings ascribed to Jesus recently unearthed in the Nag Hamadi Dig. The AJG generally believes that the text of “Q” document was not originally concerning Jesus but that “Q” was attributed to Jesus by later evangelical gospel authors. They support this claim by noting that the earliest layers of the “Q” document contain absolutely no mention of the biographical details of Jesus’ life (birth, death, etc.) but rather seem to be a collection of anonymous cynic wise sayings (Downing 145). A cynic is “one of a sect of Greek philosophers, 4th century B.C., who advocated the doctrines that virtue is the only good, that the essence of virtue is self-control, and that surrender to any external influence is beneath human dignity” (“Definition”).

The AJG generally believes that the text of “Q” document was not originally concerning Jesus but that “Q” was attributed to Jesus by later evangelical gospel authors. Q is the best record we have for the first forty years of the Jesus movements. There are other snippets of early tradition about Jesus, but they all generally agree with the evidence from Q. As remembered by the Jesus people, Jesus was much more like a Cynic-teacher than either a Christ-savior or a messiah with a program for the reformation of second-temple Jewish society and religion (Mack 247, Crossan 421-22)

According to the AJG, the oldest versions of Q were not specifically about Jesus because they made no reference to any specific founder, or central figure. They pick up on the fact that Q makes no mentions of a death, passion, resurrection, or other facts which could in turn be linked to Jesus. Thus, the AJG claims that Q is nothing more than a collection of wisdom from an anonymous author and insist that the final versions of both Thomas and Q are modifications of this oldest version, in which the “Jesus said” could simply be a scribal addition (Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 152).

Having made the claim that Thomas and Q are indeed not referring to Jesus, the AJG then moves to make the assertion that the author of the Gospel of Mark identified the author of Q as being one and the same as the Pauline Christ myth and used elements of both myths to create his Gospel (Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 141-142). They claim that the author of Mark created the human Jesus concept by pulling together the Pauline dying savior myth and combined it with the anonymous cynic teacher implied in the “Q” document. Finally, the AJG claim that the author of Mark borrowed and edited stories from the Old Testament to complete the creation of the mythical Jesus.

According to Freke and Gandy, the story of Jesus and his disciples, and in fact Christianity itself, was another mystery religion. Freke and Gandy postulate that the gospel story of Jesus is a Jewish reworking of Pagan and Jewish myths. They claim that the Jewish myth of the messiah Joshua, Jesus in Greek, and the Pagan myth of the dying and resurrecting godman, Osiris-Dionysus, were synthesized to create the story of Jesus. To support their claim, they state that Alexander the Great's conquest of the Mediterranean led to the area sharing a common culture and language, thus creating "an age of eclecticism, much like our own, in which different spiritual traditions met and synthesized". During this time, Jewish mystics such as Philo Judeas were obsessed with synthesizing the various traditions that existed, especially Jewish and Pagan traditions. Freke and Gandy are not surprised by the fact that "some group of Jewish mystics should synthesize the great mythic hero of the Jews, Joshua the Messiah, with the great mythic hero of the Pagans, Osiris-Dionysus." They also claim that later on, the Roman Church was a deviation of Christianity that misunderstood the story of Jesus as history rather than myth, and it spread this new, "superficial Christianity" to the masses. Further, they claim that the image of Jesus we see today was not created until the 8<sup>th</sup> century. (Freke and Gandy 184)

## ARGUMENTS FOR JESUS' EXISTANCE

By this point, the reader should have a good understanding of the AJG arguments. It is important to keep such arguments in mind as this thesis will now move to present arguments for the existence of Jesus, and attempt to debunk the AJG arguments.

It is a well known fact among scholars that the New Testament as it exists today was not completely collected and authorized until well into the fourth century (Ehrman, Lost Christianities 3). The authorization process for texts was by no means all inclusive either. Quite the contrary, over one hundred proposed candidates for consideration to be introduced into the New Testament were rejected for various political reasons (Ehrman, Lost Christianities 4, Theissen and Merz 23). As a result, the New Testament which we currently have is a very limited and restricted sample of the many early writings about Jesus. It is important to acknowledge upfront that such limitations exist and consider them when reflecting on the AJG arguments and when considering arguments for Jesus' existence.

It is indeed fortunate that in recent years many of the texts which were deemed unworthy of New Testament inclusion are beginning to surface archeologically and are shedding new light on the early Jesus movements and their ideas about who he was, some of which, were very historically plausible.

The most central pillar in the AJG argument is certainly the silence of Paul. In light of this fact, it is vital to take a careful look at the twenty-one letters used by the AJG as the bases for their argument of silence, keeping in mind the very limited nature and controlled scope of the New Testament. Of the twenty-one base letters used for the AJG arguments, we can disregard seven, the universal letters, immediately. It is generally accepted that the universal letters were

not written until the second century and are therefore irrelevant to the argument of silence as they date later than the four gospels. Only seven of the letters used by the AJG are uncontested Pauline letters - Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon (Harris 309). However, although scholars generally agree that they are authentic, they are severely limited in that they address small communities in a restricted geographical area within Greece and Asia Minor leaving out the far stronger centers of the Christian movement such as Syria, Cyrenaica, Rome or Egypt (Bauer 58).

The remaining seven letters used by the AJG are known as the post Pauline letters or “deutero-Pauline.” The letters include 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Hebrews (Harris 309). Scholars generally agree that while these letters were attributed to Paul, he himself was not responsible for their authorship. Furthermore they date later than the uncontested Pauline letters, making their account even less trustworthy. Moreover, with the exception to Hebrews, the letters still cover the same limited geographical area as the other Pauline letters. Due to its limited scope and dubious authenticity, the post Pauline letters, much like the universal letters, used by the AJG do little to augment their argument of silence. It therefore seems that the strongest pillar in the base of the AJG evidence is the seven uncontested Pauline letters. It is interesting that while the AJG claims that they look for an unorthodox Jesus (the physical Jesus) they base so much of their argument on the fourth century approved Orthodox literature.

Given that fourteen of the letters which the AJG uses are inadequate for their silence argument, it is vital to turn one’s attention to the remaining seven uncontested Pauline letters. With the exception of Romans, all seven of these letters have a very similar tone in that they were all written to address the problems of the small Christian communities Paul himself had

established. This means that Paul had already convinced these communities of his ideas regarding Christ. It is therefore important to keep in mind that he was not writing to explain to them who he thought Jesus was, or to give any details of his biography outside of what may be applicable to solve their problems (Harris 310). When one reads Paul's letters, it is obvious that they are often urgent and focused on problem-solving in communities where the life of the Jewish Jesus would not have been all that relevant. This being the case, one would not expect large amounts of biographical data to be contained within the seven Pauline letters, making the AJG argument of silence far less plausible.

Even though Paul himself admits he never actually met Jesus in person, the AJG protests that his letters do not discuss the exemplary details of Jesus' life to a great enough extent (Freke and Gandy 155). Coupling the fact that Paul never met Jesus with the fact that he had a less than friendly relationship with the other Christian leaders at the time, (as indicated in Galatians 1 and 2) it is certainly unreasonable for one to expect him to know the biographical details surrounding the life of Jesus; rather, one would not be surprised by Paul's focus on the more extraordinary aspects regarding Jesus. Paul began writing his letters twenty to thirty years after the death of Jesus; therefore, any biographical information he chooses to release on the person of Jesus is second-hand and would have been subject to errors anyway. It is quite likely that by the time Paul had written his first letters, Jesus had already become a well-established hero, most known for his epic self-sacrifice, which is why we see Paul placing so much emphasis on this point. It is likely that the intrusion of legendary materials into the Jesus traditions was already prevalent and further amplified by Paul due to his unique relationship with Jesus (Hoffman 34).

In his book *Jesus is Dead*, Robert M. Price points to many examples in past and recent history where religious figures had miracles attributed to them, sometimes even within days of

their public ministries. Most notable is his mention of the cult leader Charles Manson, who was attributed with levitating a bus over a creek. Therefore, as Price himself said, “it seems that an interval of thirty or forty years could indeed accommodate the intrusion of legendary materials into the gospel tradition” (Price 38). The AJG is absolutely correct when they say that Jesus resembles countless other first century savior cult figures. However, as Price pointed out, it would not be surprising for Paul to divinize a person who he had never met personally. The fact that Paul divinized Jesus does not by itself prove that every mention Paul gave of Jesus was intended to be a spiritual reference, as the AJG claims. Alexander the Great, an accepted historical figure, was divinized shortly after his death; however, Alexander was a great military commander and Jesus was a rebellious carpenter. We only have trustworthy historical information on Alexander because of his position. It is also important to keep in mind that the Gentiles, which were Paul’s intended audience, already understood the concept of a dying-savior god from their mythology. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that Paul would emphasize Jesus most heavily in that sense, making it the central theme of his message (Hoffman 16).

For the sake of providing a complete evaluation of the AJG arguments this thesis will now examine portions of Paul’s uncontested letters which the AJG disregards or claims should be interpreted spiritually. In many cases, one will find that it is far more plausible that the letters were discussing a physical, as opposed to a spiritual entity (Habermas 39).

The following is a passage found within the seven uncontested letters of Paul, and points to Jesus instructing his followers to break the bread and drink wine in remembrance of his sacrifice. This Eucharistic liturgy, or the Lord’s Supper, is stated as follows:

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever

you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor 11:23-26)

Although members of the AJG label this as a purely mythical passage, it could actually provide evidence for the physical existence of Jesus. As indicated in Gal. 1-2, Paul discusses his visit to Jerusalem, some 15 years after Jesus' death, where he met with apostles such as James and Peter. By the time of Paul's visit to the apostles, they would have been carrying out the Eucharistic liturgy, as quoted in Corinthians, thus showing that they were following the directions of Jesus himself. It is likely, then, that Paul's reference to the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians, which came a few years after Galatians was written, would have been a recount of what he saw taking place in Jerusalem and not simply a fabrication.

1 Cor. 7:10-11 and 1 Cor. 9:14 are both passages relating to God's rulings about community practices, and are stated by the AJG as having come from visions experienced by Paul. These passages relate to a ruling against divorce, and a ruling that financial support should be provided to apostles who proclaim the gospels, respectively. The AJG rejects these as rulings taught by Jesus himself; rather, they are "the voice of a spiritual Son..., not the passed-on words of a former teacher" (Price 30). It is perplexing that the AJG should reach such a conclusion, when, as stated above, Paul has indeed met with Jesus' apostles in Jerusalem years earlier. It is very likely that during this visit, as recorded in Galatians 1-2, Paul would have been taught Jesus' teachings from the people who have heard his teachings directly from Jesus. The AJG's dismissal of such rulings as visions therefore lacks insight and consideration of previous events relating to Paul's life.

The AJG discusses the verses 12-16 in 1 Cor. 15, which involve Paul having a logical discussion about Christ's resurrection from the dead:

“But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty (too) is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised,”

Paul states that if there is no such thing as a physical resurrection from death, then it could not have happened, even in Jesus' case. In verse 17, Paul continues to question the faith of those who do not believe the apostles who preach that Christ has risen from the dead: “and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). Thus, forgiveness of sins and salvation cannot be achieved if one does not believe in the resurrection of Christ. This supreme emphasis placed by Paul on the physical resurrection of Jesus is paramount. Paul essentially implies that without the physical death of Jesus, there is no point for the entire Christian movement. Despite its obvious physical ring, the verses are refuted by the AJG as simply a matter of faith for Paul (Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 61). The AJG argument is awkward when given further consideration. If, indeed, Paul was preaching the existence of a purely spiritual Jesus, why, then, would he be so angered by his followers who question the validity of resurrection in the physical realm of existence? It is far more likely that Paul was describing resurrection in the physical realm, which supports that he believed Jesus to have existed within the physical realm.

Paul also describes what is likely a historical Jesus in Romans,

“...regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God<sup>[b]</sup> by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 1:3-4)

The AJG, however, questions if this is in fact a “piece of historical information”, and some authors even go so far as to say that if it is, then “it is the only one Paul ever gives us.” (Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 84). Furthermore, authors such as Wells claim that first-century authors were vague about the timing, nature, and location of Jesus’ birth. Paul, according to Wells, does not describe Jesus as a teacher, healer, or miracle worker, and he blames Jesus’ death not on the Romans, but on Satan and demons (Wells, Jesus Myth 157). The claim that this is the only piece of historical information presented by Paul, however, can easily be refuted as there are several verses throughout Paul’s seven uncontested letters (some of which we have already seen) that point to the existence of a physical existence of Jesus, in the form of a human being rather than a heavenly, spiritual figure. The verses that refute the AJG’s claim are as follows:

- Jesus was born to a woman: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,” (Gal. 4:4). Doherty theorizes that Paul plagiarized this verse from Isa. 7:14 which states, “A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son, and call him Immanuel,”. While it is not impossible that this verse could have been the source of Paul’s “born of woman”, it does not provide proof for the AJG’s argument that all these events took place in the spiritual realm. It is more likely that Paul was describing an actual human being, Jesus, whose mother was also human. (Wells, Can We Trust 4- 6)
- Jesus had a brother named James: “But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.” (Gal. 1:19). The AJG attempts to refute this verse by saying that the word “brother” was used to mean “Christians”. However, in light of other Pauline verses, Doherty’s claim is not likely. There is no other verse in which “brother of

the Lord” is used to mean Christian(s), which is indicated by Paul by using “brother *in* the Lord” such as in Rom. 16:11, 7, and 8.

- Jesus commanded his followers to perform the Eucharistic liturgy in 1 Cor. 11:23-25. As mentioned above, this verse is not mythical in nature, as the AJG claims, and likely provides proof of Jesus’ existence. Furthermore, this verse also indicates the actual time at which Jesus was handed over to the Romans – the night of the Lord’s Supper.
- Jesus’ death was at the hands of “rulers of this age” (1 Cor. 2:8).
- Jesus was a Jew: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16).
- Jesus had a ministry to the Jews: “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs” (Rom. 15:8)
- Jews were involved in Jesus’ death: “For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.” (1 Thess. 2:14-16)
- Jesus was buried: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too

may live a new life.” (Rom. 6:4) and “that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,” (1 Cor. 15:4).

The AJG claims that Paul was not writing about a historical Jesus, but rather a Jesus who existed in the spiritual realm. The above-mentioned verses, however, contradict such claims as they place Jesus in an earthly setting, give him siblings, discuss his teachings, say he was a Jew and was persecuted under Jewish authorities. After investigating several of the AJG claims regarding various Pauline verses, one begins to question if the AJG is seeking for a genuine historical meaning behind the verses, or simply pleading for a pre-determined, baseless interpretation.

Yet another Pauline segment which the AJG considers: “All I care for is to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings...” (Phil. 3:10). The AJG refers to this verse and connects it with the fact that Paul did not physically make the effort to literally walk in Jesus’ footsteps until three years after his conversion, where he made a short trip to Jerusalem, and then waited fourteen years before paying Jerusalem an extensive visit (Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 74). Essentially, the AJG is arguing that if Paul wanted to know Christ and experience his sufferings, then he should have been at the physical place in which all these events took place. Apparently the AJG forgot that Paul’s relationship with the Jerusalem Christians was less than friendly (as indicated by Galatians 1 & 2). Furthermore, given that Paul was convinced of his own divine authority, it is not surprising that he did not care to stay in Jerusalem.

Verses in Psalm 2, according to the AJG, were taken by both Jews and Christians as directed to Jesus, and they state:

“I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession...” (Ps. 2:7-8)

Certain members of the AJG accuse Paul of taking these verses as his direct source while writing about the designation of Jesus as Son of God as found in Romans where he writes, “...and was designated Son of God in power, according to the spirit, by his resurrection out of the dead” (Rom. 1:2). Following this argument, the AJG states that if God himself assigned Jesus as his Son, then the event which Paul talks about must have taken place in the spiritual realm, and “it certainly was not based on Jesus’ recorded life experiences” (Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 85). Furthermore, the AJG states that this event took place after Christ’s death and resurrection, which are also events that, according to them, took place in the heavenly sphere.

The AJG cleverly connects these two passages, one from Hebrew sources, and the other from Christian sources, and states as a matter of fact that one reference is the source of the other. Their argument is speculative, as they do not provide actual proof that these events are related, other than merely saying that they are.

Although the AJG chooses to interpret Paul’s words as dealing with a non-physical entity, a look at the actual Pauline verses seem to imply otherwise. Paul wrote about Jesus as being "found in appearance as a man" (Phil. 2:8) in "poverty" (2 Cor. 8:9) "the one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:15) "was crucified in weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4) in "Zion" (Rom. 9:31-33) as a "Israelites, ... whose [are] the fathers, and of whom [is] the Christ, according to the flesh ..." (Rom. 9:4-5) and having "come of a woman, come under law" (Gal. 4:4) as "servant of the Jews" (Rom. 15:8) "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3). Taken at face value, it is hard to believe that these segments of Paul’s letters do not allude to some form of an earthly historical Jesus especially when one realizes that Paul’s silence is more likely from his personal arrogance

and ignorance of Jesus life. At this point, the evidence seems to indicate that using Paul as the foundation for the argument of silence is flawed.

As was touched upon earlier, archeological discoveries within the last half of the twentieth century have given scholars a huge pool of non-canonical resources with which to work. While AJG authors criticize Paul for his silence on Jesus, many AJG authors simply ignore or disregard many of the references to Jesus made in these recently discovered documents.

The AJG claims that the gospel of Thomas and the “Q” document are indeed not referring to Jesus. However, given ample consideration it becomes clear that there are three major problems with such a theory.

Nearly all of the sayings in Thomas begin with the two words “Jesus said”. In their argument against Jesus’ existence, the AJG boldly makes the claim that all such sayings were nothing more than scribal additions (Sharpes 287). However, they make this claim without the slightest amount of proof. It is not surprising that the AJG would be eager to shrug off the “Jesus said” in the gospel of Thomas so quickly. After all, some scholars date the earliest layers of Thomas to 30-50 CE (DeConick 97-98). (The earliest layer of Thomas contains 80 passages discussing Jesus apocalyptic warnings and his advice about preparing for the Day of Judgment.) While it does not provide any historical details of Jesus life, if the dating is assumed correct then the gospel of Thomas is indeed evidence for the existence of a first man named Jesus, who was talking about the end of days. This certainly provides some evidence for the existence of a historical Jesus.

Given their skeptical nature, it is indeed surprising that the AJG places any faith at all in the existence of a Q document, or even a “Q Community”. Earl Doherty, a member of the AJG

himself has stated, “there is no independent evidence for Q (such as an identifying reference to it in the ancient world)” (Doherty, Jesus Puzzle 144).

In their argument, the AJG identifies an overwhelmingly superficial survey of Q1 (the earliest dated portion of Q) and makes the bold claim that it may not be Jewish in its origin but rather, closer to a “Greek philosophical school known as Cynicism” citing the Beatitudes, “turn the other cheek”, and “love your enemies” as examples to support their claim. They hypothesize that “the Q sect at its beginnings adopted a Greek source”. Furthermore, they claim, using the argument of silence, that the portions of Q1 which contain a “savior god” concept were artificially inserted (Doherty, “Christ a ‘Man’”).

The AJG’s theory is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, nearly all current research is showing that Jesus, as well as “Q” and Thomas are all very Jewish oriented. Well known scholars such as Kloppenborg, Koester and Crossan agree to the Jewish nature of Q and Thomas, thus, the cynic Jesus claim itself speculative. Secondly, while a majority of scholars agree that “Q” did exist at one point in history (Wells, Can We Trust 50), the AJG assumes far too much about a work which is still only hypothetical in nature (Hoffmann 87). They provide no proof to back their claim that the “savior god” concepts which appear in the first layer of Q are inventions but rather assume them to be. The well know New Testament scholar Bart D. Ehrman said:

“Q is a source that we don’t have. To reconstruct what we think was in it is hypothetical enough. But at least in doing so we have some hard evidence, since we do have traditions that are verbatim the same in Matthew and Luke (but not found in Mark), and we have to account for them in some way. But to go further and insist that we know what was not in the source, for example, a Passion narrative, what its multiple editions were like, and which of these multiple editions was the earliest, and so on, really goes far beyond what we can know—however appealing such ‘knowledge’ might be” (Ehrman, Jesus: Apocalyptic, 132-133).

Thus, it seems that there is simply no historical evidence to support the AJG's "Q" community claims or theories. Indeed, it seems that much of the AJG claims about Thomas and "Q" are little more than hypothesis and thus, do little to further their argument against the existence of a historical Jesus, and rather, support the existence of a historical Jesus.

While the Pauline interpretation of Jesus did eventually grow to dominate other lines of thought, there was a point in time where it was not the most well known, nor respected of the interpretations on the nature and identity of Jesus (Ehrman, Lost Christianities 97).

Scholars have identified several Jewish-Christian movements which maintained their loyalty to Judaism while accepting Jesus as a messianic figure. It is interesting to note that Paul seems to have had major conflicts with this group (which included Peter and James the brother of Jesus), who viewed Paul as a heretic given his stance on Jewish law. This conflict involved the very essence of belief surrounding the nature of Jesus. According to Ehrman, "the Ebionites believed that Jesus was a real flesh-and-blood human like the rest of us, born as the eldest son of the sexual union of his parents, Joseph and Mary" (Ehrman, Lost Christianities 101).

Due to their refusal to acknowledge certain tenants of Pauline Christianity, which eventually grew to dominate (Please see figure 1 in Appendix 2 for details), these Jewish-Christian groups were denied an opportunity for New Testament representation.

Ebonite Christians, according to Ehrman, were true Christians. Like Jesus and his apostles, they spoke Aramaic, and were in fact first-hand witnesses to Jesus' preaching and ministry. Ehrman postulates that this is the original form of Christianity, and when Paul received these teachings, he preached a different version of Ebonite Christianity to the Gentiles, which was more popular and much easier to follow. Ehrman states that they believed Paul, who preached to Greek-speaking audiences, misunderstood the message of Jesus, dismissed Old

Testament laws, and thus made this new version of Christianity more popular and easier for the gentiles to follow ( Erhman, Lost Christianities 100-103). Raymond Brown points to traces of evidence for the existence of seven Jewish-Christian groups inside the gospel of John itself (73). Sources outside of the New Testament also point to the existence of these groups. While they do not prove the existence of a historical Jesus by any means, they surely provide some indirect amount of evidence for his existence. The very fact that there were multiple groups who did not buy into Jesus as a savior god figure, but rather as a living breathing man, makes his existence all the more plausible (Erhman, Lost Christianities 100). See figure 1 for more details on differences in belief of early Christian groups.

It is without a doubt that the New Testament contains within its gospels many inconsistencies, historical shortcomings and an obvious, biased overall religious purpose. However, while having admitted this fact there are still certain segments of these writings which seem to describe a very non-mythical, dare I say, human Jesus. A.N. Wilson makes a suggestion that those who search the New Testament for historicity fall short to account for what are the collected teachings of Jesus. Rather, they prefer to pick fine points of the gospel stories and tradition and refute historicity for each individually. However, when the general teachings outlined in the New Testament are pulled together they give a vision of a teacher with no parallel in history (Wilson 47).

Recalling this Thesis' vow to maintain historical integrity, the Gospel of Mark will be the text of primary consideration when using the New Testament for evidence of the historical Jesus.

While the evidence is by no means solid, certain segments of the Gospel of Mark seem to, interestingly, detract from Jesus' Godliness. While At first thought, this may not seem

significant it is indeed surprising after further consideration. If Jesus was indeed intended to be just another of the many divine savior-gods then why would the author of Mark seek to subtract in any way from his divinity?

Take Mark 6:3 for instance: “‘Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at Him.” Why would the author of Mark simply invent at least six siblings for Jesus and in the process, detract from Jesus uniqueness?

Another equally curious instance takes place in Mark 8:23-25:

“And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put [his] hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.”

Why would an author who sought to divinize Jesus have him fail the first time he attempted to cure the blindness of this man in the story?

Yet another instance takes place in Mark 16:8, the most reliable end point of the Gospel. “They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Surely the author must have been able to invent a better ending to the story than an “empty tomb”? Why not have Jesus appear and warn of his imminent return as he does in later Gospels?

While it is important to acknowledge that the Gospels are not historically trustworthy documents, certain aspects, such as those mentioned above do not make sense unless the center figure of the authors argument was human.

## CONCLUSIONS

And so comes to an end this thesis' search for evidence on the existence of a historical Jesus. It is vital to acknowledge that while many of the most important sources of information for Jesus existence were tapped, still other sources were not fully considered by this thesis such as the works of Flavius Josephus and the Early apostolic church fathers.

The arguments made by the AJG against Jesus existence are indeed compelling and this thesis cannot conclude without once again acknowledging the hard work done by authors such as Doherty, Price, Freke and Gandy. From the standpoint of hard historical fact, the likelihood of Jesus existence is quite slim for the numerous reasons as the AJG outlined. There is simply no first hand evidence of Jesus' existence, the first century information scholars have is limited, pagan sources are silent and the oldest source scholars have is Paul, a seeming mystic, who never even met Jesus.

It was never the goal of this thesis to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus existed, because it simply cannot be done with current historical resources. At best, one can outline indirect sources of evidence, some stronger than others, which point to the existence of a physical man in the first century, preaching the coming of the end of days. This thesis hopes to leave the reader with an understanding that there were people within the first century who did infact mention Jesus and that the Jesus mentioned, while he does in some cases involve a very spiritual purpose, is most easily interpreted as a physical entity. What surrounded his birth, life and death are beyond this thesis' purpose but the possibly, or even likelihood that he existed is not.

If nothing else, the budding historian who has read through a stack of first century sources on Jesus should be less perplexed as to why there is so little firsthand information on the historical Jesus after reading this thesis. Jesus is indeed a person whom people have sought to define from the very beginning of his history, a process which will not likely end anytime soon. While it is safe to say that Jesus' existence is possible, one would hope that in the future other early Christian writings, such as those unearthed in the Nag Hamadi Dig, may be uncovered to help the world answer the question: Did Jesus exist?

## APPENDIX A

This appendix contains a short summary of the core elements of Earl Doherty's arguments against the existence of a historical Jesus in his book "The Jesus Puzzle". This summary is contained within the thesis because it is one of the most easily understood arguments of the AJG. Below is a summary of Doherty's argument.

According to Doherty, the story of Jesus of Nazareth is nowhere to be found in any Christian writings preceding the Gospels. He asserts that prior to the Gospel of Mark as well as in writings from the second century, one cannot find any reference to the story of Jesus as a man who was known to teach, perform miracles, and after his death at the hands of authorities, was resurrected. Furthermore, Doherty claims that not only was Jesus absent from the epistles, but so were the people of high importance to the Christian faith, such as Jesus' mother Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, and Judas. Stories such as the miraculous birth of Jesus, his appointment of twelve apostles, and holy places such as the hill of Calvary or Jesus' empty tomb are also absent from these works. Such peculiar absences of important details that are central to the Christian faith have not been effectively explained, according to Doherty.

Doherty continues to assert that Jesus as a man was not mentioned in any non-Christian writings until around 115 CE when the Roman historian Tacitus referenced him. Doherty dismisses his reference to Jesus, however, as simply being a repetition of "newly-developed Christian belief in an historical Jesus in the Rome of his day." Further "famous" mentions of Jesus in *The Antiquities of the Jews* by the Jewish historian Josephus are also dismissed as "inconclusive" by Doherty. He states that one of the two references mentioned by Josephus lacks authenticity and "is universally acknowledged to be a later Christian insertion", while the

other "shows signs of later Christian tampering". Also, although there are references to Jesus in the Jewish Talmud, Doherty claims that such references are "garbled and come from traditions which were only recorded in the third century and later".

Other early writers such as Paul do mention Jesus, but only as a heavenly, spiritual figure, rather than a man who had recently lived and died. These writers speak of hidden secrets revealed to apostles such as Paul, for the first time, not directly by Jesus himself, but by God and the Holy Spirit. According to Doherty, Paul's writings make it clear that his knowledge about Christ and his message is derived not from Jesus' teachings, but from divinely inspired visions and his reliance on scripture.

Further analyzing Paul's writings, Doherty claims that Paul does not locate the place of death and resurrection of Jesus on earth. Doherty asserts that according to Paul, Christ's crucifixion "took place in the spiritual world, in a supernatural dimension above earth, at the hands of the demon spirits". According to Doherty, who claims support from "many scholars" on this interpretation, these demon spirits are the "rulers of this age" mentioned by Paul (in 1 Cor. 2:8). Other texts such as The Epistle to the Hebrews locates Christ's death in a heavenly sanctuary, while The Ascension of Isaiah, describes Christ's crucifixion by Satan and his demons in the heavenly sphere between earth and the moon described as the firmament. Doherty concludes that those who wrote about these events derived their information from the scripture as well as visionary experiences.

Doherty explains that ancient Greeks and Jews believed that gods' activities took place in the spiritual realm, which was part of a multi-layered universe extending from the world in which humans lived, through many layers of heaven populated by demons and angels, and finally to the highest level in which God lived. This perfect upper world served as a model for

the imperfect world below, and this is where spiritual processes such as salvation took place. Doherty argues that the human characteristics given to Jesus in Paul's writings were depended on readings of scripture, and were aspects of this higher, spiritual realm that were equivalent counterparts to the material world in which humans lived.

Doherty draws comparisons between features and myths attributed to Christ and those of the Greek and Roman cults that existed at the time and were known as "mystery religions". These religions had savior gods and goddesses, such as Mithras, Attis, Osiris, Isis, and Dionysos, who overcame death or carried out some act which benefited their followers with salvation. Such sacrificial events took place in the upper spiritual realm, and not on earth. Furthermore, most of these cults had sacred meals, such as the Lord's Supper mentioned by Paul (1 Cor. 11:23f), and they also described mythical relationships between the devotee and the god, similar to what Paul wrote about with Christ. Doherty concludes that the early Christian religion was no more than "a Jewish sectarian version of this widespread type of belief system, though with its own strong Jewish features and background".

The concept of the "Son" in Christianity is also compared with religious concepts found in Hellenistic age. The ultimate God, according to the Greeks, has no direct contact with the physical world, and must only reveal himself and communicate with human beings through an intermediate force. This force, such as the "Logos" of Platonic philosophy or the figure of "personified Wisdom" as mentioned in Jewish works such as the Proverbs, Baruch, and The Wisdom of Solomon, was viewed as God's external image, which played a part in creation and now acts as an avenue through which God and human beings can communicate. Doherty asserts that these features are compatible with the language used by early Christian writers in their

description of Jesus Christ, who is "a heavenly figure who was a Jewish sectarian version of these prevailing myths and through patterns."

In his analysis of the story of Jesus as found in the Gospels, Doherty claims that they all derive their story from the first version of the Gospel of Mark. He claims that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are merely "reworkings of Mark with extra, mostly teaching, material added", and that this is now "an almost universal scholarly conclusion." According to Doherty, much of the Acts is "sheer fabrication", and should thus not be relied upon "since it is a tendentious creation of the second century, dependent on the Gospels and designed to create a picture of Christian origins traceable to a unified body of apostles in Jerusalem who were followers of an historical Jesus."

The Gospels, according to Doherty, were put together following a Jewish practice known as "midrash", which involved reworking and expanding upon scripture, retelling older biblical accounts in new settings. These Gospels are thus not consistent in their accounts of Jesus of Nazareth. Mark, for example, attributed features to Jesus that were parallel to those found in stories of Moses. Also, the Passion story is no more than a collage of verses from the Psalms, Isaiah and other prophets, and it "retells a common tale found throughout ancient Jewish writings, that of the Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One." Doherty claims that liberal scholars consider the Gospels as "faith documents", rather than accurate historical accounts. He also entertains the possibility that Mark's intention could have been "to provide liturgical readings for Christian services on the Jewish model."

The Q document, according to Doherty, was a collection of ethical and prophetic sayings, gathered by a mid-first century Jewish movement originating in Syria that preached the coming of the Kingdom of God. Eventually, this community essentially created a human founder figure

to whom the sayings in the Q document were attributed. Doherty also claims that this figure inspired the creation of the Gospel Jesus, as sayings in Q were used by Luke and Matthew in the reworking of Mark's Gospel. Thus, according to Doherty, the figure of Jesus was not present in Q's earliest phases; rather, he was a later invention.

Doherty indicates that in the first century, there existed a wide variety of beliefs, communities, sects, and rituals among early Christians, which shared very little common ground and had no central authority in relation to their understanding of Jesus. Further, these traditions do not indicate an apostolic tradition which can be traced back to a human figure and his disciples. For Doherty, these diverse thoughts reveal the beliefs at the time which were "based on expectation of God's Kingdom, and on belief in an intermediary divine force which provided knowledge of God and a path to salvation." It was therefore not until the appearance of the Gospels, toward the end of the first century, that these elements were amalgamated to produce the figure of Jesus, which was "set in a midrashic story about a life, ministry and death located in the time of Herod and Pontius Pilate."

Driven by political motivations such as the need to establish a central power and orthodoxy among the early Christian sects and beliefs, gentiles in the second century gradually began to adapt the Gospel Jesus as a historical figure. It was not until Ignatius of Antioch in the second century, until we began to see the first expression in Christian writings that Jesus had lived and died under Pilate, and it was not until the middle of the second century that we see an emerging acceptance by Christians of the Gospels as historic documents. Doherty argues that many Christians sought to defend their faith in the latter part of the second century and denied the existence of a historical founder of their faith. By the end of the second century, reinterpreted canonical documents had been formed, and now considered Jesus to be an actual

human being. Thus the past of Christianity, according to Doherty, was lost upon the future Christians.

APPENDIX B  
Figure 1

In the spring of 58CE	Nazarenes' followers	Antioch Church's followers		Paul's followers
In the spring of 52CE			Paul's followers	
<b>Jesus</b>				
is in heaven	NO	YES	YES	YES
is the Christ	NO	YES	YES	YES
is or will be the King	NO	YES	NO	NO
is/was the Son of David	NO	YES	NO	yes/no
is the Son of Man	NO	YES	NO	yes/no
is the Son of God	NO	NO	NO	YES
was pre-existent	NO	NO	no	yes/YES
was sacrificed	NO	NO	yes	yes/YES
<b>The Kingdom will</b>				
come soon	YES	YES	YES	YES
be on earth	YES	YES	no	NO
be in heaven	NO	NO	yes	YES
<b>Submit to the Mosaic Law</b>	YES	yes/YES	no	NO

(Muller)

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