

The Historical and Human Existence of Jesus in Paul's Letters

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Abstract

The present article seeks to show that the case for the mythical Jesus is seriously undermined by the evidence of the undisputed Pauline epistles. By way of a thought experiment, these letters are taken in isolation from other early Christian literature, and are discussed in dialogue with mythicist scholarship. Attention to the language of the birth, ancestry and coming of Jesus demonstrates the historicity and human bodily existence of Jesus. There is also information about his ministry, disciples, teaching and character in the epistles which has been neglected. Paul's letters, even taken alone, also show the Herodian timeframe of Jesus' ministry. The evidence discussed challenges not only mythicist hypotheses, but also the minimalist strand of more mainstream Jesus-Paul research.

Keywords

mythicism – Paul – Jesus – historicity – humanity

Introduction

“Mythicism”, the view that there never was a Jesus of history, has in recent years attracted increasing interest from scholars. This interest is a positive development, not only because of the increasing attempts by mythicists to engage with scholarship, but even more importantly because of growing Jesus-scepticism among the general public. One area which is an important and contested area of this debate is the Pauline epistles, which are now being taken more and more by mythicists to attest to a non-historical Jesus. The history of Paul's

place in the mythicism debate has not yet been written, although Schweitzer's treatments in both the second edition of the *Quest* as well as in *Paul and his Recent Interpreters* touch upon it. Schweitzer highlights the tension, for example, in Arthur Drews' portrayal (a tension which Drews attributes to Paul) – that Jesus on the one hand dies a sacrificial death, but is at the same time 'a purely divine personality, a heavenly spirit without flesh and blood, an un-individual superhuman phantom.'¹ Drews in fact initially saw Paul as the first *creator* of a historical Jesus: in pre-Pauline Christianity, 'the whole of the family and home life of the Messiah, Jesus, took place in heaven among the Gods', whereas Paul – and here Drews alludes to 2 Cor. 8.9 – invented the idea of 'the descent of the Messiah upon the earth as an assumption of poverty and a relinquishment of his heavenly splendour.'² The radical Dutch school on the other hand saw the Pauline epistles as very late, and Allard Pierson in 1878 'asks whether Christianity as they [sc. the Gospels and epistles] represent it can have been founded by a historical Jesus.'³ Other connections between the study of Paul and mythicism appear in the denial of the historical existence of Paul altogether.⁴ Schweitzer's treatment of the scholars in his survey, however, concludes that they are much more concerned with the Gospels and 'do not enter into a detailed study of Paulinism'.⁵

More recently, however, Paul has come to the fore as a key witness to an unhistorical Jesus. Consider, for example, these claims about Paul by Robert Price (2009), Earl Doherty (2009), Thomas Verenna (2013) and Richard Carrier (2014):

The Epistles, earlier than the Gospels, do not evidence a recent historical Jesus ... We should never guess from the Epistles that Jesus died in any particular historical context, only that the fallen angels (Col 2:15), the archons of this age, did him in, little realizing they were sealing their own doom (1 Cor 2:6–8).⁶

1 Arthur Drews, *The Christ Myth* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1910), 180, discussed in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus. First Complete Edition* (London: SCM, 2000), p. 422.

2 Drews, *The Christ Myth*, p. 117.

3 Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and his Interpreters: A Critical History* (London: A. & C. Black, 1912), p. 123 n. 3.

4 See Schweitzer, *Paul and his Interpreters*, pp. 123–124.

5 Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 423.

6 Robert M. Price, 'Jesus at the Vanishing Point', in James K. Beilby & Paul R. Eddy, eds. *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), pp. 55–83 (63).

We are left with an entire corpus of early Christian correspondence [sc. the thirteen-letter Pauline corpus] which gives us no indication that the divine Christ these writers look to for salvation is to be identified with the man Jesus whom the Gospels place in the early first century – or indeed, with any man in their recent past.⁷

Paul did not believe his Jesus was ever historical in the first place ... What Paul is interpreting, what he is expressing, is not an earthly figure, but an allegorical one.⁸

The *only* Jesus Paul shows any knowledge of is a celestial being, not an earthly man. Paul's Jesus is only ever in the heavens.⁹

There has not been a great deal of discussion by mainstream scholars of the mythicist view of Paul. The most substantial responses are those of Casey and Ehrman, although they principally respond to the interpretations of particular passages invoked by mythicist scholars; moreover, their books were written prior to the appearance of Richard Carrier's major monograph.¹⁰ Another volume, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* includes several responses alongside Robert Price's essay, but those responses make only brief reference to Paul.¹¹ One of the best recent critiques is that of Daniel Gullotta, who notes some crucial weaknesses in Richard Carrier's volume.¹² The present article seeks to focus on Paul, with the aim of providing a more comprehensive and systematic treatment of what the undisputed epistles can tell us about the historical Jesus and the historicity of Jesus, while also responding to a variety of recent mythicist

7 Earl Doherty, *Jesus – Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), pp. 103–104 (epub edition numbering).

8 Thomas Verenna, 'Born under the Law: Intertextuality and the Question of the Historicity of Jesus in the Pauline Epistles', in Thomas L. Thompson & Thomas S. Verenna, eds. *Is this not the Carpenter?' The Question of the Historicity of Jesus* (Durham/ London: Acumen/ Routledge, 2013), pp. 131–159 (132, 133).

9 Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We might have Reason to Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), p. 515. Emphasis original.

10 Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012); Maurice Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?* (London: T&T Clark, 2014).

11 Beilby & Eddy, eds. *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*.

12 Daniel N. Gullotta, 'On Richard Carrier's Doubts: A Response to Richard Carrier's *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt*', *JSJH* 15 (2017), pp. 310–346.

claims. The purpose here is partly to establish that Jesus was a real human figure of history on earth, and partly to show just how much can be known. In fact, rather a lot can be known, and so this essay will not just contribute to the mythicism debate but should also provide a corrective to the general Jesus-minimalism prevalent in studies of Paul's view of Jesus.¹³ References to Jesus' character in Paul's letters, for example, constitute one set of material almost completely ignored in this discussion.

The method here is to engage in a thought experiment. This is not a mere frivolous exercise, a sign of the decadence of our discipline, but a pressing public need in light of mythicist claims. This article aims to adopt a kind of counterfactual approach to history, in which all of early Christian literature is set aside except the undisputed letters of Paul, in order to try to glean what can be learned from them alone.¹⁴ (This self-denying ordinance is most clearly illustrated in the discussion of chronology at the end.) The only exception is that the New Testament is occasionally used as evidence for Greek idiom. Otherwise, the letters of Paul are not interpreted in the light of, or even in tandem with, the Gospels, but are taken as far as is possible only against the backdrop of non-Christian sources.¹⁵

Jesus' Humanity: "Born from a Woman" and *Anthropos*

In Galatians 4, Paul says that God sent his son, 'born from a woman' (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, 4.4). It is hard to imagine a clearer statement of Jesus' humanity. This phrase, and others very like it, are commonly used as synonyms for 'human being'.¹⁶

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- 13 For one perception of the scholarly consensus (although considerably exaggerated), see Helmut Koester, 'The Historical Jesus and the Historical Situation of the Quest: An Epilogue', in Bruce Chilton & Craig A. Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluation of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 535–545 (540): 'it is generally agreed that Paul's letters do not permit any conclusions about the life of Jesus'. This citation is noted by Carrier (*Historicity of Jesus*, p. 521).
- 14 This approach is exemplified in e.g. Niall Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), and, closer to the subject at hand, in Dale Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), pp. 392–403, with specific reference to the death of Jesus.
- 15 Cf. the helpful older treatments in F.F. Bruce, 'Paul and the Historical Jesus', *BJRL* 56 (1973–1974), pp. 317–335, and Austin Farrer, *A Study in St Mark* (London: Dacre, 1951), pp. 203–205, where there is a comparison with the Gospels.
- 16 Cf. Hoffmann's remark: 'I regard Galatians 4:4–5 as completely unhelpful as a "proof" of Paul's conviction as to the existence of an earthly, flesh-and-blood Jesus'. Unfortunately

The poetic parallelism in LXX Job is particularly revealing:

‘But man (ἄνθρωπος) vainly buoys himself up with words;
a mortal born of woman (γεννητὸς γυναικός) like an ass in the desert.’
(Job 11.12)

‘Mortal man, born of woman (βροτὸς γὰρ γεννητὸς γυναικός),
is of few days and full of trouble.’ (Job 14.1)

‘What is mortal man (βροτὸς), that he could be pure,
or one born of woman (γεννητὸς γυναικός), that he could be righteous?’
(Job 15.14)

‘How then can a mortal (βροτὸς) be righteous before God?
How can one born of woman (γεννητὸς γυναικός) be pure?’ (Job 25.4)

Similar parallelism appears in *Sirach*:

‘Pride was not created for human beings (ἄνθρώποις),
or violent anger for those born of women (γεννήμασιν γυναικῶν).’
(*Sir.* 10.18)

The Job and *Sirach* examples derive from the Hebrew idiom of the same meaning (*yhw* ³*šh*).¹⁷ A variation on the idiom also appears in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, or *Apocalypse of Moses*. Here Eve has a vision of heaven and looks at what is impossible for ‘anyone born from a womb’ (τινα γεννηθέντα ἀπὸ κοιλίας) to see (*Ap. Mos.* 33.2). In the New Testament, the phrase appears in Matthew-Luke parallel material. In Luke’s version, Jesus says: ‘I tell you, among those born of women (ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν) there is no one greater than John.’ (Lk. 7.28). The same phrase ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν also appears in Matthew (11.11). The Synoptic formulation here is the same as LXX Job’s except that Job’s are all singular, and Matthew and Luke have the plural.¹⁸

The expression in Galatians of Jesus being ‘born from a woman’ (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός) clearly belongs in this family of very similar expressions. Whether

he does not say why. See R. Joseph Hoffmann, ‘Epilogue: The Canonical Historical Jesus’, in idem (ed.), *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2010), pp. 257–265 (262).

17 The exception is Job 11.12, which does not have as close a Hebrew equivalent.

18 See further Gullotta, ‘Richard Carrier’s Doubts’, p. 329 n. 62 for additional later as well as non-Greek examples of these idioms.

there are additional connotations of human *frailty*, as in the usage in Job, or the phrase refers to humanity in a more neutral sense (as in *Sirach* or the Synoptics), is unclear in the Galatians statement. It can hardly be doubted, however, that Paul makes here an indisputable claim about Jesus' human birth. The only real solution for the mythicist is to regard 'born from a woman' as an interpolation.¹⁹

To put the matter beyond any doubt, Paul actually calls Jesus an *ἄνθρωπος*, a human being, on three occasions with a further reference to him as an "Adam".²⁰ First, in Romans:

'But the gift is not like the transgression, for if by the transgression of the one man many died, how much more will the grace of God and the gift abound to the many *by the grace which belongs to the one man, Jesus Christ* (ἐν χάριτι τῆ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)'. (Rom. 5.15)

Here the parallel between Adam and Christ is underscored by reference to them both being *ἄνθρωποι*. (Paul appears clearly to think that Adam was also historical.) The same analogy is drawn again in 1 Corinthians:

'But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, *resurrection of the dead also comes through a man* (καὶ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν). For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ will all be made alive.' (1 Cor. 15.20–22)

To add to this, Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 15 to contrast Adam, the first man, with Jesus who is defined as 'the last Adam' (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ), drawing attention to their analogous positions (1 Cor. 15.45). The passage goes on to contrast the 'first man' made from the dust, with Jesus 'the second man' (ὁ δεῦτερος ἄνθρωπος) who comes from heaven (15.47).

To respond to a possible objection, however, what are we to make of the language of 'likeness' in Romans, and 'likeness' and 'appearance' in Philippians,

19 Thus, Doherty, *Jesus – Neither God nor Man*, pp. 795–798 (epub edition).

20 Some have also argued that the *ἄνθρωπος* in Rom. 10.5 is Jesus, though this is more disputed. See e.g. Friedrich Avemarie, 'Paul and the Claim of the Law according to Scripture: Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12 and Romans 10:5', in Jack Pastor & Menachem Mor, eds. *The Beginnings of Christianity: A Collection of Articles* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2005), pp. 125–148.

which were apparently grist to Marcion's mill that Jesus was not really human?²¹

To begin with Philippians 2.7–8, the statements that the heavenly redeemer (i) 'came in the *likeness* of men' (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος), and (ii) 'was found *in appearance as* (or, *like*) a man' (σχήματι εὔρεθεις ὡς ἄνθρωπος) could be taken to attribute an unreality to Jesus' humanity.²² Likeness and appearance in these Greek terms, however, need not be in contrast to reality; they can just as readily imply *reflection* of an underlying reality.

(i) The case of Jesus coming or being born 'in the likeness of men' (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων) is the more ambiguous of the two. Reumann describes it as 'enigmatic' and Gnilka 'not unambiguous'.²³ The division among commentators is principally twofold.

In one camp, the phrase is taken to indicate a straightforward identity of Jesus with humanity: 'the essential identity of Christ Jesus with humanity ... human in the *exact* sense, in every sense that makes one truly human', as Thielman puts it.²⁴ A softer version of the "identity" approach sees the similarity in Christ's adoption of the same conditions common to other humans. This view goes back to Bengel, and is influential via its quotation in Lightfoot.²⁵ Bockmuehl takes this line, seeing it as implying that Jesus is 'fully human' in an unqualified sense.²⁶

In the second camp, the term 'likeness' is intended as a qualifier, though indicating a divine reserve, not because Jesus is less than human. H.C.G. Moule and Vincent are early representatives of this view, according to which Jesus is fully human, but at the same time dissimilar from other humans: he is more

21 On this, see e.g. Judith M. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 372–380.

22 We can leave aside 'form of a slave' (μορφὴν δούλου) as not as directly germane to the question of humanity, because of the predication 'slave'.

23 John Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AnBib; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 350; Joachim Gnilka, *Der Philipperbrief/ Der Philemonbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), p. 120.

24 Frank Thielman, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 118.

25 Joseph B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (London/ Cambridge: Macmillan, 1869), p. 112.

26 Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: A. & C. Black, 2006), p. 137. Similarly, Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), p. 147.

than merely human because he remains divine.²⁷ This view is still popular among commentators.²⁸

Deciding the sense of Phil 2.7c is hard, as we saw Reumann and Gnllka noting. Although the case for unqualified identity (as per the former line of interpretation above) is not straightforward, the latter approach shows that it is easy to give an account of the phrase which does not compromise the humanity of Jesus. A Paulinist of the first century expressed Jesus' humanity in similar terms to those of Paul in Philippians, using cognates of *ὁμοιώμα*, when he commented that Jesus was 'made in every way like (*κατὰ πάντα ... ὁμοιωθῆναι*) his brothers', and so was tested 'in every way like us (*κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα*), though without sin' (Heb. 2.17; 4.15). The point of referring to Hebrews here is not theological, but linguistic: "likeness" need not be an incomplete likeness (and thereby imply that Jesus was less than properly human). Hence, even if Paul thought that Jesus differed *in some respects* from other humans, he could still view Jesus as human being among other human beings on earth.

(ii) Moving to 'being found in *appearance* as a man' (*σχῆματι εὐρέθεις ὡς ἄνθρωπος*), the term *σχῆμα* is often taken to refer to outward form, irrespective of whether that reflects true nature or not. Being 'found' is idiomatic (cf. French *se trouver*); it is not 'most curious', but standard biblical Greek.²⁹ The other place where Paul uses the noun *σχῆμα* conveys no disjunction between appearance and reality. In 1 Cor. 7.31 'the appearance of this world' (*τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου*) which is passing away is not in any respect in contrast to its character. The world here consists of marriage, rejoicing, commerce and the like (1 Cor. 7.29–30), and these are the very things which constitute both the

27 Handley C.G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1889), p. 39; Marvin R. Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), p. 59.

28 Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians* (Leicester: IVP, 1980), p. 98; Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 213; G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 153.

29 Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus*, p. 534. Additionally, contra Carrier's assertion that this 'found' language 'entails someone did the finding, and mistook him for a man', there is no sense of mistake necessary, or even of active finding in the passive of *εὐρίσκω*. Cf. e.g. Philip's supernatural journey when *εὐρέθη εἰς Ἄζωτον* (Ac. 8.40), and see C. Kingsley Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. Volume II: Introduction and Commentary on Acts xv–xxviii* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), p. 435. Barrett distinguishes between a 'situational' usage, as in e.g. Lk. 9.36 (*εὐρέθη Ἰησοῦς μόνος*) when Elijah and Moses disappear after the transfiguration, alongside the sense of 'arrival' in Ac. 8.40. Neither necessarily implies a particular party finding him, still less making a mistake. The idiom would merit further investigation, alongside the use of the niphil of *מָצָא* in Hebrew.

world *qua* society and its appearance: they are what this world is about (cf. 7.33: τὰ τοῦ κόσμου). Otherwise there would be no logic to Paul's argument in the verse, that those who deal with the world should be as those who do not, because the form of this world is passing away.

To come to Romans 8.3, it is notable that Paul talks there of the 'likeness of *sinful* flesh', which suggests that he may well be thinking that there is a point of discontinuity between Jesus and other humans in the matter of sinfulness. 2 Cor. 5.21 probably confirms this. Moreover, in Romans 8.3, the ensuing references to Jesus as a sin-offering, and especially the statement that sin is condemned 'in the flesh' (i.e. in the flesh of Jesus) mean that it is very difficult to attribute to Jesus a non-human or non-physical constitution.

Jesus' Jewish Birth, "Coming", Name and Family

Beyond his humanity in general, Jesus came from Israelite stock (Rom. 9.5), and was therefore a descendant of Abraham (Gal. 3.16). He was a Jew in ethnic terms (Gal. 4.4), and 'born under the Law' here might suggest not just Jewish ethnicity but perhaps being born into a culture of religious Law-observance.³⁰ More specifically, Jesus is 'born of the seed of David according to the flesh' (γενόμενος ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα) in Rom. 1.3 (cf. 15.12: 'root of Jesse') in line with the traditions of the messiah son-of-David.³¹ The natural implication here is that his earthly genealogy can be traced back to David.³²

30 On the other hand, it might simply imply that Jesus, as a Jew, was under the obligation to obey the covenantal Law.

31 As Novenson comments, various passages suggest that even at this late date Davidic ancestry could be assumed to be traced. See Matthew Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and its Users* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 85. See e.g. *C1IP* §45; *m. Ta'an.* 4.5.

32 Contra Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus*, p. 575, who translates the clause 'made from the sperm of David, according to the flesh'. This is very hard to take in an allegorical sense (*Historicity of Jesus*, p. 575 and n. 83), given the qualification κατὰ σάρκα. Similarly, the point that Paul never uses γίνομαι to mean 'be born' is irrelevant, because Paul does not frequently in his letters refer to people being born: where he uses γεννάω, he is referring to the immediate parents, and so this would not work in the genealogical sense of Rom. 1.3, because David did not beget Jesus. Carrier misses the obvious fact that ἐκ (τοῦ) σπέρματος ... is a common Septuagintal expression, corresponding to Hebrew *mzr'* ... or *min-hzr'* ..., and meaning 'from the descendants of...'. More specifically, the 'seed of David', in the sense of David's descendants, is a common theme from the historical books of the Hebrew Bible to 4 *Ezra*. See 2 Sam. 22.51; 1 Kgs 2.33; Ps. 18.50 (Gk 17.51); *Pss. Sol.* 17.4; Jn 7.42; 4 *Ez.* 12.32 syr. There is

Paul places a theological interpretation upon Christ's birth, noting that it is both a part of history and the result of divine action: 'But when the fullness of time had come (ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου), God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law...' (Gal. 4.4). Jesus' advent is the consequence of divine initiative, but it takes place in time (χρόνος).

Just prior to this in Galatians is an explicit reference to that advent:

'Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, "and to his seeds", as if it were about plural seeds. Rather it is about one: "to your seed", who is Christ (καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὃς ἐστὶν Χριστός). What I mean is this. The Law added 430 years later does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thereby annul the promise. For if the inheritance depended on the Law, it would no longer depend on the promise. God, however, did give it to Abraham through a promise. Why, then, the Law? It was added because of transgressions *until the Seed, to whom the promise was made, came* (ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπήγγελται)...' (Gal. 3.16–19a)

Shortly after this, Paul refers to the 'coming' of Christ-faith, which is clearly an arrival in the human sphere (Gal. 3.23, 25). Almost identical language to that in Gal. 3.19 (ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ) appears in 1 Corinthians in reference to the time until Jesus' second advent (ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ in 1 Cor. 11.26). The statement in Galatians about the seed 'coming' (ἐρχομαι) points strongly to, from Paul's vantage-point, a 'coming' of Jesus into the world common to Paul and the Galatians. The seed unambiguously refers to Jesus, as the beginning of the passage cited above establishes.³³

With respect to his personal name, Jesus is a very standard Jewish name. It is the same as the biblical Hebrew name "Joshua" (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, or in e.g. Neh. 12.26: יֵשׁוּעַ) whose name in the Greek versions of the Old Testament is spelled Ἰησοῦς, as Paul spells Jesus' name. According to one calculation, it is the sixth most common male name among Palestinian Jews between 330 BCE–200 CE.³⁴ Never, as far as I know, is Joshua-Jesus the name of an angel.³⁵ Here Gullotta's

no need to appeal to a cosmic sperm bank in heaven, nor is such a notion 'so easily read out of this scripture' (*Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 576–577).

33 E.g. Franz Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), p. 246. I cannot find discussion of Gal. 3.19 in *Historicity of Jesus*.

34 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 85.

35 Carrier attempts to argue that there is precedent for a heavenly Jesus in Philo's interpretation of Zechariah. First, Carrier states without any sense of there being debate that

observations about the prosopography of angels are important.³⁶ In Paul's day, the process of naming good angels was not very far advanced among Jews, but there is a consistent pattern: Daniel mentions Gabriel and Michael; Tobit adds Raphael; *1 Enoch* has these three as well as (again, leaving aside demons) Uriel, Raguel, Michael, Sariel (or Sarakiel or Suriel), Jerahmeel, and Fanuel (Penuel), as well as Zateel. Even if there may occasionally be other kinds of names for angels, the overwhelming impression is that these names are formed with the *-el* suffix. From Jesus' name, by contrast, everything suggests he is a human being and a Jew.

We have seen that Paul refers to, but does not name, Jesus' mother (Gal. 4.4).³⁷ We gather from 1 Cor. 9.5 that he had brothers who went on to missionize in his name; later in that letter Jesus was known to someone called James (1 Cor. 15.7), but we only hear from Galatians that James was one of these brothers (Gal. 1.19).³⁸ As has already been observed for the case of Jesus, James/Jacob (*γ'κβ*, Ἰάκωβος) is also a traditional Jewish name, Jacob being the progenitor of

there is in Zechariah 'a high priest crowned king in heaven named "Jesus Rising" (*Historicity of Jesus*, p. 200), who, secondly, via Philo becomes a heavenly figure. The problem here, however, is that the 'Rising' or (in the Hebrew) 'Sprout' figure is either Zerubbabel or an eschatological figure, but cannot be Joshua. (i) The 'Rising'/'Sprout' is unlikely to be Joshua because the term's associations are not priestly but Davidic (Jer. 23.5; 33.15). (ii) In Zech. 3.8, Joshua and his associates are seen in 3.8 not as the fulfilment but as the harbingers of what is to come (including the coming of the Branch/*Anatolē*). (iii) In Zech. 6.12, the *Anatolē* will build the temple, and this in Zechariah is emphatically the role of Zerubbabel (4.9), although it is also possible that the temple building in 6.12 is an eschatological event, in which case the *Anatolē* is a different figure altogether. (iv) Mark Boda, *The Book of Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), p. 398, notes, additionally, that in the Hebrew, the introductory phrase *hnh-γš* in 6.12 always in the Hebrew Bible introduces a figure distinct from the addressee. Hence in 6.12, Joshua is being addressed about someone else, not himself. (v) The reference to 'between the two' (6.13) refers to the priest (Joshua) and the *Anatolē*, and therefore Joshua and the *Anatolē*/Branch are in Zech. 3.8 clearly different figures. (vi) These observations (except obviously for the point about *hnh-γš*) apply equally to LXX Zechariah. If anything, the Greek text is even clearer in distinguishing between the *Anatolē* and Joshua, because LXX Zech. 6.13 states that the priest will be at the right hand of, not on, the throne. (vii) In terms of the reference to Philo, to which Carrier appeals for the heavenly interpretation of this figure, *Confusion of Tongues* 62–63 makes no mention of the name Jesus.

36 Gullotta, 'Richard Carrier's Doubts', pp. 326–328.

37 If we were forced to guess her name, we might guess "Mary"! Mary was by a considerable stretch the most common name for Jewish women.

38 There is no hint, *pace* Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus*, p. 588, that James and John were brothers. Indeed, the word order with Cephas intervening (Ἰάκωβος καὶ Κηφᾶς καὶ Ἰωάννης) virtually excludes this, unless all three were brothers!

and synonymous with Israel. It is the 11th most popular male name for Palestinian Jews of the time.³⁹ The view that ‘the brothers of the Lord’ just means ‘any baptized Christian whatever’ does not work for 1 Cor. 9.5, since if Paul were talking about the right of every Christian he could simply have used that general category without adding apostles and Cephas; it would be especially odd if the most general category of the three were sandwiched between ‘apostles’ and ‘Cephas’.⁴⁰

Paul refers to the fact that Jesus’ brothers and Cephas were married (1 Cor. 9.5), and the implication is probably that Jesus (at least to Paul’s knowledge) had not been: Jesus would have been a much more impressive precedent to cite for the right of Christians to marry, so the silence is a loud one. We do not know why he was not married: he may have submitted to what Geza Vermes calls ‘prophetic celibacy’, or merely may not have reached before his death the age by which most Jewish men married.⁴¹

Jesus’ Bodily Existence

There is every reason to assume that Jesus had a normal human body. He had a body, or σῶμα (e.g. Rom. 7.4; cf. 1 Cor. 10.16), which can be likened to bread, and Romans 8.3 seems to refer to Jesus’ flesh: ‘God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering, and so he condemned sin in the flesh.’ The logic of Paul’s argument seems to demand that Jesus came in flesh, or else God would not have condemned sin in the (or in *that*) flesh. This body contained αἷμα (1 Cor. 11.23–26). Purely heavenly beings in Jewish literature are not, as far as I know, envisaged as having flesh and blood. Celsus’s Jewish source in the *Contra Celsum*, at least, was very clear that the blood of Jesus was ‘ichor such as flows in the veins of the blessed gods’!⁴² (Further references to Jesus’ blood are noted in the treatment of Jesus’ death below.) He can break things

39 At least according to the evidence of 330 BCE–200 CE. See Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 85.

40 Thus Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus*, p. 585. Similarly, in Galatians 1, James is clearly being disambiguated from other people called James, and referring to him simply as a Christian would not do this. Carrier takes the phrase to mean Christians, on the basis of Romans 6 and 8, adding ‘and in particular, Christians *below* apostolic rank’ (*Historicity of Jesus*, 586), but this qualification makes the background in Romans 6 and 8 very difficult to maintain. Cf. also Price, ‘Jesus at the Vanishing Point’, p. 65.

41 On prophetic celibacy, see Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM, 1973), pp. 99–102.

42 Origen, *Cels.* 1.66, where Celsus’ Jew is citing Homer, *Iliad* 5.340.

such as bread according to 1 Cor. 11.24, although Paul did not necessarily subscribe to a Lucretian view that only a physical body can exert force on another physical body. Mythicists often emphasise that Paul appears to have received 1 Cor. 11.23–26 by special revelation (a position to be evaluated in the section on Jesus' teaching below). Even if this were so, the content envisages the pre-resurrection Jesus ('the night he was handed over') breaking bread in people's presence (τοῦτο ἔσθι) and speaking (εἶπεν, λέγων) to people he addresses with the 2nd person plural (ὑπερ ὑμῶν, ποιείτε ἄλλοις, πίνετε). Jesus here also envisages his audience continuing this practice in his memory. If Paul received this knowledge by revelation, he viewed that revelation as depicting a historical episode. It is hard, at least for me, to imagine this taking place in the firmament, especially as Paul draws such a direct line of continuity between Jesus' institution of the ritual and the Corinthians' celebration of it, in the transition from verses 23–25 to verse 26.

Two more general points can be made here.

First, Paul draws a distinction between the normal physical body which Jesus possessed prior to his death, on the one hand, and his glorious risen body on the other. There is a clear demarcation between a prior presence with an audience expected to repeat the memorial meal, and absence from those carrying out this repeated eucharist now (1 Cor. 11.23–26). References to the glorious body of Jesus are to the resurrection body. In Phil. 3.21, his glorious body is the body he possesses in Paul's present, and this is also a kind of body attainable by other normal human beings who are Christ-followers. In other words, Paul is not talking here about an exclusively divine or angelic substance unique to Christ. The analogy of Jesus' resurrection and that of Christian human beings more widely is common in Paul.⁴³ This analogy suggests strongly that, during his pre-resurrection life, Jesus possessed a body like those of other humans. One can go further and say that the resurrections are not just analogous but organically linked, that of Jesus being the 'first-fruits' of the general resurrection (1 Cor. 15.20).

Secondly, to return to the analogy of angels, we can note that the kind of experiences which Jesus goes through according to Paul (birth, suffering, death, etc.) are not typically attributed to angels. In the book of *Tobit*, the angel Raphael calls himself Azariah but is only pretending to be human, and admits it in the end: 'All the days I was visible to you, you watched me, but I did not really eat or drink anything. You were seeing a vision.' (Tob. 12.19). There is no sense of Jesus being like this in Paul. Galatians 4.14 ('you welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus') is a slender basis on which to posit an angelic

43 See also Rom. 8.11 and 1 Cor. 6.13–14; 1 Cor. 15.13, 16, 20.

Christology in Paul, as most recognise. It is simply not true that 'In this verse Paul calls Christ an angel.'⁴⁴ Most scholars take Paul to be moving a step higher from 'angel' to 'Christ'.⁴⁵

Jesus' Ministry

If Rom. 15.8 refers to Jesus becoming 'a servant of the circumcised' (διάκονον ... περιτομῆς),⁴⁶ it reinforces the impression that his fellow Jews constituted the sphere of his work (so also perhaps 'first to the Jew' in Rom. 1.16). This impression is reinforced in 1 Thess. 2.14–16, on which more later.

Presumably Paul probably thought that Jesus appeared after the resurrection to people whom he already knew. Otherwise, they would not have known that the same person who died had also risen.⁴⁷ In the course of Jesus' pre-resurrection ministry, then, someone called Cephas may well have been prominent (1 Cor. 15.5). The arguments of Dale Allison, that Cephas is one and the same person as Peter, include Pauline evidence, which even taken alone, is very strong.⁴⁸ (The identification makes little difference to the present argument, however, because "Peter" is only named as such in Gal. 2.7–8, verses which are of little consequence for the question in hand.) A similar prominence to that of Cephas belongs to a group called 'the apostles' (1 Cor. 15.7). Cephas and John seem, as the Jerusalem "pillars" along with James (Gal. 2.9), to have inherited the mantle of Jesus, and so may have been particularly prominent in his circle. Jesus may even have had a following of around 500 people in his lifetime

44 Bart Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), p. 252.

45 E.g. Mussner, *Galaterbrief*, p. 308.

46 For a dissenting view, see Joshua D. Garraway, 'The Circumcision of Christ: Romans 15.7–13', *JSNT* 34 (2012), pp. 303–322.

47 Pace e.g. Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 516–517, 524–525, with the claim that Paul does not say that Cephas, the twelve, or the pillars etc. followed Jesus during his (Jesus') lifetime. On the recognition point, see Martin Hengel & Anna Maria Schwemer, *Jesus und das Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), p. 173. Paul, as an ἔκτρομα, was an exception.

48 Dale Allison, 'Peter and Cephas: One and the Same', *JBL* 111 (1992), pp. 489–495, asks, for example: 'Does it not stretch credulity to maintain that earliest Christianity had among its outstanding leaders two men with exceedingly rare (sur)names or nicknames with the same sense?' (p. 492). In support of this, the fact that both have a ministry to the circumcised in Gal. 2.7–8, 9, is striking (p. 494). But Paul does not provide the explicit identification such as is found in Jn 1.42.

(15.6).⁴⁹ There were apostles before Paul himself was one: they included those in Jerusalem ‘who were apostles before me’ (Gal. 1.17), and Andronicus and Junia, also Christians before Paul, may have been among those who knew Jesus (Rom. 16.7).⁵⁰ Be that as it may, those included in the list in 1 Corinthians 15 very probably knew Jesus beforehand in order to be able to recognize him in the resurrection appearances.

Most strikingly in the list of the resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15 is that Paul refers, immediately after Cephas, to “the twelve” (τοῖς δώδεκα). The implication of this may have been that Jesus before the resurrection had a special, select body of twelve disciples. Two points perhaps emerge from this: first, that this twelve may have been representative of the nation of Israel, and second that Jesus therefore saw himself as standing over against them as a kind of divine figure.⁵¹ We should be careful, however, of drawing implications from implications. Moreover, Cephas may also have stood apart from the twelve in some way (1 Cor. 15.5).

Jesus’ Teaching

Some elements of Jesus’ teaching seem to be reflected in Paul’s letters, though the issue is complicated by the fact that it is not necessarily straightforward to distinguish in the epistles between what is the teaching of the earthly Jesus and what is revelation from the exalted Christ. This *caveat* will need to be borne in mind as we proceed. There are four main places where Paul refers to the instructions of Christ, and we will assess the mode of Paul’s reception of this instruction on a case by case basis.

49 Price gets around the difficulty of 1 Cor. 15 by claiming that vv. 3–11 are a later interpolation. See Robert M. Price, ‘Archetypal Apparitions’, in idem & Jeffery J. Lowder, eds. *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), pp. 69–104.

50 This makes impossible the arrival of faith during the time of Paul’s own preaching ministry, cf. Doherty, *Jesus – Neither God nor Man*, pp. 780–781 (epub edition).

51 Cf. on Jesus’ selection of the disciples in Mark, Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Black’s NT Commentary; London: A. & C. Black, 1991), p. 111: ‘The twelve represent the whole nation, since Israel consisted of twelve tribes. The tradition is united in affirming that Jesus appointed twelve men in addition to himself: in other words, Jesus is seen as in some sense standing over against the nation. Had he chosen eleven men to join him, he would still have been gathering together a nucleus of the true Israel (as did John the Baptist); but if the tradition is correct, then his choice of twelve men represents an implicit claim regarding his own status.’

First, Jesus appears to have had a zero-tolerance attitude to divorce, commanding those who were married to stay married (1 Cor. 7.10): ‘not I, but the Lord’ issues this instruction, as distinct from teaching which Paul himself has formulated (‘I, not the Lord’, 7.12; cf. also 7.25: ‘I have no command from the Lord’).

Secondly, Jesus is specifically cited as teaching that his workers should be paid (1 Cor. 9.14).

Third, eschatological instruction about the parousia and the resurrection may be attributed to him in 1 Thess. 4.15–16 (or 15–17), which would be significant as it would mean Jesus teaching about his own return after death. On the other hand, Paul’s formulation here is clearly a paraphrase rather than a quotation, referring as it does to the Lord in the third person and to believers as “we”.

Fourthly, according to 1 Cor. 11.23–26, Jesus quite clearly taught disciples to eat and drink in symbolic remembrance of what he had done (see further under “Jesus’ bodily existence” above, and “Last Supper” below).

In addition to these, a reference to a command of Jesus appears in 1 Cor. 14.37: ‘If anyone thinks they are a prophet or a spiritual person, they should recognize that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.’ It is clear from Paul’s language that he is claiming that a broad point he is making (ἃ γράφω ὑμῖν) is grounded in the authority of Christ.⁵² There is no appeal here to Jesus tradition.⁵³

Despite the caveat issued above, it should be noted that there is no particular reason to associate any of this material with heavenly revelation (which is not to conclude that it automatically stems from the historical Jesus). None of it is addressed to Paul, in contrast to the ‘my grace is sufficient for you’ oracle, which clearly is a heavenly revelation from Christ to Paul (2 Cor. 12.9: ‘he said to me...’). The first and second examples above, about divorce and wages, would to my mind be remarkably quotidian and casuistical as candidates for revelatory material (even without knowledge of the Synoptic parallels).⁵⁴ The third might be a more likely candidate, given the phrase ‘word of the Lord’.⁵⁵

52 See Christine Jacobi, *Jesusüberlieferung bei Paulus? Analogien zwischen den echten Paulusbriefen und den synoptischen Evangelien* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 214, on the vagueness.

53 Cf. Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* (AnBib; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 537; C. Stettler, ‘The “Command of the Lord” in 1 Cor 14,37 – a Saying of Jesus?’, *Biblica* 87 (2006), pp. 42–51. Michael Wolter, *Paulus: Ein Grundriss seiner Theologie* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 2011), p. 450 n. 54, is correct here.

54 For 1 Cor. 7.10–11, cf. Mk 10.9 with its context and parallels; for 1 Cor. 9.14, cf. Matt. 10.10b; Lk. 10.7, as well as 1 Tim. 5.18.

55 Though again, there are potential Synoptic parallels.

The fourth passage is not nearly as certain a case of heavenly revelation as is sometimes assumed: the language of ‘passing on’ (παραδίδωμι) and ‘receiving’ (παραλαμβάνω) can encompass a whole chain of tradition.⁵⁶ Special revelation of past events, while not unknown (e.g. Ac. 5.3), is much less frequent than one person passing on information to another. Moreover, 1 Cor. 14.37 is certainly not evidence, as Price assumes, that all these passages are ‘revelations that he [sc. Paul] has received in a mantic state.’⁵⁷ In 1 Cor. 14.37 Paul is neither quoting Jesus tradition, nor transcribing a heavenly revelation, but says that what he has written carries the authority of the Lord himself, and it certainly cannot be used to generalize about the other four cases above.

There are further places where Jesus’ teaching may be implicitly included by Paul. A dubious example might be that the language in Rom. 14.14 *may* suggest that Jesus relaxed the food laws, but on its own (i.e. without Mark 7) does not clearly imply this.⁵⁸ More promisingly, 2 Cor. 5.20 implies, by saying that Jesus’ ambassadors have a message about reconciliation with God, that Jesus’ own message was the same or substantially similar (cf. 2 Cor. 5.18–20 *in toto*). Paul refers to the ‘law of Christ’ as fulfilled in bearing one another’s burdens (Gal. 6.2). Similarly, he speaks of being subject himself to the law of Christ (ἔννομος Χριστοῦ), here implying becoming a slave for others (1 Cor. 9.19, 21).

Jesus’ Character

Carrier’s *Historicity of Jesus* makes reference to the idea that ‘no personal quality’ of Jesus is noted by Paul, and it is to this area that we turn now.⁵⁹ In terms of the characteristics of Jesus which can be discerned, we can begin with qualities clearly assigned to his pre-resurrection activity. Obedience to God is prominent in two passages (Rom. 5.18–19; Phil. 2.8). Love is evidently a

56 For cases of παραλαμβάνω in this context, see e.g. Mk 7.4; BJ 2.357. On this terminology, see the helpful discussion in Jacobi, *Jesusüberlieferung bei Paulus*, 275–276.

57 Robert M. Price, ‘The Abhorrent Void’, in R. Joseph Hoffmann (ed.), *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2010), pp. 109–118 (116). Cf. also Price, ‘Vanishing Point’, p. 63, for the comment that commands of the Lord ‘may as well be midrashically derived inferences from Old Testament commands of Adonai in the Torah, or even prophetic mandates from the Risen One.’

58 See the cautionary remarks in Wolter, *Paulus*, p. 451.

59 Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus*, p. 514, citing Billy Wheaton & Joy Fuller, *Hooks and Ladders: A Journey on a Bridge to Nowhere with American Evangelical Christians* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009), p. 31.

feature of Jesus' willingness to die for others (Gal. 2.20). These come together in Christ not pleasing himself, but serving God and others: 'For even Christ did not please himself, but – as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."' (Rom. 15.3). Paul identifies Jesus' trait of bearing with and serving others as something characteristic of him, and which is to be imitated by Christians ('have the same mindset with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus', Rom. 15.5; cf. Phil. 2.5).⁶⁰ To pick up the point made about the law of Christ noted in the previous section, Paul describes his own observance of this 'law' – involving seeking the good of others – as the imitation of Christ (1 Cor. 10.31–11.1). Similarly, as we have seen, Christ's 'law' is defined in Galatians as bearing other's burdens (Gal. 6.2), from which we might deduce that this was Christ's own attitude: this is confirmed by the passages about Jesus' vicarious death,⁶¹ which – as we will see – Paul viewed as a voluntary act of obedience to the Father on Jesus' part. Jesus is also known for his *πραΰτης* and *ἐπιείκεια*, 'meekness and gentleness' (2 Cor. 10.1); there is a strong probability that this refers to an earthly ministry, as it suggests an interaction with the vulnerable. Notoriously, according to some scholars, Jesus' earthly life in Paul is summarized under the heading of "the faithfulness of Christ" (*πίστις Χριστοῦ*), although on this point I am personally not persuaded. In fact, Paul goes further and makes the remarkable claim that Jesus was sinlessly perfect: he 'knew no sin' (2 Cor. 5.21).

Certain qualities are attributed by Paul to the present character of the risen Christ. 'Love' is again very significant (Rom. 8.35; 2 Cor. 5.14; Phil. 2.1). Jesus is also faithful (2 Cor. 1.19–20) and characterized by 'grace' (1 Cor. 16.23), 'compassion' (Phil. 1.8) and 'mercy' (1 Cor. 7.25). Although specifically assigned to the post-resurrection Jesus, these might well have been regarded as reflecting his character prior to that. The repeated references to "grace" and "peace" coming from Christ suggest that he may have been known for these attributes.⁶² Grace is given almost as the hallmark characteristic of Christ in 2 Cor. 13.13, alongside the love of God. The principal attribute of Christ which is perhaps discontinuous with his earthly ministry is his present 'power' (2 Cor. 12.9; cf. Rom. 1.3–4), since 'poverty' and 'weakness' were features of his earthly life (2 Cor. 8.9; 13.4).

60 Michael Labahn, 'The Non-Synoptic Jesus', in Tom Holmén & Stanley Porter, eds. *The Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 1933–1996 (1945).

61 Rom. 3.25–26; 4.25; 5.6–8; 1 Cor. 15.3; Gal. 1.4; 2.20, etc.

62 Grace and peace: e.g. 2 Cor. 1.2; Gal. 1.3; Phlm. 3. Grace alone: Rom. 16.20; 2 Cor. 12.9–10; Gal. 1.6; 6.17; Phil. 1.2; 3.9; 4.23; 1 Thess. 5.28; Phlm. 25.

The Suffering of Jesus

That Jesus' life seems to have been characterised by sufferings is sufficiently clear from Paul's letters on their own. As has just been noted, Jesus was poor and weak in his pre-resurrection life (2 Cor. 8.9; 13.4). Paul's statement about suffering (θλιψις) in 1 Thess. 1.6, implies an imitation of Jesus' suffering, and Rom. 8.17 has the same idea ('we share in his suffering'). Some of the references to suffering might be confined to his execution (on which see below), but the facts that (a) missionaries see their own non-fatal sufferings reflecting the sufferings of Christ and (b) Christ's sufferings are *plural* (e.g. 2 Cor. 1.5: τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, and cf. Phil. 3.10), suggest something more broadly characteristic of Jesus' life. Similarly, the enigmatic reference to the wounds of Jesus which Paul shares (Gal. 6.17) are perhaps a reference to beatings (cf. Paul's in 2 Cor. 11.24), though they may refer to the crucifixion specifically.⁶³ A more extensive sense of suffering is implied in the embracing of poverty for the sake of others' salvation (2 Cor. 8.9, as noted above⁶⁴). To mention Rom. 15.3 again, he was subject not only to physical suffering but also verbal abuse (ὀνειδισμοί). There are many Scriptural verses Paul could have chosen here; he decided to choose one about Jesus during his earthly ministry willingly suffering insults.⁶⁵ The implication of 1 Thess. 2.14–16 was that he was disbelieved by majority of, or the most powerful, Jews during his ministry. (Mythicists must believe with absolute certainty that this passage is an interpolation, a degree of confidence which is surely not justified.)⁶⁶ Again, all this language here of Jesus' suffering would be strange to predicate of an angelic being; on the occasions where we

63 For the more specific reference, see e.g. Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, p. 394.

64 2 Cor. 8.9 could, however, highlight the contrast between glory of heaven and relative poverty of earth.

65 Rom. 15.3–4 does not say what Carrier (*Historicity of Jesus*, p. 516) wants it to say, viz. that 'we have to learn things about Jesus by discovering them in scripture.' Again, there is no reason why this particular item should have been selected, had it not been for previous knowledge that Jesus had been the victim of abuse. The reference to Rom. 15.25–26 on the same page is rather baffling (Rom. 16.25–26?), and similarly 1 Cor. 4.6 cannot bear the hypothesis that Paul denies a community of witnesses to Jesus (again, *Historicity of Jesus*, 516): Paul merely states that Peter et al. are not an occasion for pride.

66 See the sweeping arguments in Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 566–569. The claim that the passage is authentic is hardly the preserve of 'diehards': see for example the bibliography in Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, pp. 399–400 n. 56, where his perception is that seeing the passage as authentic 'appears to be the trend of recent scholarship'. The list of proponents of authenticity in that footnote at the very least makes a nonsense of the claim that it is some kind of extremist 'diehard' position.

do see the sufferings of angelic beings, it is in reference to the eschatological punishments of demons (e.g. Matt. 8.29).

The Last Supper and Jesus' Arrest

On one night (ἐν τῇ νυκτί) in his final days, Jesus had a meal with an inner-circle, presumably of disciples (1 Cor. 11.23–24: 'he took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it'). Jesus instructed these disciples about his presumably imminent death (11.23–26): the breakage of the bread signified the breakage of his body (11.24), and drinking symbolised his disciples 'ingesting' the new covenant (11.25). In the course of this instruction, Jesus instituted a memorial meal by issuing to his audience before his death the command that this activity be repeated (11.24–25: 'do this in remembrance of me' x2). As noted above, how Paul gained this information is irrelevant to the fact that he regards the events 'received' as having taken place in history. 1 Corinthians 10–11 show that this practice was followed, and Paul calls it the Lord's supper, or 'the Lordly meal' (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, 11.20). This is a crucial point, because as noted above, Jesus addresses an audience *before his death* whom he envisages will subsequently, after his death, carry out his instructions and repeat the eucharistic meal 'for my remembrance' (εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν, in both 11.24 and 11.25). How could they remember what he had done before his death if he had never visited earth?

While his death is in one sense a voluntary act (Gal. 1.4; 2.20), Paul also talks about Jesus being 'handed over' (παραδίδωμι). In the absence of reference specifically to betrayal, this could simply be a theological interpretation of Jesus' arrest, as is clearly the case in Rom. 8.32; the same could apply in Rom. 4.25 and 1 Cor. 11.23 as well.

Jesus' Death and Burial

Presumably shortly after this, Jesus died.⁶⁷ There is no question for Paul that the risen and exalted Jesus is numerically identical to the person who ministered, suffered and died: in the frequent death-resurrection formulae, the subject is the same (e.g. Rom. 8.34; 1 Cor. 15.3–4; 2 Cor. 5.15; 1 Thess. 4.14), so that Paul can speak, for example, of the "cross" of the "Lord" (Gal. 6.14). Just as Paul

67 Rom. 14.9, 15; 2 Cor. 5.14–15; Gal. 2.21; Phil. 2.8; 3.10; 1 Thess. 5.10, etc. An important parallel to the treatment here is Dale Allison's 'Experiment: The Death of Jesus Based on Paul Alone', in *Constructing Jesus*, pp. 392–403.

had a theological interpretation of Jesus' birth being part of history (Gal. 4.4), so he does with the historical timing of Jesus' death:

'You see, at just the right time (*κατὰ καιρόν*), when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.' (Rom. 5.6)

Paul also refers to Jesus' death taking place 'in the present time' (*ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ*) in Rom. 3.25–26. More precisely, what Paul says in Romans 3 is that God 'presented' (*προέθετο*) Jesus so that in the present time his (God's) justice and righteousness might be demonstrated – the noun *ἔνδειξις* ('indication', 'proof', 'demonstration') is repeated twice here. While the verb *προτίθημι* does not necessarily imply publicity (though it may), the language of proof or demonstration does, unless the proof is to angels and demons – who are nowhere to be found in the surrounding context. There is no sense, then, that the death was an event taking place 'in outer space'.⁶⁸

68 So Richard Carrier, frequently in *Historicity of Jesus*: sometimes this is presented as something like a plausible hypothesis (*Historicity of Jesus*, p. 515, where the crucifixion 'could have occurred in outer space'), while in other places it is presented as a certainty (pp. 519, 522). Carrier's theory depends heavily on an implausible reconstruction of the *Ascension of Isaiah* (of which 1 Cor. 2.8 is a 'direct paraphrase' in *Historicity of Jesus*, p. 47) as attesting to Jesus' crucifixion in the firmament. Some elements which Carrier does not like are relegated in various ways: e.g. the eighteen-month resurrection is 'absurd', although it was apparently not to the *Apocryphon of James* (NH I 2.19–22) or to the Valentinians and Ophites (Irenaeus, *AH* 1.3.2; 1.30.14); *Asc. Isa.* 11.1–3 is taken to be a 'rewrite' of *Bar.* 3.38, though it must have been a comprehensive rewrite, as its resemblance is thin in the extreme; paragraphs inconvenient for Carrier's theory 'have been inserted' (*Historicity of Jesus*, p. 39), with 'humans interpolated into the story' (p. 42). The difficulty is that the textual criticism tends to be carried out in the conjectural realm, with hardly any reference to the Ethiopic, Latin and Slavonic versions. Two passages seem particularly difficult for the theory:

(1) In *Asc. Isa.* 10.8, the descent from (i) the heaven/firmament to (ii) the world to (iii) to the dead, though not as far as (iv) hell, is present in all versions – Ethiopic, Latin and Slavonic. The only uncertainties are (a) that the Latin and Slavonic may conflate the realm of the dead with hell, so that Jesus does go as far as hell, and (b) two inferior Ethiopic mss., B and C (against ms. A, the Latin and the Slavonic), have Jesus descending only to the vault. The main texts thus have Jesus both in the world and among the dead. Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus*, p. 40, seems to have understood the descent 'to the firmament and to that world' as simply one event, whereas in all the versions the 'heavens' and the 'world' are distinct.

(2) Similarly, in *Asc. Isa.* 9.12–17, the idea that the crucifixion is carried out by demonic archons, and not in this world, is unlikely. There is no indication in *Ascension of Isaiah* 9 that the descent is to the firmament, and after his crucifixion Jesus descends to hell immediately afterwards, then rises on the third day and remains in the world

Other passages strongly imply the physicality of the death. Jesus was a corpse: the language of resurrection ‘from the dead’ (ἐκ νεκρῶν) after burial (on which see below) shows that Jesus belonged, temporarily at least, to the realm of the dead. This is language which Paul uses frequently.⁶⁹ It is instructive because it is a standard way of talking about the sphere of the dead:⁷⁰ Jesus is not just raised from death, but from the realm inhabited by multiple dead people (νεκρῶν). His ‘blood’ is mentioned specifically several times, suggesting a violent death, rather than an anodyne, everyday expiration.⁷¹ The language of Jesus being sacrificed carries the same implication (1 Cor. 5.7: ἐτύθη; cf. Rom. 3.25; 8.3), along with the flesh-and-blood metaphors of the passover lamb (1 Cor. 5.7) and perhaps the ‘sin-offering’ (Rom. 8.3). Jesus was executed and so died prematurely. Paul can even talk of the ‘dying’ (νέκρωσις) of Jesus’ body (2 Cor. 4.10).

In 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians and Philippians, that execution is explicitly labelled as a crucifixion, and this is also clearly implied in several other places as well.⁷² Of the multiple modes of crucifixion, Allison is right that Jesus would not have been simply hung up with ropes (witness, as noted above, the references to blood).⁷³ Further, if the reference to the ‘stigmata’ (Gal. 6.17) refers to Jesus’ (plural) wounds on the cross, then this was not a singular impalement.

1 Corinthians 2.8 states that it was not a mob-lynching, but an official verdict: he was condemned to crucifixion by ‘rulers of this age’ (τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου), which also might suggest that there were multiple authorities involved. The language of ἄρχοντες, ‘rulers’, certainly does not require a heavenly understanding of Jesus’ killers:⁷⁴ as Gullotta rightly notes, Paul uses the

for eighteen months. The reference to the ‘god of that world’ who stretches out his hand against Jesus is clearly modelled on Job 1–2, where Satan stretches out his hand against Job – an action clearly directed against a human being in the world.

69 Rom 4.24; 6.4; 6.9; 7.4; 8.11; 10.7; 1 Cor. 15.12; 15.20; Gal. 1.1; 1 Thess. 1.10. The only metaphorical usage is Rom. 6.13.

70 Cf. Deut. 18.11; LXX Ps. 87.5, 11; 113.25; Eccl. 9.3, 5; Wis. 4.18/19, etc.

71 Rom. 3.25; 5.9; cf. 1 Cor. 10.16; 11.25, 27.

72 Jesus is clearly associated with a cross or crucifixion in 1 Cor. 1.17–18, 23; 2.2, 8; 2 Cor. 13.4; Gal. 3.1; 6.12, 14; Phil. 2.8; 3.18, and more implicitly in Rom. 6.6; 1 Cor. 1.13; Gal. 2.19; 5.11; Phil. 3.18. The border between explicit and implicit is not a hard and fast one here.

73 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, p. 395.

74 Cf. Price, ‘Jesus at the Vanishing Point’, p. 63, as cited already above: ‘we should never guess from the Epistles that Jesus died in any particular historical context, only that the fallen angels (Col 2:15), the archons of this age, did him in, little realizing they were sealing their own doom (1 Cor 2:6–8)’.

term in Romans 13 clearly to refer to human rulers.⁷⁵ Indeed, Allison notes a host of reasons for seeing 1 Cor. 2.8 as a reference to earthly authorities.⁷⁶ In another passage, we learn that it was Judaeans in Judaea who were responsible for Jesus' death (1 Thess. 2.14–15), so contra Price we do have some indication of a historical and political context for Jesus' death.⁷⁷ These two passages (1 Cor. 2.8; 1 Thess. 2.14–15) together suggest the Jerusalem elites, and the expansive 'rulers of this age' perhaps implies a wider scope. This wider scope is confirmed by the fact that the actual procedure of crucifixion was probably carried out by Romans. The passages noted above referring to Jesus being 'handed over' may belong in this context as well. There is evidence for Jews themselves carrying out crucifixions in the Hellenistic period,⁷⁸ but not in the Herodian era.⁷⁹ The fact that Jesus was crucified does not, at least if we are confining ourselves to Pauline evidence, say much about why he was executed, although in connection with references to Jesus' Davidic messianism and rule (Rom. 1.3; 15.12) an implication perhaps deducible even from Paul alone may be the execution of a revolutionary and/or on a charge of *maiestas*.⁸⁰ A further implication of the 'last supper' passage is that Jesus foresaw his death (1 Cor. 11.23–25).⁸¹ More than that, Paul also notes that Jesus went to his death not only willingly but even by his own agency (Gal 1.4; 2.20; Phil. 2.8).

Executed this way, Jesus would have been regarded as cursed by God (cf. Gal. 3.13). Nevertheless, he was buried (1 Cor. 15.4; cf. Rom. 6.4),⁸² rather than being

75 Gullotta, 'Richard Carrier's Doubts', p. 332.

76 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, pp. 396–398. The plural usage is particularly resonant of earthly authorities, and also telling is the literary context where we see the 'debater of this age' (1 Cor. 1.20), the 'wisdom of this age' (2.6), and the wise person in this age (3.18). Cf. also the usage referring to the rulers of Jerusalem in Acts 3.17 and 13.27.

77 Price, 'Jesus at the Vanishing Point', p. 63.

78 David Chapman, *Ancient Jewish and Christian Perceptions of Crucifixion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 46–69.

79 Herod the Great may have instigated a crucifixion, though he did not carry it out. Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 160 n. 32, notes that Herod the Great bribed Antony to execute Antigonus. According to Dio, Antigonus was crucified, or at least bound to a stake and whipped, though Plutarch and Strabo say he was beheaded. See further Hengel & Schwemer, *Jesus und das Judentum*, p. 51 n. 64.

80 So Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, pp. 398–399.

81 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, p. 403.

82 I am unclear about Carrier's position on the burial. In *Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 196–197, 543–544, he talks of the burial taking place in heaven. In Richard Carrier, 'The Spiritual Body of Christ and the Legend of the Empty Tomb', in Robert M. Price & Jeffery J. Lowder, eds. *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005),

left to be eaten by birds as sometimes happened with victims of crucifixion.⁸³ He belonged to the realm of the dead (οἱ νεκροί), as noted above.⁸⁴ The burial of Jesus makes it additionally difficult to think that Jesus' death took place in outer space, unless of course he was buried there as well – along with all the other νεκροί from whose midst he was said to rise.⁸⁵

The Chronology of Paul and Jesus

Since we can only deduce from the undisputed epistles (cf. Pilate in 1 Tim. 6.13) a chronological position of Jesus relative to Paul's own, a judgment about when Jesus conducted his ministry depends on a judgment about Paul's activity. Here we are particularly involved in an artificial thought experiment, detaching Paul's letters from the rest of early Christian literature and taking into account only Paul and non-Christian sources.

To begin with, a rough *terminus a quo* for Paul's letter-writing can be detected from his geographical language. Perhaps most instructive is the fact that in Philippians Paul calls his addressees Φιλιππησίοι, a Latinism unique in Paul's usage of toponymics (Phil. 4.15).⁸⁶ This term fits the Roman status of the city of Philippi and its colonial name *Colonia Augusta Julia Philippensis*. It was initially Antony (after the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE), and formally Augustus in 27 BCE, who established Philippi as a Roman colony and gave it the *ius Italicum*.⁸⁷

pp. 105–219, on the other hand, he states that 'the first Christians, at least up to and including Paul, thought that Christ's "soul" was taken up to heaven and clothed in a new body, after leaving his old body in the grave forever' (p. 105). Cf. also 'Spiritual Body', p. 122, where according to Paul 'the body of Jesus remained in the grave'.

- 83 See Chapman, *Crucifixion*, pp. 101–109, 115, 263, on Jewish texts, and 108 n. 40, 156 n. 205 for non-Jewish Greek and Latin sources.
- 84 Romans 10.7 probably alludes to this earlier situation of Jesus, when it imagines bringing Jesus up from the dead (Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναγαγεῖν) on analogy to bringing him down from heaven.
- 85 Appeal to Adam's burial in paradise (located in the third heaven) in *Apocalypse of Moses* 37–42 is hard to justify as analogous to Paul's view of Jesus' burial. The date and religious background of *Ap. Mos.* is uncertain, and the burial of Adam is part of a particular narrative in which, having been forgiven, Adam is restored to the place from which he has been expelled (37.6). The paradise, or third heaven, where Adam is buried is the Garden of Eden. Hence his burial in paradise is a kind of interim salvation. See the Greek text in Gary A. Anderson & Michael E. Stone, eds. *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*. Second Edition (Atlanta: SBL, 1999).
- 86 Cf. the conventional Greek forms in 2 Cor. 6.11; 9.4; Gal. 3.1; 1 Thess. 1.1.
- 87 See Lightfoot, *Philippians*, pp. 50–52 and further 164–165 (on 4.15) for other names of the denizens of the town. He cites Stephanus of Byzantium as giving the name Φιλιππεύς, and

Therefore, 42 BCE is most probable as a *terminus a quo* if one is relying entirely on evidence internal to Paul.

A *terminus ad quem* for Paul's letter-writing can be established in the broadest sense from his reference to Aretas:

'In Damascus King Aretas's ethnarch was garrisoning the city of the Damascenes in order to arrest me, but I was lowered in a basket out of a window in the wall and slipped through his fingers.' (2 Cor. 11.32–33)

There are four Nabataean kings of this name:⁸⁸

Aretas I: early-mid second century BCE.⁸⁹

Aretas II: end of the second century BCE.⁹⁰

Aretas III: c. 87–62 BCE.⁹¹

Aretas IV: c. 8 BCE–40 CE.⁹²

Since the reference to Φιλιππίσιοι has established a *terminus a quo* of 42 BCE, only Aretas IV Philopatris can be the king mentioned in 2 Corinthians. Therefore the dates of the last Nabataean king of this name, 8 BCE–40 CE, are

also attributing to Polybius the term Φιλιππηνός (though the passage is lost). Φιλιππίσιος also appears in the title of Polycarp's letter (Irenaeus, *AH* 3.3.4; Clement, *Strom.* 4.13.92.4). For a recent survey of the fortunes of Philippi in antiquity (including its nomenclature), see C. Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, 'Philippi', in Robin Lane Fox (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Ancient Macedon: Studies in the Archaeology and History* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 437–452, and esp. 446–447 on naming: 'The great battle which took place in 42 BC outside the walls of Philippi between Octavian and Antony, and the republicans Brutus and Cassius, was a turning point in the history of the city. After the victory Antony formed the core of the first Roman colony by settling Roman veterans and struck in commemoration of his victory the first bronze coins of the colony, with the legend A(ntonii) I(ussu) C(olonia) V(ictrix) P(hilippensium). Nevertheless, it was Octavian, now entitled Augustus, who formally re-founded Philippi as a Roman colony. On the new bronze coins, Philippi was named COL(onia) AUG(usta) IUL(ia) PHIL(ippensis) IUSSU AUG(usti)'. See also the first part of Lukas Bormann, *Philippi: Stadt & Christengemeinde zur Zeit des Paulus* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

88 There was possibly also an earlier one before the ruler we call Aretas I: see Glen Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 18.

89 He was 'tyrant of the Arabs in 168 B.C.E.'. See Glen Bowersock, 'A Report on Arabia Provincia', *JRS* 61 (1971), pp. 219–242 (222), citing 2 *Macc.* 5.8. See further idem, *Roman Arabia*, pp. 18–19.

90 Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 22.

91 Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, pp. 24–26, 34.

92 Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 55.

respectively the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* for Paul's escape from Damascus. There is no external evidence for the relations between Aretas and Damascus here which enables us to be more precise.⁹³

Paul implies in Galatians that he was in Damascus on two occasions soon after his conversion (Gal. 1.17).⁹⁴ His letter writing is later, since his ministry activity in the Roman empire, where all his letters are addressed, does not begin until at least three years after this (Gal. 1.18, 21). Romans is written after a considerable amount of missionary activity has elapsed, as is evident from Paul's account in Rom. 15.19, and from the fact that by the time he writes to Rome, he has already wanted to visit the church there 'for many years' (Rom. 15.23). The epistle to the Galatians was written at least 11 or 14 years after his time in Damascus.⁹⁵ Let us say 14 years (probably the majority view), to simplify matters, since it will then match 2 Corinthians. The second letter to Corinth seems to imply reference to Paul's Christian experience 14 years before he wrote the letter (2 Cor. 12.2–4).⁹⁶ Calculating from the accession of Aretas IV in 8 BCE, then, this puts Galatians and 2 Corinthians for sure into the first century. The earliest conceivable dates for these two letters would then be 7 CE (8 BCE + 14 years) although they might have been written as late as sometime after 54 CE (40 CE, when Aretas died, + 14 years). Both epistles, therefore, are "early- to mid- first century". When Paul wrote Philemon, he could describe himself as 'now an old man' (πρεσβύτης νυνί, Phlm. 9). Assuming that Philemon is not drastically later than Galatians and 2 Corinthians, we can therefore put Paul's

93 Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 89: 'The negative results should be kept in mind: neither from archeological evidence, secular-historical sources, nor New Testament texts can Nabatean sovereignty over Damascus in the first century AD be proven.' Pace Carrier, who assumes without argument that the Aretas must be Aretas IV, and that there is evidence for a period in which he was in charge of Damascus (*Historicity of Jesus*, p. 261 n. 12).

94 Gal. 1.16–17 implies that Paul was in Damascus immediately around the time of his conversion, and then that he returned there after being in Arabia.

95 The number of years depends not only on the old canard of whether the 3 years of Gal 1.18 are included in the 14 years of 2.1, but also on whether or not 1.18 implies that the events of 1.15–17 are within three years post conversion.

96 John Knox, "'Fourteen Years Later': A Note on the Pauline Chronology", *JR* 16 (1936), pp. 341–349, argued that 2 Cor. 12 refers to his conversion, hence Paul was converted 14 years before he wrote 2 Corinthians. In idem, 'The Pauline Chronology', *JBL* 58 (1939), pp. 15–29, he also notes that Dibelius raises the question of whether the scene in 2 Cor. 12 is similar enough to 1 Cor. 15.1–11 to justify the identification (see personal conversation in 'Pauline Chronology', p. 17 n. 5).

letter-writing activity in some segment roughly in the first three-quarters of the first century CE.

How can we relate this to the timeframe of Jesus' activity?⁹⁷ Paul could be read in places as having been called by Jesus while the latter was on earth, as was the case with the twelve disciples: Paul received his apostleship through Christ (Rom. 1.5), and 'Christ sent me' (1 Cor. 1.17). Other passages rule this out, however: in Galatians 1.12 his conversion and call came 'through a revelation of Jesus Christ'. In some ways Paul still implies, however, that Jesus' coming was a recent event: 'But now' God has revealed his righteousness (Rom. 3.21) and has done so 'in the present time' (3.26), for example.

Some instructive information about the time-frame of Jesus' activity comes from Galatians (argued above as "early- to mid- first century"). According to Galatians, it was not many years after his conversion that Paul stayed fifteen days with Cephas, and met 'James the Lord's brother', (Gal. 1.18–19). Eleven or fourteen years later, then, Cephas and James – along with a certain "John" – were still alive (Gal. 2.1–10), and Cephas is around later still at Antioch (Gal. 2.11–14).⁹⁸ In light of this, the otherwise unclear temporal frame of the ministry of Jesus' brothers in 1 Corinthians 9 slots into place as referring to Paul's activity as contemporaneous with the ministries of Cephas and Jesus' (plural) brothers. If 14+ years into Paul's ministry, Jesus' brother James and disciple Cephas are still alive, then Jesus' activity could not have been much before Paul's own.

Additionally, it is strongly implied in 1 Corinthians 15.5–7 that Jesus was known during his lifetime, before the resurrection, not only to Cephas and James, but also to a defined group of twelve, to certain "apostles", and to some or all of the 500 others – all on the third day after his death or shortly afterwards according to 1 Corinthians 15.4–7. Since most of these 500 – in addition to Cephas and James – were still living when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 15.6), this has implications for chronology, given that relatively few have died. One might guess at an interval of a maximum of about 20 years if we are to

97 It is only from the Pastoral Epistles that we find out that Jesus was active during the prefecture of Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. 6.13), which takes us into 26–36 CE. Along different lines, one recent case for Jesus' and Paul's contemporaneity is Stanley Porter, *When Paul Met Jesus: How an Idea Got Lost in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Porter regards it as 'at least a strong possibility (if not a virtual certainty) that they must have known each other due to the chronological but also environmental factors.' (p. 22). Lack of space precludes interaction with this book here.

98 This assumes that ἔπειτα μετὰ ἔτη τρία (Gal. 1.18) is counting from Paul's conversion.

believe that ‘most of them are still alive till now’ (ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, 1 Cor. 15.6).

In sum, if Paul’s letter writing takes place sometime in the first three-quarters of the first century CE, then as stated Jesus’ death can only predate this by a quarter of a century at most. Therefore perhaps the best shorthand for what can be said (on the strength of Paul’s evidence alone) of the time-frame of Jesus is that his earthly life and ministry belonged to the ‘early to mid-Herodian period’.⁹⁹

Conclusion

It is not possible or necessary to summarise the preceding sections. I will simply highlight what I regard as the decisive pieces of evidence on, respectively, the historical activity and the humanity of Jesus in Paul’s letters.

Historical Activity

- Jesus, as the seed of Abraham, *came*. (Gal. 3.19)
- He was known as ‘meek’ and ‘gentle’, which implies interaction with the vulnerable. (2 Cor. 10.1)
- The night *before his death*, he instructed an audience which he expected to repeat his *pre-crucifixion* breaking of bread and the drinking of wine. He expected them to do this as a *remembrance of him*, which can only refer to a remembrance of what the pre-resurrection Jesus did. (1 Cor. 11.23–25)
- Jesus’ death was instigated by Judaeans (1 Thess. 2.14–15), unless refuge is sought in an interpolation, which is by no means certain.
- His death functioned as a ‘proof’ or ‘demonstration’. (Rom. 3.25–26)
- The resurrection appearances, however understood, probably require a recognition of a pre-Easter Jesus. Otherwise, the witnesses would know neither that a resurrection had taken place, nor that the person who had died and risen was Jesus.
- This activity on earth took place in the early- to mid-Herodian era.

99 “Herodian” is a favoured element in Horbury’s periodisation of Jewish history, and he defines the Herodian period from Herod the Great’s accession in 40 BCE to the death of Agrippa II in 100 CE. See e.g. William Horbury, *Herodian Judaism and New Testament Study* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), p. 3.

Humanity

- Jesus is designated a *man*, an ἄνθρωπος.
- Jesus is *born of a woman*, unless refuge is again sought in an interpolation. (Gal. 4.4).
- He is a Jew (Rom. 9.5; Gal. 4.4), a descendant of Abraham (Gal. 3.16) and David (Rom. 1.3).
- He is given a human, Jewish name.
- He had a body with flesh and blood (Rom. 8.3; 1 Cor. 11.23–25 *et al.*), a body different from his post-resurrection body.
- He belonged between his death and resurrection to the realm of the dead, as implied by the language of resurrection from ‘the dead’ (οἱ νεκροί), a term frequent both in Paul and elsewhere.

These points indicate not that both an earthly and a mythical Christ are consistent with the evidence and therefore viable interpretations, but that the mythical understanding of Jesus in Paul is entirely implausible. Some pieces of evidence cited in this article are clearer than others, hence the language of ‘perhaps’ and ‘suggesting’ in some places; in other places, however, there is clear evidence.

Some general comments about mythicist approaches can also be made. One area of consistent vulnerability is that mythicist hypotheses are very trigger-happy in excising supposed interpolations. It has been noted already that certain passages, in particular 1 Thess. 2.14–16, absolutely must be regarded as interpolations lest the whole mythicist edifice crumble. In this respect, the mythicist approach resembles Marcion, who also denied a fully earthly and human Jesus, but could only do so by excising passages such as Gal. 3.16.¹⁰⁰

There are also interpretations of alleged extra-canonical parallels which are tenuous in the extreme, but which form crucial background passages for the mythicist Paul. As we have seen, the hypothesis of Jesus’ name being taken as an angelic name from Zechariah 3 and 6, via Philo, is frankly impossible. Only slightly less so are the appeals to the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Apocalypse of Moses*. There is also a failure to recognize basic Greek or Septuagintal idiom in passages such as Rom. 1.3 and Phil. 2.7. Common to all these hypotheses is a

100 See Ulrich Schmid, *Marcion und sein Apostolos: Rekonstruktion und historische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 314–344. There is also no positive attestation for Marcion’s *Apostolos* of e.g. Rom. 1.3; 9.5; Gal. 4.4b or 1 Cor. 9.5.

neglect of the quotidian sense of passages in preference for a contorted appeal to the literature such as the pseudepigrapha noted above.¹⁰¹

The appeal to interpretations very different from the everyday sense of the language is a particular problem in the interpretation of Romans. Passages there alluding to Jesus' Davidic descent, suffering, death and burial must have been understandable by *people who had never met Paul*: on the mythicist view, the Roman Christians should have been able to recognize in those passages the heavenly sperm bank along with a crucifixion and burial in the firmament. The more one appeals to very particular passages from elsewhere which neither Paul nor his readers can be presumed to have known, or conversely to generalizations about what 'the ancients' believed,¹⁰² the harder it is to imagine that a congregation could have understood Paul.

On a final note, assessing the contribution of Paul to our knowledge of the historical Jesus can be described as a balancing act. On the one hand, especially when we come to Paul from the Gospels, as – given the canonical order – we inevitably do, we notice that Paul does not give us any sort of full picture of the episodes of Jesus' life. The question, however, is how surprised we should be by this. (As a parallel case, we can note the book of Acts, where the reference to the pre-Easter Jesus is comparable to that of Paul, yet we know that the author is neither uninterested in, nor ignorant of, that pre-Easter Jesus.) If we are expecting a fifth Gospel, then of course we will be disappointed that Paul in some sense claims no longer to know Christ according to the flesh. On the other hand, there is rather more in Paul than some scholarship leads us to believe. It is not just the extreme positions of scholars such as Carrier that are in view in this article, but also that reductive strand of mainstream scholarship, noted in the introduction, which stretches back in particular to Wrede and Bultmann. Both minimalist and mythicist stances can, I think, be challenged by the seven basketfuls of fragments which can be gathered from Paul's undisputed letters.¹⁰³

101 It is not clear to me why reading Paul in the light of the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Apocalypse of Moses* is legitimate, whereas reading the epistles in the light of the canonical Gospels is not. Neither these extra-canonical texts nor the Gospels are demonstrably pre-Pauline or known to Paul.

102 See e.g. Doherty's generalising in *Jesus – Neither God nor Man*, p. 31 (epub edition), referring to how 'the ancients viewed the universe'.

103 I am very grateful to James Carleton Paget, Mark Goodacre, Daniel Gullotta, Jonathan Linebaugh and Justin Meggitt for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.