

Rethinking Jesus:
When the Walk Fails the Talk

The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason.

—Benjamin Franklin

Rethinking Jesus: When the Walk Fails the Talk

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This book is dedicated to the vast number of sincere individuals who have given Christianity a place in their lives, only to become disillusioned and discouraged by its moribund shortcomings.

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But when his own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him,
for they said 'He is out of His mind.'

Mark 3:21

Preface

For those of you whose lives are filled with spiritual doubts, or who are conflicted and torn about what to believe...For the many of you who are unable to reconcile the expectations that come from trusting Jesus with your spiritual station in life...For those who find yourselves emotionally exhausted by the constant testing of your faith—who must rationalize nonsensical circumstances with excuses, unlikely explanations, and denials...For the disheartened whose prayers do not get answered—whose doubts seem legitimate, but who are afraid to act on them...Most importantly, for those who have looked back on their Christian life and felt little but disappointment and failure...*Rethinking Jesus* was written for you.

This book is designed to provide encouragement and confidence, toward the end that it frees readers from doubt and fear—the hope being that you can modify or even walk away from your faith if you choose to. It does this by providing a cognitive understanding of Jesus that is unbiased and closer to truth. It re-examines the story of the self-appointed Messiah: a megalomaniac and imposter who used hope as a tease.

You may be surprised to find that the unadulterated story of Jesus varies significantly from the one most Christians are familiar with. For centuries, Christian teachers and expositors have routinely cherry-picked the New Testament in their attempt to articulate a coherent tale of “the Lord” to an unsuspecting world. Their misguided efforts have beguiled many hope-filled believers whose lives do not reflect what they are being told. Taking a critical look at what they omit and fail to teach brings a new perspective to the table.

Rethinking Jesus is meant to restore readers’ view of reality and return them to a rational frame of reference. It will remove the blinders from those whose vision of truth has been narrowed and

distorted. This book offers a different look at the counterfeit Christ and the religion he created. It is unabashed in doing so. May it be eye-opening for some and life-changing for others.

—DB

Jesus of Nazareth

No one in history has had a greater impact on humankind than Jesus of Nazareth. His influence is pervasive even now, some two thousand years after he walked the earth. At the same time, there is likely no one who has generated more controversy than Jesus. Wars have been fought and millions have died over the question of who he was and what authority he should be granted in the lives of individuals, their cultures, and their civilizations. Even today, Christianity continues to impact and influence society at a multitude of levels.

Who was Jesus? *It has been said that Jesus was either who he claimed to be, or he was the greatest imposter in human history.* Author and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis wrote: “The man we are talking about either was (and is) just what he said, or something worse.”¹

We all know the basics of who Jesus said he was. He was unabashed in claiming to be the Hebrew Messiah, the Savior, and the only begotten Son of God.

However, when considering the intent of this book, we are compelled to view the life of Jesus from a different and more comprehensive perspective—one that is open-minded and willing to be harshly critical when necessary. We will boldly test biblical assertions and question authenticity where veracity seems lacking. Our sources will extend beyond the New Testament to external ports of information that are both plausible and reliable. Let us apply a critical eye to the complete and unadulterated story of Jesus. Who was this Jewish carpenter, really?

To understand how the worldview of Jesus developed into what it is now, necessity requires that we first examine the backdrop

¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55–56.

of the time in which he lived. A Hebrew prophecy set the stage for the life of Jesus, who called himself the Christ.

Daniel's Prophecy

The prophecy found in Daniel 9 is arguably the most important in the Hebrew Bible. It begins with a prophecy in the book of Jeremiah that speaks to the captivity of the Jews in Babylonia. Daniel was given the new prophecy by an angel in 536 BCE. *Daniel prophesied that from the time of a decree authorizing the rebuilding of Jerusalem (the Babylonians had destroyed it), there would be "seventy weeks of seven" before the Messiah would appear.* It was understood that those 490 days represented 490 years.²

There were four decrees that surfaced regarding this prophecy. Only one of them was the true decree. The first was issued by Cyrus, the king of Persia, in 538 BCE. The second was given by Darius I of Persia in 519 BCE. The third and fourth decrees were issued by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, in 444 BCE and 457 BCE. It is the majority opinion of Bible scholars that the decree issued in 444 BCE approximates the date when Jesus began his ministry at age 30. Four hundred and ninety years following the third decree of Artaxerxes yields a date of 46 CE. Therefore, Daniel's prophecy for the appearance of the Messiah turned out to be roughly coincidental to the appearance of Jesus. This added a measure of credibility to Jesus' messianic claim. However, some partisan believers have taken things even further. Using complex calculations based on various lunar/solar calendars, they posit that Jesus entered the East Gate of Jerusalem on the exact day prescribed by scripture.

Mary's Controversial Conception

Leaping forward 438 years, it is now 6 BCE, and the setting is no longer Babylonia. Rather, we are in Roman-occupied Israel. The Hebrew people are eager for the Messiah to appear, for his predicted time is close at hand. They believe he will remove the Roman oppressors and establish the new Davidic Dynasty. Mary, the future

² Fruchtenbaum, "The Messianic Timetable According to Daniel."

mother of Jesus, resides with her parents in the trading settlement of Nazareth, approximately ninety miles north of Jerusalem.

Mary may have been in her mid-teens when she was betrothed to Joseph, who was much older. Sometime after entering their one-year period of engagement, and in the absence of Joseph, Mary became pregnant. Since she was not yet married, she was vulnerable to prosecution under Jewish law. The penalty for becoming pregnant out of wedlock was death by stoning. It did not matter whether the pregnancy occurred due to rape or was of a consensual nature. Joseph, being elsewhere at the time of conception, was upset when he returned to find his bride-to-be pregnant (Matt. 1:19).

Mary and Elizabeth: Manufacturing an Explanation

It is perhaps not surprising that early in Mary's pregnancy she was sent "with haste" to her aunt Elizabeth's house in the "hill country of Judah" (Luke 1:39). If Mary had been raped, it is conceivable she would want to leave the area to avoid the embarrassment associated with such a thing. There is also the distressing prospect that she would be "put away" if her baby had been conceived out of wedlock and the father was deemed to be someone other than her future husband. Less clear is why Mary would flee after announcing she was pregnant with the Messiah. She might well have remained in her hometown to celebrate the divine event with family and friends. Taking flight as she did is more consistent with a pregnancy that was not of divine origin. However, it is probably not fair to second-guess the situation. Fleeing would also take her out of the jurisdiction of local authorities who might want to prosecute her under Hebrew law.

In all probability, Mary and Elizabeth gave considerable thought as to how the problems associated with Mary's untimely pregnancy could be sorted out. Fortunately, the time in which she lived coincided with the prophesied appearance of the Jewish Messiah. For that reason, it must have seemed reasonable for Mary to persist with her claim that she was miraculously pregnant with the Christ. Though it presented an enormous deception, it was

preferable to being put to death or having to live out her life as the outcast mother of an illegitimate child. Mary, however, wouldn't be the only one making the claim. In that day there were many who claimed to be the Messiah. Some of those who also made the claim were:

1. Simon of Peraea
2. Athronges
3. Simon bar Kokhba
4. Simon Magus
5. Dositheos (Nathanael) the Samaritan³
6. Taheb, the Samaritan messiah⁴

There were many lesser-known messianic claimants, as well.

Mary and Elizabeth possibly borrowed from the story of Samson in attempting to manage the delicate situation. Significant parallels exist between the two stories. Since divine intervention had occurred previously, it might seem reasonable for Mary to claim an angel also appeared to her.

Before his conception, Samson's peasant mother, who was barren, was visited by an angel of the Lord who told her that she would bear a son who would become a Nazarite. The Nazarite sect consisted of those who were dedicated to the special service of God. The angel further foretold that her son would "deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (Judg. 13). He would therefore be a type of savior. Samson typifies Hebrew saviors, who historically saved Jews from oppression instead of their sin.

Remarkably, Luke 1:36 states that Elizabeth was likewise pregnant "in her old age." This miraculous circumstance had been foretold by the angel Gabriel, as well. Finally, there was the prophetic verse in the book of Isaiah that foretold of a virgin conceiving and giving birth. Mary might have believed the sum of the correlations would support her contention that she was immaculately pregnant with the Messiah. Her fervent hope was that

³ "List of Jewish Messiah Claimants."

⁴ Prather, "Tahab—The Samaritan Messiah" and Barton, "The Samaritan Messiah."

the story would resonate with the Jewish community. Mary's only concern was that she needed to deliver a male baby. If not, she would at least be out of Nazareth, where condemnation would be substantial. Apart from that, the script had already been written, and it fit quite well with the circumstances Mary was facing.

Mary would tell Joseph of her "good fortune" and, after receiving assurance from yet another angel (Matt. 1:21), Joseph decided to believe her. Her story appeared to be working. However, there would be no point at which she could renege. Accordingly, Jesus would be told from early childhood that he was the Son of God as well as the Jewish Messiah.

Virgin Birth and Medical Considerations

Before proceeding further, perhaps the medical potential for virgin conception should be briefly reviewed. A data analysis published in the *British Medical Journal* (2013) found that "of 7,870 women who participated in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 45 women said they had a virgin pregnancy that wasn't related to reproductive assistance." To be clear, the study did not imply that no male partner was involved in these types of "virgin" births. Rather, "fooling around" is implicated. Teenage girls, whose reproductive health is at its prime, make up the preponderance of females claiming virgin birth⁵.

There have been reports of human virgin births occurring without a male partner through the process of parthenogenesis. Suffice it to say that parthenogenesis never produces a viable embryo of all-maternal origin. The extremely rare process produces a viable baby (chimera) that has two cell lineages in its body. One is of biparental origin and the other results from the spontaneous activation of a single maternal oocyte.⁶

How, then, does this information apply to a discussion regarding the alleged virgin birth of Mary? For one, it means that there is no medical possibility that Mary could have produced a male

⁵ Miller, "Can You Get Pregnant Without Having Sex?"

⁶ Pianka, "Virgin Birth in Human Females?" and Strain, Warner, Johnston et al, "A human parthenogenetic chimaera," 164–169.

child through parthenogenesis. An informed probability requires that a human male partner was involved in some fashion.

Yeshua ben Pantera

Excluding the Holy Spirit, who could possibly have been the father of Jesus? Only one human male has ever been mentioned as the potential biological father of Jesus of Nazareth. What follows is the anecdotal evidence that implicates him.

An appellation in the Talmud credits a Roman archer named Pantera as having raped Mary and points a finger at him as being the biological father of Jesus. Since Jesus was born in 5 or 6 BCE., Pantera may have been sixteen or seventeen years old at the time of Jesus' birth. It is historically accurate that a young Roman soldier named Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera (b. 22 BCE, Sidon, Phoenicia, d. 40 CE), was stationed in the northern district of Galilee at the time of Jesus' conception. Given the possible similarities in age, some consideration could be given to the idea that Mary's pregnancy was the result of a teenage tryst and not a rape. The Greek philosopher Celsus and an early Christian writer named Origen Alexandria both reported that Mary had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Pantera.⁷ Pantera was subsequently transferred to Germany in 9 CE to help Roman general Varus put down the Germanic tribal rebellion. Two rabbinic texts also reference *Yeshu ben Pantera* (Jesus, son of Pantera).⁸

Meanwhile, given the controversial circumstances surrounding Mary's pregnancy, it might have behooved the Jewish leadership of that time to discredit the claim that Jesus was the Messiah. Proposing that Pantera was Jesus' real father would accomplish such a thing. Some contemporary theologians have contended that the accusation was indeed made by Hebrew authorities.⁹ If Pantera *was* the father of Jesus, then the ethnicity of the Christ would be a mixture of Jew and Canaanite (Gentile). With certainty, Christian critics emphatically denounce claims of Mary

⁷ Tabor, "Who is a Jew?"

⁸ Helwig-Larsen, "Jesus, Son of Pantera."

⁹ Jaffe, "The Virgin Birth of Jesus in the Talmudic Context," 577–92.

becoming pregnant by an earthly father. It is their forceful assertion that the Holy Spirit fathered Jesus (Matt. 1:18–20).

At one point during his three-year ministry, Jesus traveled north from Galilee to the Mediterranean coast. His enigmatic journey was brief, and only the Gospels of Matthew and Mark (Matt. 15:21, Mark 7:24–31) mention it. His destination was the Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre. Strangely, Jesus entered a certain house in Sidon “and wanted no one to know it.” Who was he going to see? There is no mention of what his intentions were. Could it have been a visit to meet with his father, Pantera, who was born and raised there? It is an enticing thought that carries a note of plausibility.

Hebrew Monotheism and the Holy Spirit

Whatever the cause of Mary’s pregnancy, and whoever was responsible, it remained Mary’s impassioned claim that the Holy Spirit fathered her child. Unfortunately for Mary, a careful review of Jewish theology exposes an important point. The Hebrew faith does not recognize the concept of the Holy Spirit. It does not exist in Judaism.

The Hebrew term for “holy spirit” is the phrase *Ruah ha-Kodesh*. *Ruah* means spirit, but not in the sense of an entity. The connotation it carries is similar to the concepts of ethos or essence. *Ruah ha-Kodesh* may also relate to divine inspiration. The first chapter of Genesis mentions “the spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters.” This ethereal vision uses the Hebrew term *Ruah Elohim* (the breath or wind of God). Even though there are many mentions of the spirit of God in the *Tanakh* and other rabbinic texts, there is no mention of a Holy Spirit that corresponds to the divine singularity depicted in the New Testament. Neither is the ministry of the Holy Spirit found in the Hebrew Bible. Hebrew theology believes in only one preeminent God. That God is the Creator God, also called Yahweh. A Son of God is not part of a nonexistent *Godhead trilogy*. If there was consideration given to a Son of God, that title would apply metaphorically to King David through the promises of Psalm 2:7 and the Davidic Covenant.

The word “trinity” is not found anywhere in the Judeo-Christian Bible. The canon of the Holy Trinity was presented and argued by early church fathers at the Nicene Council in 325 CE. It is derived from Matthew 3:17, Matthew 28:19, Luke 3:22, John 14:26 and 1 John 5:7. “Trinitarianism” is viewed differently by various denominations of Christianity, including Catholicism. Judaism does not recognize the Holy Trinity.

Hebrew religious hierarchy refused to believe that Jesus was who he claimed to be. A primary reason for that rejection included that his claim to be the Son of God did not fit with Hebrew theology. Neither did they find that the Holy Spirit could have fathered Jesus, since there is no godly persona known as the Holy Spirit in Judaism.

Missing the Messianic Mark

In addition to complications brought forth by the Pantera theory and the Holy Trinity dilemma, there is another difficulty that was raised by detractors of Jesus. It centers on messianic lineage. A core condition established in Hebrew theology and its traditions mandates that the Messiah be born of the royal bloodline of King David. David is presented as being the Messiah’s father through his “seed.” However, Christian scholars maintain that Hebrew Bible references to the seed of David are ambiguous and not necessarily binding as regards the Messiah. Their contention is that Jesus was the legal son of Joseph by marriage, if not by birth. It is asserted that Mary was married to Joseph, and through that relationship, Jesus gained access to the House of David. Hebrew law *did* allow for an adopted son to be considered the legal son of his stepfather. This fact notwithstanding, biblical references to “seed” mean just what is implied. *Jesus could not become part of the Davidic bloodline through marriage, adoption, or association.* Just as an American president *must* be a natural-born citizen of the United States, the Hebrew Messiah *must* be a direct descendant of King David, by birth.

There are nine mentions of the “seed of David” in the Judeo-Christian Bible. Five references occur in the Protestant Old Testament. They are: 1 Kings 11:39, 1 Kings 13:2, 1 Kings 14:8, Jeremiah 33:22, and Jeremiah 33:36. Although none of these

scriptures mention Jesus (Yeshua), some use the term Christ, which is Greek for Messiah. Four New Testament verses use “seed of David” within the text. The verses—John 7:42, Romans 1:3, Romans 1:4, and 2 Timothy 2:8—are not prophetic, but are instead misleading while attempting to connect the Son of God and Jesus Christ with the term “seed of David.”

The books of Matthew and Luke both describe alleged genealogies from David to Jesus. They differ in that one is maternal and the other is paternal. Luke records that the Davidic bloodline for Jesus ends with his mother, Mary. Jewish law derived from the Torah declares that tribal lineages *only* pass from father to son and not to daughters. Mary’s father (Joachim) could only pass his tribal lineage to his sons. When a daughter is born to a given tribe, if she marries, her tribe becomes that of her husband. Her children inherit her husband’s tribe but only in rare instances where they are his own biological children. Lineage in the tribe of Judah (Kings) only passes from a father to his biological son.

Genetics and Davidic Lineage

Genetic science has recently been invoked in an effort to settle longstanding disputes surrounding the lineage of King David. It has been said that the DNA does not lie. Jewish truth seekers, the curious, and others eagerly await the results of genetic analysis. Investigations include an ongoing effort to establish a composite Hebrew family tree. This undertaking has involved massive amounts of research and has created a monumental database. Much like the Mormons, Jewish geneticists and genealogists are seeking to fix inheritance for every Jew who has ever lived. Research has already established the lineage of Aaron, brother of Moses. Y Chromosome Aaron, otherwise known as the Cohen Modal Haplotype, represents the Jewish priestly line (the Cohanim).¹⁰ In all, there are at least a dozen independent programs working to establish one or more ethnicities or lineages. DavidicDynasty.org is attempting to define the truthful lineage of King David. Of even

¹⁰ Behar and Hammer, “Extended Y chromosome haplotypes.”

greater potential importance, questions surrounding Jesus of Nazareth may ultimately be answered via genetic investigation.

Religious scoffers who disdain science cannot dispute the faith-based notion that God clearly understands genetics. It follows that he would know the importance of the Y chromosome. A long-understood genetic fact has disclosed that human males possess an XY pairing of chromosomes, while females possess an XX pairing on the sex (gender) chromosome. A genetic segment carried on the Y chromosome delivers the male determination gene. Since Hebrew lineage is passed along an all-male line, it follows that the Y chromosome must play a defining role in Jewish lineage. Once a female X chromosome replaces a male Y chromosome, male lineage is lost. Mary's procreation partner (the father of Jesus) would have needed to donate the Y chromosome that delivered the maleness of Jesus. Mary did not receive it from her own father, whose X chromosome from his XY pair was the donated DNA strand. Thus, her alleged Davidic lineage through David's son, Nathan, was lost. Further, if Jesus was fathered by the Holy Spirit, either he was a haploid individual (incompatible with life) or the Holy Spirit is a corporeal being, capable of genetic reproduction.

The Blood Curse of Jeconiah

Most Christians are not familiar with the blood curse of Jeconiah. It is not widely taught, even though it is scripturally valid and relevant. Arguments refuting it are problematic and weak. This little-known narrative remains a critical obstacle for those who believe that the Davidic bloodline extends to Joseph.

Matthew 1:12 places King Jeconiah, who ruled Judah briefly in 598 BCE, in the bloodline of King David. Therefore, Bible scholars maintain that Jesus would be a descendant of Jeconiah. However, God cursed Jeconiah as recorded in Jeremiah 22:24 and Jeremiah 22:30. God said that none of Jeconiah's offspring would prosper and that none would sit on the throne of David. This would preclude any descendant of Jeconiah from being the Messiah, Jesus included. The curse also said that Jeconiah would not prosper in his lifetime. In fact, Jeconiah and his children did prosper in his lifetime. His grandson, Zerubbabel, found favor with God and was chosen to

be a ruler (but not king). Even though God declared the curse, it is concluded by Christian theologians that the curse *must* have been reversed after Jeconiah repented. How else to explain that Jeconiah prospered? Although circumstances surrounding Jeconiah's renewed prosperity seemingly imply otherwise, it is *never* stated in the Hebrew Bible that God reversed the curse. It would require direct and convincing evidence to convey that God would go back on his word. Such a thing would demonstrate that God's words are insincere, ineffectual, and unreliable. Most Hebrew scholars believe God's words "As surely as I live, declares the Lord" were compelling, and that the curse was not reversed or revised. Those who believe that the curse was reversed are of the opinion that this somehow kept Jesus in the Davidic bloodline. This is flawed thinking, as Jesus was never there in the first place. Jesus had no biological relationship with David, Jeconiah, or Joseph. Period. If Jesus had been the natural-born son of Joseph, he would have been barred from sitting on the throne of David by virtue of the curse of Jeconiah. Joseph was banned from conveying or conferring anything to Jesus or anyone. Hence, the blood curse of Jeconiah offers a secondary reason establishing that Jesus could not be the Messiah. Today's Jewish community refutes the spurious explanations invented by Christianity. They continue to wait for their Messiah and expect him to be of the seed of David and the tribe of Judah.

Commentary

What have we learned from Chapter One? What can be said regarding the early storyline of Jesus?

We know that the time was right for the appearance of the Hebrew Messiah and that Mary may have taken advantage of that fact and used it to her benefit. We know it is plausible that Mary then used other correlating information, gleaned from the *Tanakh*, in creating a story designed to protect her from legal prosecution and the wrath of her betrothed.

Further, we can say with certainty there are several issues that would prevent Jesus from achieving status as the Messiah. For one, Mary's contention that she was immaculately impregnated by the Holy Spirit is contrary to Hebrew theology. The Holy Spirit does not exist in Judaism. Additionally, as we will discover later, the virgin birth prophecy described in Isaiah 7:14 is specious, at least with respect to a distant-future virgin birth. And of the greatest importance is the fact that Jesus did not come from the lineage of King David. Even genetic considerations support that he could not have. And lastly, we now understand that Jesus unabashedly took from David in proclaiming himself to be the Son of God. David's place as the Son of God was guaranteed through the promises God made in the Davidic Covenant, and as expressed in Psalm 2:7.

So, where do we go from here? The next chapter, "The Birth of Jesus," covers most of the events prior to and immediately following the nativity and, of course, the nativity itself. We will challenge much of what was written about the nativity using the Bible's own words. We will closely examine a significant finding that may overturn everything you thought you knew about the birth of Jesus.

In addition, please continue to consider the evidence. What impact might it have with respect to any future decisions you make about your relationship with Jesus? If Christianity has not been working for you, it may be because the story of Jesus is not founded on truth.