So...if Jesus Didn’t Exist, Where Did He Come from Then?

Richard Carrier, Ph.D

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# Three Horses in the Race

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- **Islam**: Mohammed “hallucinates” conversations with the angel Gabriel and the Koran records the spoken teachings of Gabriel.

- **Mormonism**: Joseph Smith “hallucinates” conversations with the angel Moroni and seeing words on magical plates, and the Book of Mormon records what the latter two said.
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Jesus was originally a celestial being like Gabriel or Moroni, and taught his followers in the same way.
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Mormonism: Joseph Smith “hallucinates” conversations with the angel Moroni and seeing words on magical plates, and the Book of Mormon records what the latter two said.

Then he was “Euhemerized” (stories were created that placed him on earth interacting with historical figures)
The Divine Analogy

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- **Mormonism:** Joseph Smith "hallucinates" conversations with the angel Moroni and seeing words on magical plates, and the Book of Mormon records what the latter two said.

  Then people started believing or selling those stories as true.
Why Is That Credible?
Trends in Hellenistic Religion


- Four big trends in religion in the centuries leading up to Christianity

- Christianity conforms to all four
The Four Trends

- **Syncretism**: combining a foreign cult deity with Hellenistic elements.

- **Monotheism**: transforming polytheism into monotheism (via henotheism).

- **Individualism**: agricultural salvation cults retooled as personal salvation cults.

- **Cosmopolitanism**: all races, cultures, classes admitted as equals, with fictive kinship (members are all “brothers”); you now “join” a religion rather than being born into it.
The Trend in Action
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Dying-and-Rising Gods

- **Romulus**: Roman state god, his death and resurrection celebrated in annual plays.

- **Osiris**: Egyptian god, those baptized into his death and resurrection are saved in the afterlife.

- **Zalmoxis**: Thracian god, his death and resurrection assures followers of eternal life.
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But Mithra is *Not* a Dying-and-Rising God
All These Gods Do Have in Common....

- They are all “savior gods”
- They are all the “son” of God (or “daughter”)
- They all undergo a “passion”
- They all obtain victory over death, which they share with their followers
- They all have stories about them set in human history on earth
- Yet none of them ever actually existed
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But they were not all born on December 25 (and neither was Jesus for more than a century).

Etc.
Philo of Alexandria Tells Us...

There was a pre-Christian Jewish belief in a celestial being **actually named “Jesus”** who was...

- The firstborn son of God...
- The celestial “image of God”
- God’s agent of creation...
- And God’s celestial high priest.

For sources see Carrier, *Not the Impossible Faith*, pp. 250-51
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**Philippians 2:5-11**: Earliest known Christians believed this preexistent being descended, became incarnate and died, rose again, then appeared to select people to tell them this.

- Romans 8:29
- 2 Corinthians 4:4
- 1 Corinthians 8:6
- Hebrews 2:17, 4:14, ...

And God’s celestial high priest.
Philo of Alexandria Tells Us...

There was a pre-Christian Jewish belief in a celestial being actually named "Jesus" who was the firstborn son of God, the celestial "image of God", God's agent of creation, and God's celestial high priest.

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On the Most Plausible Mythicist Theory: This incarnation, death, and burial took place in outer space just below the moon.

And God's celestial high priest.

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The same was taught of Osiris: public stories put him on earth, but private stories had his death and resurrection occur in outer space just below the moon.

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Precedents in the Jewish belief system: e.g. Adam was believed to have been buried in outer space (Revelation of Moses).

Romans 8:29
2 Corinthians 4:4
1 Corinthians 8:6
Hebrews 2:17, 4:14, ...
Paul's (Authentic) Letters

- **Galatians 1:11-12:** “brothers, the gospel I preached does not come from man. Neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

- **1 Corinthians 15:1-8:** “brothers, the gospel I preached ... [is] what I also received: that according to the scriptures Christ died for our sins, and that he was buried, and that according to the scriptures he was raised on the third day, and that he appeared to Cephas [etc.] ... and at last he appeared to me as well.”

- **1 Corinthians 11:23:** “I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that on the night he was handed over the Lord took bread...and said...[etc.]”
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Note that Jesus is not said to have appeared before his death. People only see him after his death.
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Could mean “in fulfillment of” or “we are told by”
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This means Paul hallucinated the last supper, and thus received teachings from the dead Jesus (even quotes him).

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According to Paul

- **Scripture** and **Revelation** are the only sources of information Paul ever mentions anyone having.

- The Jesus he knows and refers to and speaks to is always in outer space.

- Paul never clearly places Jesus on earth or connects him to human history.
The Gospels come decades later and are the first we hear of an earthly story for Jesus.

The Gospels are wildly fictitious in their content and structure.

Every story has discernible allegorical or propagandistic intent.

The first (Mark) looks like an extended metaparable (outsiders are told a story, while insiders are told what it really means).
No Other Evidence...

- Everything else is either not independent *(they just echo the Gospels or what Christians said the Gospels say)*...
- Or is fabricated *(e.g. the Infancy Gospels, Jesus’ Letter to Abgar, the forged epistles in the NT and beyond)*
The Roswell Analogy

- **What Really Happened:** A guy found some sticks and tinfoil in the desert.

- **What Was Said to Have Happened:** It was debris from an alien spacecraft.

- **What Was Said to Have Happened within just Thirty Years:** An entire flying saucer was recovered, complete with alien bodies that were autopsied by the government.
The “tinfoil in the desert” would be analogous to the “revelations of the archangel named Jesus” and the “flying saucer and alien bodies” would be analogous to the “historical Jesus of Galilee.”

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Imagine if we only had the stories written by the Roswell believers from thirty years later (and information derived from them), and nothing else...
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It was debris from an alien spacecraft.

What Was Said to Have Happened within just Thirty Years:
An entire flying saucer was recovered, complete with alien bodies that were autopsied by the government.

We would not know about the tinfoil. All we would have are multiple witnesses and sources reporting a flying saucer recovery and alien body autopsy.
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What Was Said to Have Happened within just Thirty Years: An entire flying saucer was recovered, complete with alien bodies that were autopsied by the government.

Neither of which ever existed.
The Standard Rebuttal

1. Christianity is **different** from those other religions and Jesus is **different** from those other dying-and-rising savior sons of god.

2. There are elements of Paul and the Gospels that **make more sense** if there was a real Jesus.

3. Lots of **real historical people** are unattested until generations later or not at all.

4. You can’t **invent a whole man** in just one generation of storytelling.
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But they are *all* different from each other. The differences are not the issue. Their **similarities** are what identify them as a **trend**.
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But in Paul these are very few, very vague, and very debatable. And all attempts to extract such data from the Gospels fail on either facts or logic.
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But those people weren't immediately worshipped as demigods about whom our earliest literature says they communicated only by revelation.
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If you can invent a whole flying saucer, you can invent a whole man.

Mark even invented a three hour eclipse of the sun. That’s a lot harder to get away with than inventing an obscure Galilean preacher.

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What to Read...

- Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle*
- Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions*
- Stephen Law, “Evidence, Miracles and the Existence of Jesus” (google it)