

Review of the *Historical Figure of Jesus*

Penguin Books, 1993
Reviewed by Jacob Aliet
May 2007

Introduction

It is typical of New Testament (NT) scholars involved in the quest for the historical Jesus to crown the years spent in historical Jesus research with a book presenting their personal reconstruction of who the historical Jesus was. Because of the way the gospels were written, this effort involves painstaking separation of fact from myth and fiction. Whereas they have assiduously attempted to prevent their confessional interests [1] from intruding upon their research, their religious beliefs have doggedly militated against their best efforts, forcing them to question the objectivity their own scholarship [2]. One of the notable figures in the third quest, J.D. Crossan, lamented that the “historical Jesus research is becoming something of a scholarly bad joke” [3] while his compatriot, J.P. Meier, who believes that Jesus performed miracles and was resurrected, openly admits in an interview that “it is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history.” [4]

Lacking a reliable methodology and dogged by confessional interests, the result of their efforts has been a confusing profusion of divergent portraits of who the putative historical Jesus was [5], a competitive affair that Peter Steinfel of the New York Times has named “the Jesus wars”. It is in this backdrop that we review Professor Ed Parish Sanders’ *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (hereafter known as *HFoJ*). In *HFoJ*, Sanders presents the historical Jesus as a radical eschatological prophet [6], a portrait that has increasingly gained acceptance amongst those that believe a historical Jesus existed, hence the need to scrutinize *HFoJ*.

Sanders retired in 2005 as Arts and Sciences Professor of Religion at Duke University, North Carolina where he had been since 1990. He holds a Doctor of Theology degree from the University of Helsinki and a Theology degree from Union Seminary in NYC. His specialty is Judaism and Christianity and he has authored or co-edited over a dozen books and taught in several universities.

Because Sanders avoids technical jargon in *HFoJ* and provides substantial introductory material before getting down to an exegesis of the New Testament one can infer that it is intended for laymen. But as a final product marking the end of Sanders intellectual trajectory in historical Jesus studies, and bracketing his perspective in the quest for the historical Jesus, it is of great interest to those interested in the origins of Christianity.

Brief Outline of the Historical Figure of Jesus

Sanders starts by giving an outline of Jesus’ life and then provides the political setting in Judaea at the time of Jesus including the Roman administration and religious parties in Judaea at the time. He then examines Judaism and its effect

on the socio-political setting of early Palestine. After that, he goes through a few extra-Biblical sources that mention Jesus and points out that the Roman sources that mention Jesus are dependent on Christian reports. He then explains the problems of the primary sources (the gospels) including the fact that they were written anonymously, that they contradict each other and that they were redacted for theological interests. Then follows a discussion on the messianic hopes amongst the Jews, how miracles were viewed by the ancients, the coming Kingdom of God and Jesus' view of his role and his last week. The book ends with an appendix followed by notes and an index of names and subjects.

Overall Impression of the Book

HFoJ is a useful resource especially as an introduction to the view of Jesus as an eschatological prophet. The presentation about how mainstream NT scholars believe the gospels were developed is informative from a form-critical point of view. Sanders' description of the historical setting of ancient Palestine and the Roman mode of administration is also very edifying and easily digestible. On the whole, readers are acquainted with how to weigh the truth of New Testament claims, how to detect inventions by the authors and how to separate theological redactions from preceding traditions.

If Sanders has a religious side, he doesn't *openly* show it in the book and maintains a critical and objective tone throughout the 337 pages that constitute the book. At one point though, a voice that seeks to assure Christian readers interrupts his scholarly tenor and declares that "there is good news" [7] because Christian scribes probably only rewrote *Antiquities* 18.63. The good news being that Josephus likely mentioned Jesus. This of course would be good news for Christians seeking affirmation that a historical Jesus indeed existed.

He wins over the critical reader by his open willingness to point out invented passages and conceding his inability to extract historical information from certain passages – as opposed to contriving such information. However, in some cases, after making such concessions, he claws back what was conceded and proceeds with his reconstruction. In other instances, he gives up the search and says it is impossible to reach a judgment about historicity when in fact it is apparent that the historicity of the events can be determined. We shall examine examples of these in this review. Considering the subtlety of this approach, it is no wonder that Sanders has won over many readers.

Sanders does not meaningfully engage other scholars and only fleetingly refutes in a few places the idea that Jesus was a reformer. By closing the door on the works of other scholars, he gets free room to indulge in his chosen approach and he is able to pick and choose his sources without having to provide cogent explanations. Because of this, he writes as if there were no difficulties underlying some of his positions; difficulties that are otherwise not discernible by one not familiar with the field of NT scholarship.

One conceptual weakness underlying Sander's work is his failure to question the existence of a historical Jesus and instead treating it as an unstated premise. He writes that he aims at "recovering the historical Jesus" [8] yet he has not established that a historical Jesus indeed existed. If any scholar approached the documentary record with the aim of "recovering the historical Ebion" they would likely be able to extract "a few basic facts about Ebion" like Sanders does about Jesus. Yet it is quite probable that Ebion never existed. [9]

A Note on the Historical Jesus and Mythical Jesus

New Testament scholars generally respond with derision to questions about the historicity of Jesus and disdain such questions even when that historicity is seriously challenged. In the recent years however, some Biblical scholars have seriously questioned the existence of a historical Jesus. Some of these include Robert Price in *Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable is the Gospel Tradition* (2003) and Thomas L. Thompson in *The Messiah Myth* (2005). More notable is *The Jesus Puzzle* (2001) by Earl Doherty who, though not technically a scholar, developed the Jesus Myth hypothesis, which proposes that Paul, who was the first to write about Jesus, believed that Jesus was an intermediary savior figure who died in an upper realm and that this mythical Christ [10] was only later historicized in the gospels.

Whereas mainstream NT scholars dismiss the Jesus myth hypothesis as a fringe theory, they have never demonstrated it to be false or invalid [11]. It is interesting to note that while scientists have debunked books written by Intelligent Design proponents, Earl Doherty's book has not been seriously reviewed or debunked by any NT scholar, even as the validity of the question regarding the existence of a historical Jesus continues getting wide recognition [12]. Indeed, historian Richard Carrier thoroughly reviewed *The Jesus Puzzle* and concluded that compared to the orthodox position, the Jesus Myth Hypothesis has greater explanatory power and "is a better explanation of this evidence--even if not decisively better." [13]

Sanders relies on the canonical gospels for his reconstruction of the historical Jesus without explaining why Paul does not speak of an earthly Jesus in his several letters [14]. Germane questions include: Why does Paul state in [1 Corinthians 2:6-8](#) that demons (*arcontes*) killed Jesus [15] and not that Pilate killed Jesus as narrated in the gospels? Why does [Philippians 2:8-11](#) say that a god humbled himself by taking the form of a man and dying and as a result was exalted by being named Jesus? Why does Paul totally fail to mention historical markers like Pilate and Herod while speaking of Jesus? Why is the Pauline Christ devoid of earthly markers like Nazareth, Bethlehem and Galilee? Why is it that almost every unit in the first gospel can be traced back to the Old Testament? These are questions that the Jesus Myth Hypothesis can answer more meaningfully than the mainstream position.

Examining Sander's Approach

Sanders states that a historian is required to recognize the fact that the authors of the New Testament had theological convictions and must have redacted the gospels to support their theology. In this backdrop, he suggests, a historian has a professional obligation to rigorously cross-examine the sources. The aim of the book, Sanders states, is to "lay out, as clearly as possible, what we can know [about Jesus], using the standard methods of historical research, and to distinguish this from inferences, labeling them clearly as such." [16] What about methodology for separating fact from fiction? Sanders points out that doing ancient history requires "common sense and a good feel for sources." [17]

This review is basically an examination of how Sanders employs "common sense", a "good feel for sources" and standard methods of historical research to reconstruct the historical Jesus. In doing this, we shall focus on how Sanders uses the gospels to arrive at the year that Jesus was allegedly born, how Sanders determines that Jesus was a flesh-and blood man who had no divine pedigree and how he handles allusions and borrowings from the Old Testament that are abundant in the New Testament. In examining the last point, we shall assess his treatment of the triumphal entry in Jerusalem and the temple ruckus incident. It is hoped that this will expose the reliability of his methods, the limits of his approach and his objectivity as a scholar.

Was Jesus Born c. 4BCE?

Sanders begins his reconstruction by laying out the framework of Jesus' life as found in the gospels and listing ten statements that belong to the framework of Jesus' life that he says are almost beyond dispute. His appeal to consensus is an indication that there is no clear evidence to support the said statements so this is a cue to be vigilant. The first statement in his list says that "Jesus was born c. 4 BCE, near the time of the death of Herod the Great." [18]

Is this statement almost beyond dispute? Actually, Sanders notes in the next page that "The year of Jesus' birth is not entirely certain" [19] and then he proceeds to state in the same page that "some scholars prefer 5, 6 or even 7 BCE." Of course, this may confuse a reader because if scholars have such a range of preference in years, then one wonders how then the claim that "Jesus was born c. 4 BCE" is at the same time *almost beyond dispute*. Sanders argues that "the decisive fact is that Matthew dates Jesus' birth at about the time Herod the Great died" (*ibid*). But how does Sanders pick the correct date from the two conflicting dates in Luke? Sander's answer appears in the seventh chapter. We examine it below. But first, let us lay down some basic ideas.

Critical scholars, including Sanders, generally regard the birth narratives in [Matthew 1:18-23](#) and [Luke 2:1-20](#) as invented by the evangelists [20]. Sanders notes that the "two gospels have completely different and irreconcilable ways of moving Jesus and his family from one place to the other." [21] He also questions the likelihood of Augustus (who Sanders regards as the most rational of all

Caesars before him) issuing a decree requiring people to register in their ancestral homes for tax purposes [22].

Sanders finds several difficulties with Luke's census. One is that Luke "dates it near Herod's death (4BCE) and also ten years later, when Quirinus was the legate of Syria (6CE)." [23] Luke writes in [Luke 2:1-2](#) that Jesus was born during a census that was held when Quirinius was governing Syria. And we know from the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus that this census took place in 6CE [24] around ten years after Herod the great had died (Herod died in 4BCE). But at the same time, [Luke 1:5](#) has the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist "in the days of Herod" and [Luke 1:36](#) states that Mary bore Jesus approximately 16 months after annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist putting Jesus birth "no later than 3 BC" [25]. Yet [Matthew 2:1-3](#) claims that Jesus was born while Herod the great was still alive, probably two years before he died ([Matthew 2:7-16](#)). Thus Luke dates the birth of Jesus at 6CE and at 3BCE at the same time while Matthew dates Jesus' birth near 4BCE.

Another problem besides the date conflict is that Rome took a census of people who lived in Judea Samaria and Idumaea, not Galilee as Luke asserts. And even then, Sanders notes correctly that there was no requirement for travel. Sanders notes down all these problems, then suggests that the most likely explanation for Luke's account is that he or his source accidentally combined 4 BCE (Herod's death) and 6CE which was the year of Quirinus' census [26]. Sanders writes that after the source had 'discovered' that there was a census at the time of Herod, he decided to elaborate the event to make it a reason for Joseph to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem [27].

Sander's argues that it is possible that Luke accidentally combined 4BCE and 6CE based on the assertion of Roman historian Ronald Syme, that similarities between 4BCE and 6CE lead to confusion. And Syme's assertion is further based on the claim that W. W. Tarn "a well-known Hellenistic historian, once wrote that Herod died in 6CE." [28]

In essence, Sanders is treating this noted error (whether it was a typo or a chronological error, or genuine mix-up of the dates is not demonstrated in *HFOJ*) as sufficient evidence of a phenomenon. He then proceeds to ascribe Luke's error to that phenomenon. By faulting Luke for committing this alleged error, the door is opened for Matthew's date which is then treated as the correct one. This is not sound methodology and essentially amounts to a preference for one date over another based on spurious methodology, so as to retain the preferred date.

By attributing Luke's error to the 6BC-4BCE dyslexic phenomenon, Sanders is in effect vindicating Luke of any possible accusation of not knowing when Jesus was born. The implication of Sander's argument is that Luke probably knew the correct date but this phenomenon rendered him selectively dyslexic -- hence the date mix-up. This kind of argumentation is very much akin to what Biblical

apologists do because Sanders has essentially managed to harmonize the dates in Luke and Matthew using tenuous arguments. This is a serious indictment against Sander's scholarship.

The argument that there were "similarities" between 4BCE and 6CE making these two years difficult to differentiate is a peculiar argument. Of course there may have been similar *events* that took place between those two years, like the riots as Sanders mentions but other years equally witnessed riots, like the ones in Jerusalem that resulted in the death of James the Just and the riots during Caligula's reign. Sanders has failed to demonstrate that the common events between these two years, which are ten years apart, were sufficient to make these two years almost interchangeable. There is simply no credible evidence to support the idea that there was a selective dyslexia at play that led Luke to mistake 4BCE for 6CE. In addition, there is no evidence in *HFoJ* or elsewhere to support Sander's assertion that the idea that Jesus birth took place in c. 4BCE is almost beyond dispute.

Richard Carrier has extensively researched on the date of nativity in Luke and addressed numerous attempts by conservative scholars and Biblical apologists to harmonize Luke and Matthew and he writes the following as his conclusion:

There is no way to rescue the Gospels of Matthew and Luke from contradicting each other on this one point of historical fact. The contradiction is plain and irrefutable, and stands as proof of the fallibility of the Bible, as well as the falsehood of at least one of the two New Testament accounts of the birth of Jesus. [29]

Even Raymond Brown, whose book, *The Birth of the Messiah: A commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the gospels of Matthew and Luke* is one of the most extensive works done on the infancy narratives, favored an approach that represents a departure from Sanders attempt at fixing a Lukan date for the birth of Jesus. Brown suggests that are three basic approaches of dealing with the date conflicts in Luke:

First, one may seek to reinterpret the Herod chronology of [Luke 1](#) to agree with the Quirinus census dating (A.D. 6-7) of Luke 2. Second, one may seek to reinterpret the Quirinus census chronology of [Luke 2](#) to agree with the Herod dating (4-3 B.C.) of [Luke 1](#). Third, one may recognize that one or both of the Lukan datings are confused, and that there is neither a need nor a possibility of reconciling them. Basically, this appendix will come to the conclusion that the third approach is the most plausible. [30]

It is interesting that whereas Sanders admits that we don't know who wrote the gospels [31], and he admits that the conflicting and irreconcilable narratives are clearly fabricated, he is nonetheless willing to go on a limb and date the same fictional events (the birth narratives) that he himself regards as invented. This is a clear attempt at contriving a presumably historical factoid (the year the putative Jesus was born) from non-historical stories.

Sanders error here is in doing historical criticism [32] without assigning due recognition to literary [33] *tendenz* [34] and redaction criticism. Whereas he states correctly that Matthew likely “derived elements of the birth narrative stories from stories about Moses” [35] and that both Luke and Matthew may have had no information regarding Jesus birth and therefore resorted to “transferring” birth stories from the OT into the gospels, he nonetheless sets aside these literary critical ideas and proceeds to extract “history” from the gospels.

In the process, he encounters and sidesteps several difficulties including the idea that there may have been no synagogues in pre-70 Galilee [36] and the idea that very little, if any was known about first century Nazareth [37] and the etymological problems surrounding derivation of the appellation “the Nazarene” from Nazareth [38]. To be fair, Sanders does mention that there are problems regarding the presence of pre-70 synagogues but he barely addresses them. Instead he offers a one-sided presentation on the matter. He maintains, in the face of gathering difficulties, that “Something of the real Jesus was certainly preserved” [39] and he admits that whereas the evangelists had theological views, “nevertheless the gospels contain material that the theological views did not create.” [40]

These are like statements of faith since they are not supported by evidence. They betray the fact that Sanders did not start his research with a blank slate because he presumes that the historical Jesus is the fountain that brought forth the gospel narratives. This concept forms an axis around which all his ideas circulate and his conceptual and interpretive framework are ineradicably grounded by this basic but unfounded belief. Whereas the question of the existence of a historical Jesus is not at issue for Sanders, his model of representation and interpretation is caught up in a rhetoric of historicist assumptions and tropes that entirely controls his logic. Alongside the mythical Jesus alternative theory, there is a question about what literary genre the gospels can be grouped under which would influence what he can and cannot derive from the gospels.

Sanders does not even once consider the possibility that Mark may have written his gospel as *faux* history which was mistaken as actual history by Luke and the other evangelists. This is possible and perhaps probable because ancient literature had considerable plasticity as reflected in the case of the Sesonchosis fragment [41]. Regarding faux history and historiography, George Orwell wrote that “The scholarly historian and the undocumented novelist ... are confronted with faux history as it is construed by power, as it is perverted for political purposes, as it is hammered into serviceable myth by those who take advantage of its plasticity. For “History,” of course, is not only an academic study. It is, at all times, in all places, hot. “Who controls the past controls the future” [42] Orwell’s words are germane as far as the gospel of Mark is concerned and how it was appropriated later by Christians who were intent on developing a story about a historical Jesus.

Mark's portrayal of the disciples as ignorant clods, reversal of the expectations of the disciples (Markan irony), the use of doublets [43], triptychs [44] and other literary devices among other reasons (like deriving thematic units, speeches and structure from the OT almost entirely) dispel the idea that Mark was writing actual history. These are ideas that Sanders does not give due consideration even as he charges that there must be some real history in the gospels.

Reconciling the Virgin Birth and Genealogies

Luke and Matthew say that the virgin Mary conceived when the Holy Spirit "came upon" her. This semi divine conception renders Jesus a godman or a hybrid similar to the Greek gods like Dionysus who were born by earthly women whilst sired by gods. Dionysus for example was (re)born by Semele who was impregnated Zeus. Like other critical scholars, Sanders does not assign any historicity to the virgin birth narrative. However, we also find genealogies in [Luke 3:23-38](#) and [Matthew 1:1-17](#) that attempt to link Jesus to an earthly father, Joseph, who is also linked to King David. These genealogies contradict each other.

Luke traces Jesus back to the lineage of David's son Nathan while Matthew traces Jesus back to David's son, Solomon. In addition, Luke has 41 people between David and Jesus, while Matthew has only 26. Sanders does not highlight these contradictions and below, we examine how Sanders handles these genealogical accounts and the birth narratives of Jesus. Let us first start with a brief overview of how these genealogies are regarded with respect to the birth narratives.

Generally, scholars view the virgin birth narratives as later redactions that were grafted to the earlier stories about Jesus. These earlier stories were presumably written by Christians who believed Jesus had a human father of a Davidic pedigree. The genealogies are thought to precede the birth narratives because the earliest traditions about Jesus arose from amongst Jewish communities that believed that the messiah would be a flesh-and-blood man like the Old Testament Joshua. These early traditions are more likely to have sought to confer a Davidic pedigree to Jesus, as opposed to virgin birth traditions which entailed ideas foreign to Jewish theological thought. In fact, the first gospel (Mark) pointedly argues against Davidic lineage in [Mark 12:35-37](#). We thus infer that Christians who wanted to present Jesus as a divine son of God later added the virgin birth narratives. Anybody with a basic understanding of form and redaction criticism concepts can deduce this since these are two conflicting traditions.

But Sanders departs from other scholars [45] and asserts that Jesus being the "son of god" was meant purely in the adoptionist sense [46] and not in the sense of divine conception as portrayed when Zeus took the form of a duck and impregnated Leda to bring forth Helen and Polydeuces. He argues that "Son of

God" designated one standing in a special relationship to God and that Early Christians did not view Jesus as a hybrid. Sanders writes:

Matthew and Luke, in their birth narratives, do sow the seeds of this view [that Jesus was a hybrid], but even these accounts do not systematically suppose that God directly sired Jesus, since the genealogies trace Jesus' descent from David through Joseph. [47]

Sanders is trying to argue away two blatantly conflicting genealogies by first faulting Matthew and Luke for sowing seeds of hybridism and then quickly vindicating them for nipping the problem that they had sowed, in the bud. To exculpate the evangelists further, he states that "in any case, the birth narratives did not shape the early Christian conception of Jesus." [48] The furthest Sanders goes towards admitting that the early Christians sought to portray Jesus as a (semi)divine being is when he writes that "The only passage that might have a metaphysical meaning – Jesus was something other than merely human – is the question at the trial, since the high priest follows the question by shouting 'blasphemy' when Jesus does not deny the title." [49] The rest of his efforts are expended on valiantly downplaying the import of the virgin birth narratives (which he reminds us, would have been heresy in creedal terms) and emphasizing that "Son of God" had no metaphysical connotations.

Sanders argument that Matthew and Luke never *meant to* and did not succeed in assigning Jesus a metaphysical pedigree is not forthright and denies what is patently clear. It is a fact that the majority of Christians believe that Jesus was a hybrid and this is as a direct result of the virgin birth narratives. At this point, Sanders is engaging in apologetics, not scholarship and this is one of the lowest points in *HFoJ*. He focuses on one bit of the evidence and is wholly preoccupied with extracting an eschatological Jesus from the bricolage of myth and invention that is in the genealogies and the birth narratives.

Sanders Treatment on OT Allusions in the NT

It is generally agreed in NT scholarship that there are several passages in the gospels that were borrowed wholly or partly from the Old Testament, including narrative sequences and speeches.

Commentators only differ in how they interpret these parallels between the OT and the New Testament. The way these parallels are interpreted can be grouped into five broad categories.

1. Some regard them as evidence of creativity by the evangelists using the Old Testament. The use of the OT to create stories was labeled *prophecy historicized* by John Dominic Crossan [50]. Some have proceeded on this basis to regard the *entire* gospels as whole cloth inventions [51].
2. Some regard such passages as embellished history and assume that behind such passages and the gospels is a historical core [52].
3. Still, others argue that such passages are supportive of the idea that the early Christians chose to recast actual events of their time using the more prestigious history and language of the Old Testament. This is in line with the idea that the evangelists wanted to make the gospels more Jewish.

- This is also known as *scripturalization*, a term coined by Judith Newman [53], which refers to casting events in the language and models in scripture [54].
4. Others believe that Jesus read the OT and acted using the Jewish messianic expectations in the OT as a script, and even uttered words and speeches in Psalms and OT books [55].
 5. A mixture of (2), (3) and (4).

Sander's approach is a mixture of (4) [56] and (2) [57]. And we shall now examine how Sanders employs (4) to interpret NT passages.

It is generally agreed that some Jewish messianic claimants believed that they had powers to do what OT prophetic figures did. For example Josephus narrates in *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.5.1 that Theudas marched to the Jordan river believing that God would part it for him the way he parted the Red Sea for Moses in Exodus. *Antiquities* 20.8.6 also narrates how "the Egyptian" stood on Olivet and issued a command, expecting the walls of Jerusalem to tumble down, the way the walls of Jericho did in [Joshua 6](#) when Joshua blew a trumpet. "The Egyptian" also chose Olivet because [Zechariah 14.4](#) says that is where the Lord would stand and do battle. As such, the idea of people acting out OT scenes is supported by examples in history. What is of interest is how far one can appeal to this motif while explaining OT allusions in the NT.

Sanders believes that like other messianic claimants, Jesus sought to act out OT prophecies [58]. We examine below how Sanders uses approaches (4) and (2) to judge the historicity of the temple ruckus incident in [Mark 11](#) and the triumphal entry in Jerusalem in the same chapter.

The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Mark 11:1-11 narrates that Jesus entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey with crowds welcoming him shouting 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' Sanders argues that Jesus' ride into Jerusalem was a symbolic action meant to fulfill the prophecy in [Zechariah 9:9](#) which talked of triumphal entry on the back of a donkey. Did this event actually take place as narrated in Mark? Sanders writes that he is unsure whether the prophecy created the event or vice versa but adds that he inclines "to the view that it is Jesus himself who read the prophecy and decided to fulfill it" [59]. Sanders doubts that there would have been a "large" crowd to welcome Jesus as Mark narrates because the presence of a large crowd shouting "King" would have been highly inflammatory and would have drawn the reaction of the High Priest or the Roman prefect who were alert for danger during Passover. His aporetic remarks notwithstanding, Sanders nonetheless suggests that "Jesus' demonstration was quite modest" [60] and was a symbolic action for insiders "who had eyes to see" [61].

Sanders has no basis at all to allow even a “modest demonstration” because this triumphal entry is not attested by Paul, Josephus or any other sources not dependent on Mark. He does not appeal to historical Jesus methodology and its associated complex of criteria such as the dissimilarity criterion, embarrassment criterion, friend and foe, coherence criterion and so on. It is pure conjecture on his part and is comparable to a historian finding a statement like “Jesus walked on water” and saying, well, “That is obviously an exaggeration. I suggest that he merely walked on the beach”. History is not done by revising unacceptable claims to make them acceptable. Historical claims require historical evidence. Sanders has no evidence that there was a modest demonstration by Jesus and is therefore not doing history when he makes that claim.

In addition, the fact that this event is “presaged” in [Zechariah 9:9](#) impairs its historicity and makes it lean toward a historicized prophecy. Even the location from which Jesus approaches Jerusalem, the mount of Olives, is presaged in [Zechariah 14.4](#) as the place where the messiah would launch his mission.

Further, there are a number of factoids that render this event very unlikely. One, as Gundry notes in *Mark: A Commentary on His Gospel* (1993):

“Though Mark does not tell the mileage to Jerusalem (it is about two miles), the paving of the road from a point farther away than Bethpage and Bethany makes for a “red carpet” the astoundingness of whose length magnifies the VIP that Jesus is...the doubling of the pavement with straw as well as with garments despite the fact that since Jesus is sitting on the colt instead of walking on foot he does not need any pavement at all adds to the astoundingness of its length” [62]

Two, it is impossible that Jesus could ride smoothly on a colt that was never rode on before as Randel Helms points out in *Gospel Fictions* (1988). Three, the words uttered by the crowds, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” are pulled from [Psalm 118:26](#). So unless the crowd, like Jesus, was engaged in the agenda of enacting symbolic acts, this speech is clearly fictionalized. Four, Jesus is portrayed as one who was coming to Jerusalem for the first time. As such the residents are not likely to have recognized him and their spontaneous acts of lining along the road and spreading their garments require organized action and an anticipation by the crowds that is not mentioned in the gospels. Fifth, it is also very unlikely that the sophisticated ruling elite in Jerusalem, the capital city with its imperial authority, could make a red carpet using their own garments to an unknown peasant from Galilee who could not speak or read Greek, riding on the back of a donkey.

Together all these reasons combined leave us with no conceivable reason to assign historicity to Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Sander’s scholarship at this point is patently at odds with critical scholarship and fails to deal with or even acknowledge the considerable difficulties surrounding the historicity of the

triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As we have seen, instead of dealing with the passage as it is, or confirming whether the event was attested by independent sources, Sanders instead seeks to redeem the event and make it more realistic, which is fine except he has no basis for doing so. No external sources, no methodology. With an approach like this, one can successfully extract history from the parting of the Red sea by Moses.

We shall now examine Sanders's take on the temple ruckus incident that is narrated in [Mark 11:15-19](#), which says that Jesus turned the tables of moneychangers and drove them out of the Temple.

The Temple Ruckus Incident

The temple ruckus incident, also known as the temple cleansing scene, refers to the passage in the gospels where Jesus goes into the temple and throws the moneychangers out, overturning their tables and accusing them of turning the house of prayer into a den of robbers.

With the temple cleansing incident before him, Sanders first admits that it is more "difficult to interpret [than the triumphal entry into Jerusalem]." [63] He discounts the possibility that Jesus uttered the words "house of prayer" and "den of robbers" in reference to the temple because those words were derived from [Jeremiah 7:11](#) and [Isaiah 56:7](#) respectively. He doubts the actuality of the idea that Jesus said the temple was a "den of robbers" because there is no hint that the money and sacrifices offered in the temple were being misappropriated. Note however, that misappropriation is not the only avenue that could have attracted that accusation as Sanders implies [64]. Sanders deems it unlikely that Jesus was against the temple because Jesus paid his temple tax ([Matthew 17:24-27](#)) and because to be against the temple would be tantamount to being against Judaism as a whole, and would "also be an attack on the main unifying symbol of the Jewish people." [65] Sanders relegates the incident to a possible flash of anger on Jesus' part and discounts the possibility that it was part of Jesus' mission.

He suggests that the "action of overturning symbolized destruction" [66] and argues that [Mark 13:1](#), which has Jesus saying that none of the stones of the temple will be left upon another, is a prediction of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. He vindicates the evangelists from the possible charge of writing the prophecy after the event by arguing that the prophecy and the event are not in perfect agreement since the temple was destroyed by fire and not completely torn down. He surmises that "This prophecy, then, is probably pre-70, and it may be Jesus' own." [67] He argues that it is likely that Jesus threatened to destroy the temple because the evangelists are at pains to assure readers that Jesus did no such thing. [Mark 14:57-59](#)/[Matthew 27:40](#) have Jesus claim that he would rebuild the temple while Luke excludes the passage entirely. From these denials,

Sanders concludes like Gertrude, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (III, ii, 239), that "They protest too much. It is probable that he made some kind of threat." [68]

Sanders conclusion is that Jesus' demonstration at the temple and subsequent speech as he was leaving the temple constituted a prophetic threat. And for this, the high priest and Antipas wanted him dead because they feared that like John, he might cause trouble by inciting a riot.

The first thing to notice is that Sanders approaches the passage believing that an incident actually occurred. His ten-page vermiculations on this temple incident are geared towards arguing away the idea that Jesus was a reformer engaged in cleansing the temple and instead presenting Jesus as an eschatological prophet. To facilitate this, he fuses together the "overturning" and Jesus' speech outside the temple as a single, unified act, which he declares, constituted a prophetic threat. Whereas he correctly states points against the historicity of the words uttered in the incident, he is eager to interpret it as *an* action that constituted a prophetic threat apparently because that is consistent with his thesis that Jesus was an eschatological prophet. His main goal is thus to extract eschatological meanings in Jesus' words and deeds and not to demonstrate that the events actually took place as narrated, or otherwise. This is not historical criticism but biased interpretation on top of the historicist assumption that Jesus existed. We shall now weigh the historicity of this temple incident.

One scholar who has doubted the authenticity of this temple incident is Paula Fredricksen who writes in [From Jesus to Christ](#) that she learnt quite a bit about the temple from Sanders book *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (1992) including the temple's measurements which she describes as follows: "The total circumference of the outermost wall ran to almost 9/10ths of a mile; twelve soccer fields, including stands, could be fit in; when necessary (as during the pilgrimage festivals, especially Passover) it could accommodate as many as 400,000 worshipers." [69]

When Fredricksen visited the Temple Mount, she was aghast at how huge it was and its size shrank Jesus alleged action and prompted her to ask herself:

If Jesus *had* made such a gesture, how many would have seen it?

Those in his retinue and those standing immediately around him.

But how many, in the congestion and confusion of that holiday crowd, could have seen what was happening even, say, twenty feet away? Fifty feet? The effect of Jesus' gesture at eye-level would have been muffled, swallowed up by the sheer press of pilgrims.

How worried, then, need the priests have been? [70]

Needless to say, her confidence in the historicity of the temple scene diminished as she contemplated these questions and she states as much in the referenced article.

But assuming, for argument's sake, that Jesus' action was as disruptive as portrayed in the gospels, the Roman soldiers would have arrested Jesus or

forcefully restored order because, as Josephus intimates in *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.5.3 and [Wars Of The Jews 2.12.1](#), the Romans always had soldiers on stand-by during Passover because riots were likely to ensue during Passover. The Roman administration also needed the taxes that the moneychangers and other traders paid and they would not watch idly as the temple activities were disrupted by a lone man.

Whereas Sanders identifies the OT sources of the speeches in the temple ruckus scene, he does not go further to identify from whence the structure and the components of the temple ruckus were derived from. One scholar who has attempted to do this is Geoffrey Troughton who has identified the 'intertextual echo' between [Mark 11:15-16](#) which states that Jesus ejected the moneychangers out of the temple, and [Nehemiah 13:4-9](#), which states that Nehemiah ejected Tobiah from 'the assembly of God'. Besides thematic similarities, Troughton also points out the linguistic links between the two passages. Troughton writes in [Echoes in the Temple? Jesus, Nehemiah and their Actions in the Temple](#):

Perhaps the most vivid similarity between the actions of Jesus and Nehemiah is the overturning of the tables. Both actions involve a direct, physical interaction with the equipment that furnished the 'foreign' presence. In each case, violence is enacted against inanimate objects rather than directly against people...the prohibition against carriage through the Temple is the likeliest source of allusion to Nehemiah. Specifically,...the linguistic connection through common use of the term *skeuoj* ('vessels'). In the gospel accounts, it appears that Jesus endeavored to disrupt the carriage of certain objects through the Temple... NRSV translates *skeuoj* as 'anything' (thus, 'he wouldn't allow anything to be carried'), but the word is more properly rendered 'vessel'... Nehemiah was concerned about the 'proper' functioning of the Temple, including ensuring that the items necessary for proper worship were readily available. These included the 'vessels'. [71]

Although he doesn't argue the point, the point that emerges from Troughton's paper is that the author of Mark distinctly borrowed aspects of the temple cleansing incident from Nehemiah. This is a further argument against the historicity of the temple incident.

As has been pointed out by George Wesley Buchanon in *Symbolic Money-Changers in the Temple?* (1991), the temple was the most fortified place in Jerusalem since it acted as the treasury and could even be used as a Fortress. As such, Jesus could not simply have walked in and thrown the moneychangers out as depicted in the gospels. Michael Turton explains in *Historical Commentary of the Gospel of Mark*:

The moneychangers undoubtedly had their own guards and servants, and so did the local priests. It is therefore unlikely that Jesus could have generated an incident there that was prolonged

enough for anyone to notice. There were too many warm bodies to squelch it before it got rolling. A further problem, as Buchanon (1991) points out, is that the Temple was not merely the main religious institution of the Jewish religion; it was also the national treasury and its best fortress. The Temple's importance should not be underestimated: all three sides in the internal struggle during the Jewish War fought to gain control of the Temple. Not only is it highly unlikely that Jesus could have simply strolled in and gained control of the Temple, it is also highly unlikely that anyone would have permitted him to leave unmolested after such a performance. [72]

In *Jesus' Temple Act Revisited: A Response to P. M. Casey* (2000), David Seeley states some of the practical obstacles Jesus would have countenanced. For example, at least one of the moneychangers would have been angry at having his table overturned and wrestled with Jesus. It would have been next to impossible for an individual to prohibit hundreds of people from carrying vessels. And if his disciples helped out, that would have been tantamount to an insurrection which the Roman soldiers would have crushed brutally and Jesus would not have been crucified alone. [73]

It should be clear at this point that at every unit and narrative sequence, the incident narrated in the gospels as temple cleansing was remote, if not impossible. This impairs its historicity.

Further, Josephus mentions several messianic claimants and the prophecies they made. He never mentions Jesus making this incident that Sanders, as we have seen, identifies as a 'prophetic threat'. An event of this magnitude, considering the thousands of witnesses that would have been present, and considering the extent to which it could have disrupted the trading activities, would not have missed Josephus' radar. Even Paul does not mention it. This lack of attestation outside the gospels further argues against its historicity.

Sander's also analyzes the crucifixion scene and identifies literary borrowings by the evangelists of speeches and actions from [Psalm 22](#). The crucifixion scene, particularly acts such as casting lots for the clothes of Jesus by Roman soldiers ([Mark 15:24](#)), which is borrowed from [Psalm 22:18](#) ("They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."), exposes the weakness of Sanders approach of interpreting allusions to the OT as symbolic acts. He *guesses*, against evidence to the contrary, that in the midst of pain, as the iron nails tore through Jesus flesh and broke his bones, like a good stoic actor reading a script, Jesus recalled [Psalm 22:1](#) and cried out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" ([Mark 15:34](#)). Sanders states that we don't know which elements of the crucifixion took place. But he neglects to mention that the very act of piercing hands and feet is also mentioned in [Psalm 22:16](#). He neglects to mention that it is almost impossible that the Roman soldiers who pierced Jesus' feet and hands and cast lots for his clothing were also acting out Psalm passages. Having

arrived at Jesus' death, Sander's reconstruction of the historical Jesus is complete and he remarks that strictly speaking, the resurrection is not part of the story of the historical Jesus.

Conclusion

There are five main weaknesses of Sander's approach which have been demonstrated in this review. The first one is treating the existence of a historical Jesus as an axiom. Second is approaching the gospels with a preconception that Jesus was an eschatological prophet and not a revolutionary, nor a reformer nor an itinerant teacher nor a cynic. His preoccupation with supporting his portrait and refuting the other portraits of Jesus limits his perspective and undermines his objectivity. Third is his failure to give due regard to redaction, *tendenz* and literary criticism and relying largely on historical criticism. The fourth one is his failure to consider the Pauline Christ which anteceded the gospel Jesus which is embellished and historicized. Fifth is lack of a reliable methodology. "Common sense" and "good feel for sources" are not methods and are purely subjective approaches that are doomed to yield invalid results.

As noted earlier, it is otherwise a useful book for anyone interested in NT scholarship but must be approached carefully with the above weaknesses in mind.

Notes

1. M.H. Goshen-Gottstein writes in, "Christianity Judaism, and Modern Bible Study," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, 28 (1975) 83 (68-88): "However we try to ignore it — practically all of us are in it [Biblical studies] because we are either Christians or Jews." As quoted by Jacques Berlinerblau in "[The Unspeakable in Biblical Scholarship](#)", (accessed on 8th May, 2007).
In "[Comprehensively Questing for Jesus?](#)", (accessed on 8th May, 2007) Mark Goodacre notes that Gerd Theissen and Anette Merz regard Helmut Koster as 'running the risk of reconstructing an 'anti-canonical picture of Jesus' in his work. That there are ideas in the field that are regarded as risky to contradict speaks volumes.
2. Michael V. Fox writes regarding Biblical scholarship in "[Bible Scholarship and Faith-Based Study: My View](#)", (accessed on 8th May, 2007): "Any discipline that deliberately imports extraneous, inviolable axioms into its work belongs to the realm of homiletics or spiritual enlightenment or moral guidance or whatnot, but not scholarship, whatever academic degrees its practitioners may hold. Scholarship rests on evidence. Faith, by definition, is belief when evidence is absent."
3. Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1991), xxvii.
4. [Finding the Historical Jesus: An Interview With John P. Meier](#), (accessed on 8th May, 2007)

5. There are several competing theories of who the historical Jesus was. Jesus has been characterized as a prophet, a charismatic preacher, a magician, a sage, a revolutionary and so on. Early proponents of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet include Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer and more recently E.P Sanders in *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993), J. P. Meier in *A Marginal Jew* volumes I and vol II (1991 and 1994), Dale Allison in *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (1998), Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (1999) and Paula Fredricksen *From Jesus to Christ* (2000); Proponents of Jesus as a man of spirit include Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer* (1995), Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*(1995) and Geza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (2001); Proponents of Jesus being a cynic sage: John Dominic Crossan *The Historical Jesus* (1991), Gerald F. Downing, *Christ and the Cynics* (1988), Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence* (1988); Richard Horsley, Hyam Maccoby and Gerd Theissen present Jesus as a prophet of social change. Robert Eisenmann presents him as a revolutionary. Luke Timothy Johnson, Robert H. Stein and N. T. Wright propose that Jesus was a son of God and a savior for mankind. See Peter Kirby's [Historical Jesus Theories](#) for more.
6. *Eschatos* means "last" in Greek. Thus Eschatology concerns ideas about the last times. Jewish thought held that judgment and redemption by God was at hand and through that judgment, God would alter the scheme of things then reign either directly or through a viceroy (like a messiah).
7. *Op. cit.*, p.50.
8. *Op. cit.*, p.76.
9. Whereas Tertullian (*On the Flesh of Christ*, Chapter 15) incorrectly assumed that the founder figure of the sect of Ebionites was called Ebion in the same fashion Valentinians derived their name from the name of their founder Valentinus, Origen stated that Ebion came from a Hebrew word signifying "poor" among the Jews (*Contra Celsum*, Book I, Chapter I).
10. This mythical Christ figure is consistent with that of several pagan religions who believed that their gods also died and resurrected in a mythical realm. The location of this realm shifted upwards under Platonism. Several ancient religions had dying and rising gods and most of them were linked to the agricultural cycles of seasonal vegetation like Dumuzi/Tammuz. From Sumerian clay tablets we learn that the goddess Inanna descended to the underworld and was killed then resurrected after three days (Samuel Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-Nine Firsts in Man's Recorded History* (1981), p. 162). Although her resurrection, like that of Egyptian Osiris, is not exactly like that of Jesus, the underlying concepts are similar because the deaths have the same effects on the believers. As such, the common objection from Christian apologists that Osiris' resurrection was not a true resurrection because he remained a king of the dead is not valid. Earl Doherty has studied the parallels between Christianity and mystery religion and he writes the following in [The](#)

- [Mystery Cults and Christianity Part Two: on Comparing the Cults and Christianity](#): "If Osiris "became ruler over the dead, not the living," the same can be said for Jesus. The resurrected Christian who goes to heaven is part of "the dead" and not "the living," in the sense of the departed from this world, the same as "the dead" pagan. And Christ in heaven is the same as Osiris in the underworld. Both are rulers over "the dead" in that same sense. The location of the happy afterlife is hardly significant. (A heaven in the sky simply sounds better to us than an eternity under the ground.) In essence, they are exactly the same, and Osiris gives such benefits to his devotees as much as Jesus to his. We as a culture, and Christianity in its writings, may have managed to paint a brighter, fuller picture of the Christian afterlife than did the mysteries, but this is in large part because we have the greater literary production of the two, and such things were not expressed openly in the cults."
11. What is available are superficial refutations comprising a few passages, not falsification of the Jesus Myth Hypothesis based on evidence. And these refutations critique old Jesus myth proponents, who did not present an alternative origin of Christianity as presented by Earl Doherty, and who relied inordinately on an argument from silence. See the opening chapters of Robert E. Van Voorst's *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (2000). See also Earl Doherty's comprehensive [Alleged Scholarly Refutations of Jesus Mythicism](#) (accessed on 8th May, 2007).
 12. The Center for Inquiry started [The Jesus Project](#) that seeks to explore the question "What if the most influential man in human history never lived?" This means that the question regarding the existence of Jesus is getting serious treatment and is no longer dismissed as it was in the past.
 13. Richard Carrier, [Did Jesus Exist? Earl Doherty and the Argument to Ahistoricity](#) (2002), (accessed on 8th May, 2007)
 14. To be sure, there are passages that have human-sounding connotations like [Galatians 1:19](#) and [1 Corinthians 9:5](#) which mention "James brother of the Lord" and [Galatians 4:4](#)'s "born of woman" and [Romans 1:3](#) "of the seed of David" and [Romans 9:5](#) "according to the flesh". These all have alternative interpretations that do not necessarily have earthly meanings. See [20 Arguable References To The Gospel Jesus In The NTEpistles](#) (accessed on 8th May, 2007).
 15. Scholars are divided over how to interpret *arcontes/archotons* ("princes of this world"). Those that favour the idea that *arcontes* means earthly rulers include James Walther, Gene Miller, Leon Morris, Archibald Robertson, Alfred Plummer M. Pesce, A. W. Carr and T. Ling. Those that allow a *spiritual* meaning of the word include W. J. P. Boyd, Paul Ellingworth, Paula Fredriksen, R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer and R. Murphy, S. G. F. Brandon and Tertullian (*Adv. Marcionem*, Book 5, chapter 6). See Earl Doherty's [Who Was Christ Jesus?](#). Note that most scholars who assign a spiritual meaning to the word *assume* that the demons *stood behind* earthly rulers. The appeal to scholarly interpretation here is purely on what the word

- arcontes* means, not how the *arcontes* achieved their ends. Scholars import a lot of unwarranted earthly suppositions when describing *how arcontes operated*.
16. *Op. cit.*, p.5
 17. *Op. cit.*, p.56
 18. *Op. cit.*, p.10
 19. *Op. cit.*, p.11
 20. Even leaving aside the supernatural claims in the virgin birth, the birth narratives of Jesus fit the mythic hero archetype. And some of its elements were crafted from the story of the birth of Moses. For example, Herod instigates a massacre of innocents just like Pharaoh did when Moses was born. These alleged massacres were neither attested by Roman or Egyptian documents respectively. Regarding the mythic hero archetype, Otto Rank writes in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*: “The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king [Jesus is portrayed as coming from the lineage of King David and alternatively as the son of God]. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles. During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth [the wise men from the east and angel Gabriel], and usually threatening danger to the father (or his representative)” as quoted by Alan Dundes in *In Quest of the Hero* (1990), p.57.
In *The Birth of the Messiah: A commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the gospels of Matthew and Luke* (1977), p.36., Raymond Brown writes that the birth narratives are rewritings of the Old Testament scenes and themes. The story of the magi who saw the Star of David, he says, echoes Balaam’s story, Balaam being like a type of magus who saw the star rise out of Jacob. The story of Herod as written above recalls how Pharaoh sought to kill all Israelite firstborn males in Exodus and Luke’s description of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, is derived from the Old Testament story of Abraham and Sarah.
 21. *Op. cit.* p.85
 22. Sanders suggests that it is unlikely that everyone would know the place where their ancestors (42 generations according to Luke’s genealogies) came.
 23. *Op. cit.*, p.86.
 24. Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.355.
 25. Raymond Brown, *Op. cit.*, p.547.
 26. *Op. cit.*, p.87.
 27. Sanders references Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, 1981, pp. 404f. He notes that Fitzmyer “cites the distinguished Roman historian, Ronald Syme. Syme pointed out that the similarities between 4 BCE and 6CE easily led to confusion and still sometimes do: W. W. Tarn,

a well-known Hellenistic historian, once wrote that Herod died in 6CE.” Sanders, *Op. cit.*, p.300.

It is quite probable that Luke was aware of Matthew’s midrashic attempt at building the birth narrative using the birth Moses and knew it would not resonate well with his (Luke’s) gentile audience. While excising Matthew’s scripturalization, Luke sought to present Jesus as a good tax-paying citizen to his Roman audience whilst using Josephus to craft his birth narrative. The dating conflict that remained can be attributed to what Mark Goodacre has described as “editorial fatigue” and the little weight attributed to chronological significance at the time.

See Richard Carrier’s [Luke and Josephus](#) (2000) and Mark Goodacre’s [Fatigue in the Synoptics](#) Goodacre defines editorial fatigue as “a phenomenon that will inevitably occur when a writer is heavily dependent on another’s work. In telling the same story as his predecessor, a writer makes changes in the early stages which he is unable to sustain throughout. Like continuity errors in film and television, examples of fatigue will be unconscious mistakes, small errors of detail which naturally arise in the course of constructing a narrative. They are interesting because they can betray an author’s hand, most particularly in revealing to us the identity of his sources.”

28. *Op. cit.*, p.300
29. Richard Carrier, [The Date of the Nativity in Luke](#) ,(5th ed., 2006)
30. Raymond Brown, *Op. cit.*, p.548.
31. *Op. cit.*, p. 63.
32. Historical criticism approaches texts with the assumption that they refer to an actual or a real world. Thus historical criticism deals with the referential function of a text. See Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (1990), p. 8.
33. Powell (*ibid*) states that literary criticism deals with a text apart from consideration of the extent to which it reflects reality. It seeks to uncover the intended effect the author would like the story to have on the readers.
34. Tendenz criticism is concerned with the motives or the tendencies of the author(s) of documents being examined. For example, the tendency of the author of Acts was to present the early Church as unified and working in harmony.
35. *Op. cit.*, p. 88
36. Howard Clark Kee writes that “the supposed architectural and institutional synagogue of the first century C.E.” is a “highly dubious scholarly construct” Howard Clark Kee, *Defining the First Century Synagogue*, as cited in *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress* (1999), p.9. See also Rachel Hachlili, in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), pp. 447-54, Joseph Gutmann, *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology and Architecture* (1975) and L. Michael White, *Building God’s House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among the Pagans Jews and Christians* (1990), pp.102-39, for the unlikelihood of the existence of synagogues as architectural edifices in Galilee pre-70.

37. A lot of confusion abounds regarding the size of first century Nazareth. Sanders writes that Nazareth “must have been a minor village, since it is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, Josephus or rabbinic literature. It was not on a major road.” (*Op. cit.*, p.104). The same sentiments are echoed by M. Goguel, *Jesus the Nazarene: Myth or Fact* (1926), J.D. Crossan and J. Reed, *Excavating Jesus* (2001) and J.L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (2000), p.132. Against the idea that Nazareth was a small village, A. Edersheim wrote that among the major cities located along the caravan route from the Mediterranean to Damascus was Nazareth hence it was an important and well-known city (A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus Messiah* (1993), p.147). The Semitic Scholar Gustav Dalman thought Nazareth was a radiating point of important roads and a thoroughfare for extensive traffic (Dalman, Gustav, *Sacred Sites and Ways*. Trans. P. P. Levertoff (1935)) J.P. Meier states in *Marginal Jew* (2001), p.301 that “Nazareth was not a totally isolated village.” Others like W. B. Smith, A. Drews and G.T. Sadler argued that Nazareth is not attested outside the gospels (in the Old Testament, the Mishnah and Josephus) because it never existed in the first century.
38. The appellation *Nazarhnos* (Ναζαρηνοϛ) in [Mark 10:47](#), which is translated as “Nazarene”, cannot be derived from the word Nazareth or Nazaret. Neither can *Nazwraios* (Ναζωραιοϛ) in [Matthew 2:23](#) which is also translated as *Nazarene*. The gentilic form for Nazareth would be *Nazarethnos* (Ναζαρεθνοϛ). The consequence of this is that “Nazarene” cannot mean “of Nazareth” as we find in [Mark. 10:47](#). The *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT* states that “linguistically, the transition from Nazaret to *Nazwraois* is difficult”. Gerhard Kittel detailed some of the etymological problems in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1967), Vol IV. See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature* (1957). Raymond Brown, *Op. cit.*, pp. 207-210.
39. *Op. cit.*, p.90.
40. *Op. cit.*, p.91.
41. Ancient novels had remarkable plasticity as Mikhail Bahktin observed in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981). For example the Sesonchosis fragment narrated about a historical romance of Pharaoh Senwosret/ Sesostris of the twelfth dynasty. When it was first published, it was identified as history and was only later reclassified when another part of it was obtained. See Susan A. Stephens and John J. Winkler (Eds.) in *Ancient Greek Novels* (1995) for more on this. More recently, a British businessman went on a treasure hunt inspired by H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885).
42. George Orwell, as quoted by E. L. Doctorow, [Notes on the History of Fiction: Who would give up the Iliad for the “real” historical record?](#) (accessed on May 8, 2007).
43. In literary criticism, a doublet is a parallel narrative, parable, saying etc, which grew out of, or alongside of an original narrative e.g. [Matthew 16:19](#)

- is a doublet of [Matthew 18:18](#) – the two miracles of loaves and fishes in [Mark 6:35-44](#) and [Mark 8:1-9](#) are probably two accounts of a single event or narrative. Soulen Richard N and Soulen Kendall R., *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (1989), p.50. The Sanhedrin trial ([Mark 14:53-65](#)) and the trial before Pilate ([Mark 15:1-20](#)) are doublets amongst several other passages in Mark that are also doublets. See Gerd Ludemann. *Jesus after 2000 Years: What He Really Did and Said*, (2001), p. 101. Raymond Brown shows that [Mark 14:32-43](#) is a doublet of the Mount of Olives scene and the Gethsemane scene. See Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah. Volume 1 & 2* (1994), pp. 219-220.
44. A triptych/tryptych is a composition or presentation that has three parts or sections. The word "Triptych" is derived from the Greek "triptychos," formed by combining "tri-" ("three") and "ptyche" ("fold" or "layer"). Turton (*op. cit*) notes that Ched Myers in *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (1988), p. 356, observed that the mockeries of Jesus complete a tryptich in which Jesus is mocked by Jewish guards as a prophet ([Mark 14:65](#)), Roman guards as a King ([Mark 15:16-20](#)), and Jewish onlookers as Messiah ([Mark 15:30](#)). Compare this with rising on the third day and the transfiguration scene where Jesus was with Moses and Elijah. Referring to Tolbert Mary Ann's *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (1989), p.272. Turton (*op. cit*) writes: "Pilate makes three attempts to release Jesus, just as Peter makes three denials of Jesus. In the typology of the gospel as delineated back in [Mark 4](#) in the Parable of the Sower, Peter is rocky ground, while Pilate represents thorny ground. Both fail to recognize and respond to Jesus, but whereas Peter makes a comprehensive threefold failure, Pilate nearly succeeds in releasing Jesus, a partial success. This, Tolbert avers, shows the difference between the infertility of rocky ground and the stunted fertility of thorny ground."
45. See Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions* (1988), Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (1993), David Freidrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* - translated from the fourth German edition of 1892, (1994).
46. Adoptionist Christology is the idea that Jesus was chosen or adopted by God when he was a grown man. It is argued that Mark does not have a birth narrative because the writer favored adoptionist Christology. Besides adoptionist Christology is the divine ancestry as being presented in the virgin birth narratives in the gospels. Sanders argues in p.244 that the declaration "You are my beloved son" in [Mark 1:11](#)//[Luke 3:22](#) is a "statement of adoption" borrowed by Mark from Psalm 2:7 where "son of man" referred to the King of Israel, a human being. He adds that Pauline Christology ([Romans 1:4](#)) held that Jesus became "son of God" upon his resurrection.
47. *Op. cit.*, p.245
48. *ibid.*
49. *ibid.*

50. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (1998), p. 520-521. See also Mark Goodacre's [When Prophecy Became Passion: The Death of Jesus and the Birth of the Gospels](#) (accessed on 8-May, 2007).
51. This is the position of most of those that favour the Jesus Myth hypothesis as presented in Earl Doherty's *The Jesus Puzzle*. See also Thomas L. Brodie's *The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings* for more on this. Though Brodie does not believe that the entire gospels are fiction, he nonetheless believes that Jesus life and activity were modeled on Elija-Elisha prophetic biographies.
52. This is the position of mainstream NT scholars. See Joel Marcus, *The Old Testament and the Death of Jesus: The Role of Scripture in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, in John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (1995), p. 205-233. Crossan, John Dominic, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (1998). The alleged "historical core" is an assumption that they share not in an academic sense, but in a social sense because it has never been questioned or established by them. It is protected almost impregnably by what Derrida called "institutional closure".
53. Judith H. Newman, *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (1999).
54. Goodacre writes in [When Prophecy Became Passion: The Death of Jesus and the Birth of the Gospels](#) (online): "Events generated Scriptural reflection, which in turn influenced the way the events were remembered and retold. And the process of casting the narrative in this language might be described, to utilise a somewhat cumbersome but nevertheless illuminating term from Hebrew Bible scholarship, *scripturalization*. This term is used by Judith Newman of Jewish prayers in the Second Temple Period, which increasingly used Scriptural models, precedents and language." (online at ntgateway.com)
55. In *The Jesus Dynasty* (2006), James Tabor argues that Jesus went to great lengths to fulfill Old Testament prophecies and applied Isaiah and Zechariah and Jeremiah to himself. Sanders employs this interpretation.
56. Sanders argues that Jesus' actions were probably all symbolic. "Symbolic actions were part of a prophet's vocabulary. They simultaneously drew attention and conveyed information" (*op. cit*, p.253). He adds "I incline to the view that it was Jesus himself who read the prophecy [[Zechariah 9:9](#) – which talks about a King riding triumphantly on a donkey] and decided to fulfill it" (*op. cit*, p.254).
57. He writes that he doubts the authenticity of the "den of robbers" statement in [Mark 11:17](#), which is found in [Jeremiah 7:11](#). He argues it looks to him "like an easy phrase for the evangelists to lift from Jeremiah to make Jesus appear politically innocuous to Greek-speaking gentile readers" (*op cit*, p.260). See also p.270.

58. *Op. cit.*, p.254
59. *ibid.*
60. *ibid.*
61. *ibid.*
62. Gundry, Robert. *Mark: A Commentary on His Gospel* (1993), p. 626, as cited by Michael Turton in [Historical Commentary on the Gospel of Mark](#) (accessed on 8-May, 2007).
63. *Op cit*, p.254
64. Geoffrey Troughton, explains in [Echoes in the Temple? Jesus, Nehemiah and their Actions in the Temple](#), *JBS* 3/2 (April 2003), p.16 (available online at JBS website): "Concern for the 'proper' functioning of the Temple also lay behind Jesus' action. It may be plausibly argued that Jesus was opposing the carriage of sacred supplies that would later be sold to worshippers at a significant profit. Thus, 'Jesus was protesting against the Temple establishment for turning the sacrificial system into an oppressive profit-making industry.'" Troughton references Kim Huat Tan, *The Zion Traditions and the Aims of Jesus* (1997), p.181.
65. *ibid.*
66. *op cit*. p.257
67. *ibid.*
68. *Op. cit.*, p.258
69. Paula Fredricksen, [From Jesus to Christ](#) (accessed on 8-May, 2007)
70. Paula Fredricksen, *ibid.*
71. Troughton G., *ibid.* For the linguistic connection of *σκευοφ* ('vessels') between Mark and Nehemiah, Troughton refers to W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Volume 3 (1997), p. 134.
72. Michael Turton, [Historical Commentary of the Gospel of Mark](#) (accessed on 8-May, 2007).
73. David Seeley, *Jesus' Temple Act Revisited: A Response to P. M. Casey*. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Jan 2000, 62, no1, 55-63 as cited by Michael Turton, *op cit*.