

Jesus the Messiah: a survey of the life of Christ

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Robert Stein provided survey of the life of Christ, which is understandable and yet unabridged. In very sharp bird's eye view he confronts strongest positions of bible criticism, balancing between their errors and bringing very adequate, exact and unembroidered answers.

I can recommend this book with enthusiasm due to Stein's zeal and sense for the reality and the truth.

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- Introduction

- Two doubts appeared: "...whether historical research could arrive at the Jesus of history." and "...whether the result of such 'historical' investigation could ever prove an asset for faith." (11)

... Ernst Käsemann read a paper in which he pointed out that making an absolute distinction between the "historical" Jesus and the Christ of faith was ultimately a form of docetism (an early Christian heresy that denied the true humanity of Jesus Christ).

...

The original quest emphasizes a discontinuity between the Jesus of "history" and the Christ of the Gospels and sought to free the "real Jesus" from the Christ of the church and the creeds. The new quest, on the other hand, sought to find continuity between them.

(p. 12)

- This new quest unfortunately continued to work under the same historical-critical method seeing that continuity in the similarity of the message (proclamation of the "existential encounter with God", p. 12) rather than in actual identity.
- Second quest could not fill the gap. Today so called "third quest" takes its place. Remaining influence of h-c method brings disappointment.

Any research on the life of Christ that eliminates at the beginning the possibility of the supernatural will always produce a "historical Jesus" who is by definition radically different from the Christ of the Gospels.

...

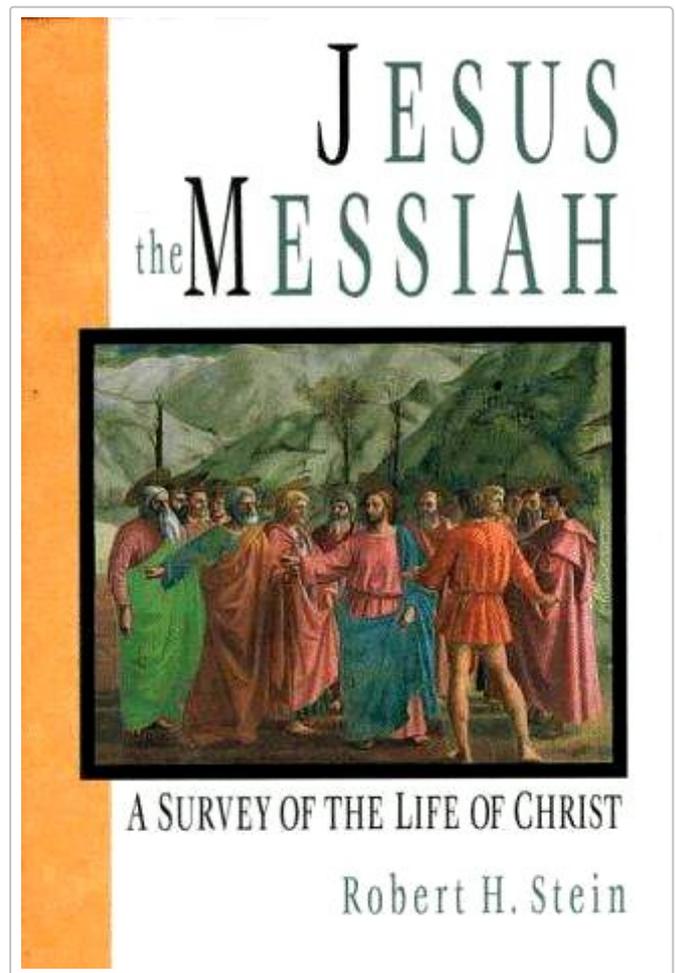
What the world critically needs is a Savior, but only a supernatural Jesus can be a Savior.

(p. 13)

- Part One: Key Issues in Studying the Life of Christ

- Where You Start Determines Where You Finish: The Role of Presuppositions in Studying the Life of Jesus

Where one starts one's investigation determines the result one will obtain.



(p. 17)

- This holds good right here, in this quest.

We are firmly convinced that what happens in space and time is subject to the general laws of motion, and that in this sense, as an interruption of the order of Nature, there can be no such thing as ‘miracles’ (*What is Christianity?* [New York: Putnam, 1901] pp. 28–29).

(p. 19)

- Rudolf Bultmann speaks of this presupposition similarly. See p. 19.
- David Hume stated philosophical argument against miracles:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of the “laws of nature.”

The “laws of nature” are inviolable.

Therefore, a rational person is never justified in believing that a miracle actually happened.

- Ernst Troelsch formulated it as the principle of analogy:

Since our present experience is nonmiraculous, our interpretation of the past must be nonmiraculous.

- Historical-critical method raises no theoretical difficulty up to the decisive point which comes with the question of resurrection answered according to one's presupposition.
 - The miracle traditions are found throughout all gospels in various forms, which results in weighty evidence in favor of certain miracles, such as resurrection.

There is certain wholeness about the Jesus who preached the arrival of the kingdom of God, who ate with tax collectors and sinners, who healed the sick and raised the dead, who died sacrificially on the cross and rose triumphantly from the dead. This wholeness produces an overall portrayal of Jesus of Nazareth that is convicting to a sympathetic reader of the Gospels. Attempts to strip the supernatural from Jesus' life can only produce Jesus so radically different that he is unrecognizable and his impact on history unexplainable.

(p. 24)

- Where can we go? Sources for Studying the Life of Jesus
 - Non-Christian sources
 - Pagan sources
 - Plinius the Younger in *Epistles* mentions Christians as stubborn in holding their convictions and describes their church life as far as he was familiar with it.
 - Tacitus in *Annals* writes, that Nero placed the blame for the burning Rome on Christians. His records “concerning Jesus' being sentenced and put to death by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius may be based on the official records of Rome.” (28)
 - Suetonius in *Life of Claudius* mentioned act of expelling Jews from Rome for causing riots because of some Chrestus.
 - Mara ben Serapion mentioned Christ along with Socrates and Pythagoras as three martyrs, which martyrdoms brought judgment.
 - Jewish sources
 - Josephus in *The Antiquities of the Jewish People*.

Within the *Antiquities* are two important references to Jesus. The most famous is called the “Testimonium Flavianum”:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such

people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared. (18.3.3 [18.63–64])

(p. 29)

- Authenticity of Josephus' testimony is being greatly disputed. It doesn't fit his biographical context, nor textual context, nor it was quoted by any early apologist till Eusebius in 4th century.
- In Babylonian Talmud, there is a parallel tradition resembling Jesus' trial and death from Jewish point of view.

Most of the material, however, arose from later Jewish-Christian debates and appears to be apologetic in nature.

(p. 32)

- Talmudic tradition is more-less written prejudice, misinterpretation, superstition and slander. See pp. 32, 33,
- Jewish manuscripts generally describes Jesus sorcerer, who led Israel astray.
- Christian sources
 - Oral tradition and witness existed along with written records (J 21:25).
 - These traditions can be glimpsed today
 - apocryphal Gospels, especially the *Gospel of Thomas*
 - hypothetical manuscripts such as Q, the *Secret Gospel of Mark* and a "Cross Gospel"
 - quotations of early church fathers
 - textual variants in various Gospel manuscripts
 - + number of various apocryphal Gospels and writings
 - The *Gospel of Thomas* stands out above all others in importance.

The *Gospel of Thomas* consists of a collection of 114 sayings. Some of them repeat almost verbatim the saying found in our Gospels; some are similar to our Gospel sayings but have an interesting twist of addition. Others are quite strange and betray a clear Gnostic bent: ...

(p. 37)

- Most scholars believe, that these sayings come from separate traditions.
- Hypothetical existence of "Q" is utmost improbable fiction. Eight percent probability is generous percentage for eight incredible presuppositions. See pp. 40–41.
- Discovery of so-called *Secret Gospel of Mark* led to another theory:

This Mark-like Gospel was made into a heretical Carpocratian version of Mark, which then reworked into our Mark. To build such a complicated system upon an eighteenth-century addition to a printed work that no one but the discoverer has actually seen is building a great deal on an exceptionally weak foundation.

(p. 40)

- Even less convincing is argument for the Cross Gospel.

Our survey of the noncanonical Christian sources ultimately turns out to be rather negative.

- Biblical sources: Acts through Revelation

... we find less information about Jesus of Nazareth than we might expect.

(p. 41)

- Biblical sources: the Gospels
- Criteria for the Authenticity of Jesus' Sayings

There are six *positive* criteria: multiple attestation; multiple forms; Aramaic linguistic phenomena; Palestinian environmental phenomena; dissimilarity; divergent patterns from developing tradition. The primary *negative* criteria number three: the tendencies of the developing tradition, environmental and contradiction of authentic sayings.

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- All criteria described. See pp. 47–49.
- Conclusion
 - The non-Christian sources establish following undoubted minimum: Jesus was historical person, lived in Palestine in the first century, Jewish leadership was involved in his death, was crucified by the Romans under Pontius Pilate, his ministry was associated with wonders/sorcery.

The *Gospel of Thomas* may contain various agrapha, but that cannot be demonstrated.

(p. 49)

- 3 When Did All This Take Place? The Problem of Chronology
 - Gospels are no modern-day diaries of Jesus' life. Mark is written around a simple geographical framework (first Galilee events, then Judea events). Matthew follows Mark, only alternates account between series of events. John's Jesus moves back and forth between Galilee and Judea and Luke has placed majority of Jesus' teaching in two discerned sections. (51)
 - Birth of Jesus
 - Jesus was born in year 4 B. C. (750 A. U. C.) in the time of King Herod, who died in 34th year of his reign, while he began to reign in year 37 B. C.

Our present calendar is the work of a sixth-century Scythian monk named Dionysius Exiguus, who obviously erred by at least four years.

(p. 52)

- According to Josephus, moon's eclipse (March 12–13) took place shortly before Herod's death, while Passover (April 11) took place after his death.

Thus Jesus must have been born no later than between March 12 and April 11 in 4 B. C.

(p. 52)

- The fact, that Mary's purification involved only giving two pairs of doves or two young pigeons (Lk 2:24) implies, that wise men hasn't arrived yet and that they were still pure. (Normal purification fee was a lamb and a dove. Cf. Lev 12:6 and 12:8.)

Thus we can date Jesus' birth at least forty-one days earlier than Herod's death, assuming that the wise men came to Herod on the day of his death. It is unlikely, however, that one can fit the visit of the wise men to Herod, their visit to Jesus in Bethlehem, and Herod's discovery of his having been tricked (Mt 2:1–12) into a single day.

(p. 53)

- Matthew suggests earlier dating of Jesus' birth. He points out, that Herod inquired from the wise men exact time when the star had appeared (Mt 2:7) and then slaughtered the innocents of Bethlehem, who were under two years. This implies, that Jesus could have been two years old yet.
- Lukes mention of Quirinius being governor in Syria make us dating trouble.
- Josephus only knows about him being governor in 6 A. D.
- Tertulian thought, that Luke was wrong and maintains, that C. Sentius Saturninus was governor when Jesus was born.
- Explanations
 - Term *protos* in Luke 2:2 should be translated as *before* rather than *first*. That would mean dissension with all the major Bible translations.
 - The census took place under C. Sentius Saturninus, but was finished under Quirinius. Luke 2:2 and Acts 5:37, however, refer to two different censuses.
 - Quirinius was governor of Syria on two separate occasions.
- There are therefore number of problems in a discussion concerning Quirinius in Luke 2:1–2.
- It would be too short-sighted to accuse Luke of such a historical blunder considering historical value and accuracy of the rest of his work.

Thus even apart from the question of divine inspiration, it is probably wisest at this point to acknowledge the difficulty of what Luke says but to hold off calling this a clear error. Perhaps in the future additional evidence may become available that will explain the present difficulty.

(p. 55)

- The visit of wise men was caused by star, which could be Halley's comet (12/11 B. C.), nova/supernova (5 and 4 B. C. according to Chinese records), conjunction of Jupiter with Saturn and Mars (May/June, September/October and December 7 B. C.) or a simple miracle, which would mean, that every natural explanation is misguided.
- The conjunction of Jupiter (symbol of king) with Saturn (symbol of sabbath and Jews) could be well associated with the birth of Jewish king.

... Jesus began his ministry in approximately A. D. 28.

(p. 58)

- The length of Jesus' ministry according to The Synoptics lasted a little more than a year. That reasoning assumes, that they arranged material in precise chronological order. John, however, seems to be more likely doing that. And according to him, Jesus' ministry lasted for 2+ to 3+ years, depending on John 5:1 interpretation.
- The date of Jesus death according to Mk 15:42 was a Friday in month Nisan preceding sabbath. Possible years are 27, 30, 33 and 36. There is discussion about fitting either 30 or 33 to the context, most scholars agreed on the year 30. (60)

- Part Two: The Life of Christ

- Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary: How It All Started

... most frequent argument against raised virginal conception is that too many other parallels exist in ancient literature to allow us to take the Christian account seriously.

(p. 65)

- Two parallels are: Birth of Perseus, and the birth of Hercules.
- All these parallels turn out to be quite different from the NT accounts. Even though the woman was called virgin before conception, she was not called so after.
- Conception of Perseus is due to adulterous lust of Zeus for his mother.

Paganism simply does not have accounts of *virgin* births.

...

The more closely they are compared, the clearer becomes the stark contrast between them.

(p. 65)

- Following the parallel leads us to question of God's lust after Mary. That is utmost offensive and clearly unfitting into the asexual nature of the Gospel.
- There is disagreement between genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Mark.
- Julius Africanus in A. D. 220 thought, that Jacob (Mt 1:15) and Heli (Lk 3:23) were half-brothers. Luke referred to Joseph's legal father whereas Matthew to his actual father. This explanations assumes, that the genealogies are of Joseph.
- It could be assumed, that these are two different genealogies: One of Mary and one of Joseph.
- More natural would be to exclude Joseph from the parenthetical comment (Luke 3:23)
- Satisfactory explanation of this problem has not come forth yet. (71)
- Herod the Great was very paranoid about his political position. He was exactly that kind of person, who would order the slaughter of innocent boys in Bethlehem, so even though “no clear extrabiblical document confirms the massacre of the innocents, there is no need to deny the historicity of the event” (72).

There was just reason on Rome for the saying “Better Herod's swine than his son .”

(p. 72)

Shepherds were generally considered dishonest (*b. Sanhedrin* 25b). They were unclean according to the law. Their presence at the birth of Jesus was recorded by Luke to show his readers that the good news of the gospel is for the poor, for sinners, for outcast, for people like these shepherds.

(p. 75)

- Name “Jesus” (Joshua, Jeshua) was pretty common Jewish name till 2nd century. It means “YHWH is salvation”.
- The fact, that Jesus' parents gave only two pigeons at the Mary's purification rite indicates, that they were poor and that wise men had not arrived yet.
- The Theological Importance of the Virginal Conception
 - It is one of five “fundamentals” listed in twelve volume Fundamentals work.
 - In the Christmas story, it is the “fact” that matters, not “how”.

The latter criticism should be taken seriously. The essence of the Christmas story is not that Mary conceived as a virgin. Nor is the Christmas story a sentimental ode to motherhood.

(p. 79)

- According to some Platonic-like dualistic thoughts have some argued, that non-sexual conception was the only way to prevent Jesus inheritance of sinful nature. According to this thinking, Mary should have been conceived immaculately also, so she wouldn't pass her sinful nature on Jesus. [cf. with Catholic doctrine]

Luke simply says that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and overshadowed her through all this. Through his protection the offspring would be holy, the Son of God (Lk 1:35).

...

The Son of God did not come into existence through a virginal conception. The Son of God was, is and always will be. The virginal conception was simply the means by which God brought about the incarnation of his Son.

(p. 79)

The importance of confessing or denying the virginal conception lies not in its christological consequences.

...

TO deny in was obviously to reject the Bible as an infallible rule of faith. In this respect the question “Do you believe the virgin birth?” served as a kind of twentieth-century shibboleth (Judg 12:6) testing a person's view of the Bible.

(p. 80)

- 5 What Was the Boy Jesus Really Like? The Silent Years

- Only one story from these silent years (birth to baptism) is recorded in canonical gospels.

Still another factor that argues for the normalcy of these silent years is the unbelief of Jesus' family and community. Unlike the stories found in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (see chapter two under “Extrabiblical Sources”), there was no cemetery in Nazareth devoted to the victims of Jesus and no major sparrow problem that would have led his family (Jn 7:5) or community (Mk 6:4) to believe in his unique divine calling and relationship to God.

...

Jesus' sinlessness was something known to God alone.

(p. 82)

- The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus

- Hieronimus (4th century) thought, that Jesus had no siblings at all. (See Jn 19:26–27)
 - Helvidius (4th century) thought, that Jesus had younger siblings born to Joseph and Mary in later years.
 - Epiphanius (4th century) thought, that Jesus' siblings were from Joseph's previous marriage.
 - The most acceptable is Helvidius' model. It would also explain Jesus' concern about his mother (Jn 19:27), because he was responsible for her as her oldest son.
 - Jesus was educated man living in trilingual environment.
- 6 The Baptism of Jesus: The Anointing of the Anointed
 - The Coming of John the Baptist

In A.D. 27 or 28 a strangely dressed man appeared near the southern end of the Jordan River.

...

In Jesus' understanding John the Baptist fulfilled the role of the returning Eliah (Mk 9:11–13)

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- John's baptism was not self administered like similar purification rites of that time.
- His message was not only of doom, but also of awaited messianic kingdom.
- John baptized less than ten miles away from the community of Qumran near the northwest corner of the Dead Sea.

Both John and Qumran were priestly in descent, stressed the need of repentance, had a similar though not identical “baptism,” proclaimed a similar judgment on the Pharisees, were ascetic in their lifestyle and lived in the wilderness. Even more striking, however, was that they both had the same biblical passage as their theme verse: “A voice cries out ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God’” (Is 40:3; compare Mk 1:3 and 1QS 8:12–14).

(p. 95)

- The Baptism of Jesus

He who later would invite people to take up a cross and follow him (Mk 8:34) made just such a commitment at his baptism.

(p. 98)

- 7 The Temptation of Jesus: “The Kingdom of God Has Come to You”

- Temptation and baptism account were connected in earliest traditions.
- No reason why temptation was necessary is given. Various religious traditions, however, connects testing with ministry.

“My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing” (Sirach 2:1)

(p. 103)

- Since Mark doesn't write temptation account, it appears to have origin in Q source.
- Q possibly got these informations from Jesus' autobiographical narrations in times, when he came through similar temptations in his ministry. (Mk 8:31–33; Mk 11:1–11; Jn 6:1–15)

It was not a temptation to immorality or sin in the traditional sense. It was rather a testing as to the kind of Messiah Jesus would be.

...

Was messiahship an excuse for privileges or a responsibility for serving?

(p. 106)

- Jesus came to serve (Mk 10:45).
- Satan twisted meaning of Psalm 91:11–12.

Context and substance of the Old Testament quotation does not involve performing a sign before people in order to gain a hearing.

(p. 107)

- Putting God under the test would not be an act of faith, but an act of unbelief.
- Temptation boiled in the offer to a political solution to the world's problems without the “cup” God called Jesus to drink.

With the kingdoms of the world given to him he could rid the world of hunger, war, injustice, poverty and so on. A “crossless solution” would resolve such problems, and it would do so with no need of great suffering on his part. On the other hand, if the basic need of the world involved forgiveness, reconciliation with God and salvation from future judgment, then such a “victory” by Jesus would be a shallow one. “For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mk 8:36 RSV).

(p. 109)

- 8 The Call of the Disciples: You Shall Be My Witnesses

- The fact, that Judas is always referred to as “Iscariot” indicates, that there was another Judas, who is Matthew's and Mark's Thaddaeus.

Also among the disciples were a traitor (the tax collector Matthew) and a Zealot revolutionary (Simon). The fact that they could coexist side by side for an extended period reveals how Jesus can change the hearts of natural enemies and bring reconciliation and peace.

(p. 118)

According to some scholars, Jesus thought that history was soon to end and that therefore he could not have planned for a “church” and “apostles” to lead it. Yet it would seem wiser to reverse this reasoning and conclude that because Jesus did choose and train twelve disciples he envisioned a period of time before the ultimate consummation of all things.

(p. 121)

- 9 The Message of Jesus: “The Kingdom of God Has Come to You”

- Jesus was an extraordinary teacher. He basically did what other rabbis did.

People were so mesmerized that they forgot about their basic necessities of life. The miracles of the feeding of the five thousand (Mk 6:30–44) and four thousand (Mk 8:1–10) were necessary partly due to his great ability as a teacher.

(p. 124)

- He used various literary forms (poetry, parallelism, etc.).
- Today we recognize parables as extended metaphor, which tend to teach a basic point, not as allegories nor as secret hidden in details.
- Central message of Jesus: The Kingdom of God has come. This wasn't understood as God's spiritual rule in hearts of believers, nor as zealot sympathizing rebellion (Mt 5:9, Mk 12:17). The fact, that Roman authorities had no problem with early Jerusalem church indicates, that it wasn't seen as a political revolutionary movement.
- Another way to put in is that kingdom of God has been **realized** (Lk 16:16).
- Realized and fulfilled were promises, prophecies. Jesus himself did it intentionally. (Mt 26:54 *But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*)
- Another evidence is in Lk 11:20. If Jesus casted demons out, God's kingdom has truly arrived. X Kingdom of God is in some way still in the future (Lk 11:2 Who will enter?)

The confusion caused by the presence of both the “already” and the “not yet” is aggravated by our tendency to understand “kingdom” as a static, spatial entity.

...

- If it would be so, how could Jesus claim it had come in his ministry?

On the other hand, if he understood the term *kingdom* dynamically as involving God's “reign,” then it could include both a present and a future. This is in fact the way the Old Testament and New Testament understand this term (compare Mt 6:33; 20:20–21; Lk 10:9; 17:21; 19:12–15; 23:42).

Maintaining the balance between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God is critical. When the tension between them is lost and one aspect is emphasized at the expense of the other, two major errors arise. To lose sight of “not yet” leads to spiritual triumphal enthusiasm that is ultimately doomed to disappointment and disillusionment. The fallen character of this world and our sinful nature will see to that. On the other hand, to lose sight of the “already” leads to defeatism and a defensive mentality that thwarts the spreading of the gospel throughout the world. Kept in proper perspective, Jesus' teaching leads to an optimistic and aggressive evangelism as well as an awareness that in this life we are still “strangers and foreigners on the earth” (Heb 11:13).

(p. 130–131)

- Abba: Jesus' favorite way for addressing God.
- Paul uses word Abba and does not adapt it for Greeks, there is only possible explanation: This is the way how Jesus taught His disciples to address God.

Jesus invited his followers to see and experience God not as some “Unmoved Mover,” “First Cause” of “The Force” but as a heavenly Father who cared for and loved them (Mt 6:25–34).

(p. 133)

- God's fatherhood is no universal, as some liberals taught. Jesus actually describes some people to have the devil as their father.
- Jesus' ethics
 - Catholic view
 - two-level ethics: 1) laypeople – general and necessary commandments 2) “evangelical advices” for clergymen.
 - protestant view is two-level too: justification → sanctification, born again → baptism in the Spirit, ...
 - vs. Mk 8:34, Lk 14:26
 - Utopian view
 - Jesus' ethics as a recipe for new society.
 - vs. Mk 12:13–17
 - Lutheran
 - Jesus' ethics is impossible to fulfill, therefore only leading to seek Grace.
 - vs. Mt 3:1–2
 - Liberal
 - JE is about what followers should *be*, not what they should *do*.
 - Concentration on heart.
 - vs. Mt 7,17.20
 - Existential
 - JE is call to radical and total decision.
 - vs. JE is not contentless demand for decision
 - Idea of “Interim” ethics
 - Concept by A. Schweitzer: JE only was meant for the very end of history, which did not occur. Jesus was therefore wrong. Schweitzer nonetheless admired Jesus' decisiveness to high ethical standard.
 - vs. the fact, that Jesus based his teaching not on future crisis, but on OT, prophets and creation.
 - so called **Kingdom interpretation**

Those teachings stem from the moral character of God himself.

(p. 138)

Now it is seen as never before what it means to love outcasts, sinners and enemies.

...

The call to forgive is carried out in the realization that they have been forgiven and receive continual forgiveness (Lk 11:4).

...

- Satan has already been defeated, we are the heirs.
- We are called to live as God's children calling Him Abba.

Shortly the Spirit would come (Jn 16:5–15), and in his presence the ethic of the kingdom would be lived out with a new heart and a new power (Rom 8:2–5). Thus the ethic of the kingdom, like the kingdom, itself, is realized in the “already.”

...

The same God was worshiped in both, although a new intimacy was apparent in the use of the title *Abba*.

...

Paradoxically the ethic Jesus taught was both the same and different, old and new!

• 10 The Person of Jesus: “Who Then Is This, That Even the Wind & the Sea Obey Him?”

Jesus revealed his own understanding of who he was in three ways: by his actions, through his speech and by the titles he used or accepted.

(p. 142)

- Jesus exercised God's prerogative of forgiveness of sin.
- He made miracles, was plundering Satan's domain, commanded demons.

Thirty-four separate miracles are performed by Jesus in the Gospel accounts. Along with these are fifteen Gospel texts that refer to Jesus' miracle-working activity. In addition, we have other accounts in which Jesus is the recipient of a miraculous act, such as the virginal conception, the events surrounding his baptism and transfiguration, his resurrection and his ascension.

One cannot read the Gospel accounts without the question arising, “Who is this man who is master of nature, disease and even death?” In Jesus' actions people saw a bold claim to a unique authority. Even as the prince dressed as a pauper unconsciously revealed who he was by his behavior, so Jesus, despite his modest dress and occupation, revealed his understanding of who he was by his actions.

(p. 143)

- Jesus' words were not based on OT, nor on logic. He really spoke like one who knows, that world revolves around himself.

Heaven or hell, bliss or damnation—one's eternal destiny is determined by the acceptance or rejection of him (Mt 10:32; 11:6; Mk 8:34–38; 9:37)! In the person of Jesus one is confronted with salvation or judgment.

...

In light of all this, one cannot avoid the question “Who is this who thinks that the world revolves around himself? A deranged egomaniac? A false prophet? Or can it be that this is indeed the King of kings and Lord of lords?”

(p. 145)

- Although Jesus' accepted being successor of the Davidic dynasty, he rejected any political dimensions associated with it.
- He was “eschatological prophet”.

He did not simply predict the destruction of the temple; he brought it about (Mk 15:29). Thus the title “prophet” is both correct and yet inadequate. Unlike the prophets of old, the authority of Jesus' words lay not in “Thus saith the Lord” but in “Truly, I say to you.”

(p. 146)

Attempts to portray Jesus as a social reformer or political activist lose sight of this dimension. They focus almost totally on horizontal concerns dealing with one's “neighbor.”

(p. 151)

With regard to the Last Supper, Jesus referred to his death as achieving human forgiveness (Mt 26:28) and sealing the new covenant. This teaching would provide the nucleus from which the church's later interpretation of the meaning of Jesus' death would develop.

(p. 153)

• 11 The Events of Caesarea Philippi: The Turning Point

- Jesus made a decisive journey.
- Peter confesses for all disciples, that Jesus is Messiah. Jesus did tell them not to say anyone, but that was not rejection of this title (p. 159)
- Jesus then began to show them, that he has to undergo passion.
- Peter began to criticize Jesus, who rebuked him.

The harshness of Jesus' rebuke is a guarantee of the historicity of the incident.

(p. 162)

- Jesus spoke of Peter as of a rock. Peter's gift to the early church is obvious.

However, there is no hint anywhere in this text or in the rest of the New Testament that this leadership role was passed on in perpetuity to a successor of any sort.

(p. 164)

Just as it is foolish to build a large theological practice on a single, confusing reference to baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29, so it is unwise to build a large ecclesiastical framework in this single reference to Peter as the rock.

(p. 165)

• 12 The Transfiguration: A Glimpse of the Future

- These accounts are attached to previous from Caesarea Philippi.
- Mk, Mt: 6 days later vs. Lk: 8 days after. Mk & Mt may reckon the time period inclusively.
- Tradition says, that transfig. took place on Mt. Tabor. That could be hardly described as “high” and it may have been occupied by Roman troops in that time (Josephus).
- Other suggestion is Mt. Carmel, which is even lower than Mt. Tabor.
- Most probable is Mt. Hermon, which towers to height 9100 feet (Tabor or Carmel X 5!).
- Geographical location does not bear the heart of the story though it is interesting and legitimate question.
- Jesus took an inner core of the Twelve with himself—Peter, James and John.

On the mountain Jesus was *transfigured* before his disciples. This English term translates the Greek *metamorphóté* (Mk 9:2). Jesus experienced a supernatural transfiguration. Naturalistic explanations, such as the sun breaking through the clouds and shining brightly upon Jesus' white garments, will not do. Jesus' garments became dazzling white (Mk 9:3), but the appearance of his face also changed (Lk 9:29).

...

Thus whereas Moses in his encounter with God on Mount Sinai radiated God's glory (Ex 34:29, 30, 35), Jesus on this occasion radiated a foretaste of his own future glory.

(p. 169)

- Nor can be the transfiguration explained as some vision (according to Mt 17:9). Peter's words and whole tenor of the account prohibits us to think so.
- Nor it is some kind of “reading resurrection accounts back” to time of Jesus' ministry. Gospel writers doesn't understand it so, Peter would hardly make such a foolish suggestion of building three dwellings after resurrection, presence of only three apostles in post-resurrection account is not acceptable.

Mark understood transfiguration as fulfilling Jesus' statement “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power” (Mk 9:1).

...

It would appear, therefore, that both 2 Peter and the Gospel writers understood the transfiguration as a glimpse of the future splendor of the Son of Man at his glorious return.

Still another possible interpretation is that the transfiguration was a manifestation of the preexistent glory of the Son of God.

(p. 171)

... More important, however, is the error of seeking to build tabernacles *equally* for Jesus, Elijah and Moses. The latter greats of the Old Testament were servants, not “sons.”

...

The command “Listen to him” was a rebuke of Peter and the disciples. They had to understand and accept Jesus' teaching concerning the messianic role.

(p. 173)

- After transf, Jesus headed toward Jerusalem.
 - Mt: Galilee → Capernaum → Judea → other side of Jordan → Jericho → Jerusalem
 - Mk: Galilee → Capernaum → Jordan → Judea → Jerusalem
 - Luke: Jesus went through Samaria (Lk 9:52).

What Peter had confessed was now verified by the divine Voice. Jesus was not Elijah, Moses, a prophet or John the Baptist. The Voice affirmed Peter had said. Jesus was the Messiah/Christ, the beloved Son of God. This implied that he had no equals.

(p. 176)

- 13 The Triumphal Entry: Israel's King Enters Jerusalem

- Crowning event of Jesus' mission was near.
- Evangelists placed at this point various traditions, especially Luke does so. (Lk 9:51–18:14; Mk 11–16)
- Jesus has most probably somehow pre-arranged the colt for himself. Foreknowledge does not explain it.

The Gospel writers want us to understand that Jesus consciously sought to enter Jerusalem not on foot, as other pilgrims did, but in this specific manner.

(p. 179)

- Hosana means “Save us [please]”. It became a greeting such as nowadays' “Praise the Lord”.

For some of his followers who made up the crowd, Jesus was not a mere pilgrim coming to Jerusalem, but “the” Pilgrim, their Teacher, their Master and Lord.

...

For Jesus this entry was indeed messianic in nature. Intentionally he arranged for an unriden colt to be prepared for him. Its virginal nature indicates that the colt would serve a special use. It was fit for Israel's King. Intentionally he entered the holy city in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, for he was Israel's Messiah.

(p. 181)

- Disciples still didn't fully understand everything involved in this event.

For Jesus the triumphal entry was a carefully orchestrated messianic act.

...

In majesty he rode on—to die!

...

At the trial, when witnesses were sought to condemn Jesus and justify Roman political action, no mention was made of the triumphal entry. Clearly in the minds of Rome and the Jewish leadership this event was not understood as a messianic claim or challenge.

(p. 184)

- 14 The Cleansing of the Temple: God's House—a Den of Thieves

As we shall see, Mark “sandwiched” the cleansing of the temple (Mk 11:15–19 between the cursing of the fig tree (vv. 12–14 and 20–25) so that his readers would understand that the “cleansing” was not simply an act of purification or reformation but one of judgment.

(p. 185)

... the selling of sacrificial animals and the exchanging of money could be seen as an attempt by the priesthood to make the temple more “user friendly.” From a different perspective, however, it could be seen as the transformation of the temple from a place of worship to a kind of priestly bazaar. Far from assisting the animals, their refuse, their cries and so on detracted attention from the God-ordained purpose of the temple.

(p. 189)

- Some pharisees may have supported Jesus' action since some of them disagreed with Saducean priesthood practices.

The incident was probably on a smaller scale than a simple reading of the Gospels might suggest.

(p. 191)

- Jesus action was understood by disciples as the judgment over religion, which doesn't bear fruit (cf. Mark's sandwiched acted-out parable of cursed fig.)
- Jesus did not want to overthrow Jewish leadership and Roman government. This was no political statement.
- By temple guards and Roman authorities this was seen as intrareligious Jewish squabble.
- Jesus only sought to cleanse the temple from everything, what has nothing to do there. He didn't opposed to sacrificial system, on the contrary, he supported it!
- He was aware of dishonesty and hypocrisy. He even wouldn't allow anyone to make temple his shortcut from one part of the city to another (Mk 11:16).
- Cleansing the Temple as well as cursing the fig was an parabolic act of judgment.

- 15 The Last Supper: Jesus Looks to the Future

... as in the fetching of the colt (see chapter thirteen, under “The Event As Understood by Jesus”), the arrangement for Jesus to eat the Passover with his disciples in this “upper room” (Mk 14:15 RSV) appears preplanned.

(p. 199)

- Accounts from John and from the synoptics differ in stated time of the Last Supper.

The question of how to reconcile the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper remains unresolved. It would appear for several reasons, however, that the meal Jesus ate with his disciples on the night of his betrayal was indeed the Passover.

(p. 203)

- There are two different traditions concerning the Last Supper: Those of Matthew and Mark and those of Luke and 1 Corinthians.
- There are basically four views on *"This is my body."*
 - transubstantiation (Catholic view)
 - consubstantiation (Lutheran view)
 - remembrance (Zwingli, Baptists, Methodists)
 - spiritual presence (variant of remembrance held by Calvin and the Reformed church)

Elsewhere Jesus spoke of himself as a vine, a door, the good shepherd and so on without intending that these metaphors should be understood literally.

(p. 207)

If the disciples literally believed that they were being told to drink blood, one would have expected them to protest strongly. One need only recall Peter's protest in Acts 10:9–16 when he was commanded to eat nonkosher meat to see how difficult it would have been for the disciples to drink real blood.

(p. 210–211)

- 16 Gethsemane, Betrayal & Arrest: God's Will, Human Treachery & Governmental Evil
 - When Jesus arrived to Gethsemane, he took James, Peter and John and separated himself from others.

The biblical accounts emphasize Jesus' great torment at this time.

...

It is hard to imagine that the Gethsemane tradition is fictional in origin. Who would have created such an account in the early church?

(p. 215)

- Jesus did not fear death, nor guilt that it would bring over his enemies.

Believers who walk through the valley of the shadow have God's assurance and promise: "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb 13:5). Jesus knew, however, that he "would become accursed" during the very hour he needed God most. Nowhere do the horror and tragedy of sin become more evident than in Jesus' anguished cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34).

(p. 217)

- Jesus' cry to the Father to remove his cup was not petition for altering the way of redemption. It was expression of deep agony.
- When Jesus sought assistance of his disciples during this crucial hour, they were already beginning to forsake him (Mk 14:27–31).

There is good reason Christians tend not to name their children Judas.

...

... thirty pieces of silver was not a great sum of money; it was the price of slave (compare Ex 21:32 and Zech 11:13).

(p. 218)

- Judas may have betrayed Jesus due to disillusionment caused by Jesus' teaching concerning his death.
- Any psychoanalyzing of Judas, however, lack biblical support. Evangelists are not interested in explaining the human factors, but in emphasizing of divine plan.

Jesus states, “The hour has come” (God has brought about the hour); “the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (God is giving his Son over to sinners through Judas's betrayal) (Mk 14:41; compare Jn 12:27). The verbs in this verse are examples of “divine passives”—the use of the passive voice to avoid using God's name out of reverence.

(p. 219)

In no society and at no time in history have “traitors” ever been admired.

...

To have accompanied Jesus, to have shared his cup, to have eaten the Passover meal with him, and then to betray him—this was indeed an unspeakable act. And history will forever remember Judas Iscariot for it.

(p. 221)

- 17 The Trial: The Condemning of the Innocent
 - We have three separate traditions of the trial.
 - Annas wasn't high priest at the time of trial, but it was called so.
 - After unsuccessful interrogation Annas sent Jesus to Caiphas. Evidence were not found.
 - Jesus remained silent until Caiphas put him under oath before the living God and asked him whether he is Messiah (Mt 26:63).
 - Although Jesus' answer is three times different, all three writers understand it as yes. The Sanhedrin understood it likewise.
 - The fact, that moment of Peter's denial of Jesus was written during his lifetime supports historicity of this account.
 - Differences of Peters is explained by Luke trying to tell whole part of the story an once. He just used different literary technique.
 - According to Luke, Pilate passed Jesus to Herod.

Luke's reason for recording this incident is clear: Herod provides a second ruler's verdict that Jesus was innocent (Lk 23:15).

(p. 232)

- One can almost feel sorry for Pilate, who sentenced Jesus only under enormous pressure, seeking to release him till the last moment. It was, however, his decision to sentence man, who he knew was innocent.
- Gospel account of Jesus' trial violates more than two dozen rules from *The Jewish rules for a trial as found in “b. Sanhedrin.”*
- As the result, some scholars reject historicity of the Gospel accounts.
- Fact is, that Mishna is even more questionable. It was completed about A. D. 200. The question of Gospel account historicity therefore only assumes, that it records practices of previous times.

Can we accept as proof that Jesus must have received a fair trial before the Sanhedrin the fact that the rules in the tractate *Sanhedrin* demand it?

(p. 236)

- Jews had no right of capital punishment both according to the Gospels and the Talmud.

... we should not succumb to some politically correct desire to rewrite the Gospel accounts in order to refute this charge. We cannot rewrite what took place in the past. The Gospel accounts clearly portray the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day as being involved in his death.

(p. 238)

- 18 Suffered Under Pontius Pilate, Dead & Buried: Despise & Rejected, a Man of Suffering

The shape of cross took varied forms: the traditional cross, or *crux immissa*, in which the vertical beam extended above the horizontal one (like a lower-case *t*), the *crux commissa*, which looked like a capital *T* (the horizontal beam rested on the vertical one), and the *crux decussata*, or crooked cross, which looked like an *X*.

(p. 242)

- Jesus' cross was probably those traditional one, since an inscription was placed above his head.
- He was probably not naked due to Jewish sensitivity.

The most commonly described cause of death is asphyxiation, but that cannot be proven. Bodily exhaustion, no doubt, also played a role.

Crucifixion is one of most abominate forms of torture and execution that the world has ever seen. It is so horrible that only Christians speak positively of it, and that is only because of the redemption Jesus achieved by means of it.

(p. 245)

- The seven last words of Jesus:
 - “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).
 - “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43).
 - “Woman, here is your son.” ... “Here is your mother” (Jn 19:26–27).
 - “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” ... “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34).
 - “I am thirsty” (Jn 19:28).
 - “It is finished” (Jn 19:30).
 - “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46).
- We do not know, what caused the darkness (Lk 23:45). Solar eclipse was not possible. Duststorm? Thunderstorm? Volcanic eruption?
- Some absurd theories arose, that Jesus didn't really die on the cross.
 - Soldiers crucified Simon of Cyrene, since they thought, that it's Jesus bearing the cross.
 - Some Gnostics argued, that unlike Jesus' body, spirit was not crucified.
 - Another theory states, that Jesus brother or someone who was transformed to look like him was crucified instead of him. (This is what Qur'an claims.)
 - Judas intentionally kissed someone else.

All these theories require unbelievable error and confusion on the part of those involved in Jesus' death. It is hard to imagine that those who desperately wanted Jesus killed were confused about his appearance and could be so easily mistaken.

(p. 258)

- 19 The Resurrection: “Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead?”
 - Several problems arose:

... “on the third day,” “after three days,” “in three days,” “three days ago” and “for three days and three nights” are all expressions the biblical writers used to designate the same period of time.

(p. 260)

... the problem of number of women present at the tomb is not a major one, as long as we do not force John (one), Matthew (two) and Mark (three) to mean that only the women they mention were there.

(p. 261)

- Women were probably unsatisfied with burial or they just wanted to make sure, that Jesus' was placed/buried properly.

- The historicity of empty tomb got under severe attack in 20th century. It was seen as legendary addition, since Paul doesn't confirm it anywhere.

The proclamation in Jerusalem that Jesus was alive and risen from the dead meant that his dead body no longer lay in the tomb. It had been transformed from corruption to incorruption.

...

All they [Jews] would have needed to do to discredit the early Christian proclamation was to produce the body of Jesus.

...

The fact that the witnesses to the empty tomb were women, whose witness was disallowed among the Jews, makes the fabrication of this account unlikely

(p. 264)

- Nonsupernatural explanations
 - Women went to a wrong tomb. Unlikely (it was very particular tomb).
 - Joseph of Arimathia took the body. Fiction (or Pontius Pilate? or who else had reason to do some weird trickery?)
 - Jesus never died, he merely “swooned.”
 - Half dead Jesus with spear wound pushed “very large” stone, went to the disciples and convinced them, that he conquered death?
 - Most rationalistic explanation of resurrection is that disciples just experienced several visions due to their anticipatory mood.
 - Such visions, however, tend to be individualistic.
 - Their emotional state of deep confusion and grief wouldn't allow any ecstatic experiences.
 - Even Paul refers to “more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time.” (1 Cor 15:6)
 - cf. with 1 Cor 15:14, 17, 19

The ascension of Jesus furthermore points out that Jesus' return is not capable of being demythologized into some abstract or abuse sociological movement or event.

...

The “Life of Jesus” is incomplete. It awaits that day when he will return to share messianic banquet with his followers (Mk 14:25). For those who follow and love him, that is a day prayed and longed for.

(p. 276)

<https://selah.cz/books/jesus-the-messiah-a-survey-of-the-life-of-christ/>