

The Historicity of Jesus

A Bayesian Reassessment

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AI collaboration: Claude (Anthropic, Fable 5.1) and ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.6 Sol) - adversarial analysis and synthesis.

September 2026

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Central estimate: approximately 38% historical / 62% mythic. A defensible uncertainty band remains wide—roughly 25% to 55% historical—because the result is highly sensitive to reference-class construction, the interpretation of “brother(s) of the Lord,” and the evidentiary meaning of early anti-terrestrial Christologies. The numerical estimate is intended as a transparent summary of comparative evidential judgments, not as a measurement with decimal-level precision.

1. Why Reopen a Question the Field Treats as Settled?

Within mainstream New Testament scholarship, the existence of Jesus is generally treated as close to certain. Mythicism is usually classed as a fringe position even by scholars who reject Christian supernatural claims. Bart D. Ehrman remains a useful benchmark because *Did Jesus Exist?* (2012) directly addresses the mythicist case from a non-confessional historical-critical standpoint and argues that the combined Christian and non-Christian evidence establishes existence. Richard Carrier, by contrast, has attempted the most systematic modern Bayesian case for mythicism, first in *On the Historicity of Jesus* (2014) and then in substantially updated form in *The Obsolete Paradigm of a Historical Jesus* (2025).

The attraction of a Bayesian treatment is that it forces a distinction between consensus and evidence. Expert consensus can itself carry evidentiary weight when specialists possess distinctive information and strong error-correction mechanisms, but consensus is not a substitute for explicit priors and likelihoods. The method also makes disagreement inspectable: conclusions can diverge because of different priors, likelihood ratios, dependence assumptions, or hypothesis definitions. The purpose here is not to claim mechanical certainty, but to make those judgments visible and testable.

Carrier’s 2014 and 2025 work provides the most developed modern Bayesian case for mythicism. His updated argument places particular weight on a tragic-hero-king or Rank–Raglan-type reference class, on Pauline revelatory epistemology and sparse biography, on non-familial interpretations of “brother(s) of the Lord,” and on evidence that some early Christian opponents may have rejected an ordinary terrestrial Jesus more radically than the conventional label “Docetism” suggests. The present analysis grants these arguments their strongest defensible form while testing how much weight each should bear.

The question is therefore narrow: given the strongest surviving evidence on both sides, how probable is the minimal claim that Christianity began around an actual first-century Jewish founder?

2. Specify the Hypotheses Before Scoring the Evidence

2.1 Minimal historicity (H)

The historical hypothesis used here remains deliberately minimal. H says that a first-century Jewish man existed, attracted followers, died, and became the nucleus around which the Christian movement formed. It does not require the truth of miracles, virgin birth, bodily resurrection, the accuracy of any individual Gospel saying, or even substantial Gospel biographical reliability. A real founder can be rapidly mythologized, and ancient literature supplies abundant examples of historical persons whose later narratives are transformed by legend, rhetoric, typology, propaganda, and literary invention.

2.2 Broad and Carrier-style mythicism (M)

Broad mythicism says that the earliest object of Christian devotion was principally scriptural, revelatory, celestial, or otherwise non-biographical and that an earthly biography developed later. Carrier's narrower model adds more structure: an originally celestial Jesus, revelatory origins, a death or crucifixion outside an ordinary earthly career, subsequent terrestrialization, and non-familial explanations for expressions such as "brother of the Lord." A broad mythic prior cannot be purchased cheaply and then silently replaced by the narrower Carrier model only when scoring favorable evidence. Hypotheses must be priced and tested consistently.

A separate textual branch is also important. If substantial portions of the Pauline corpus reached canonical form later than conventionally dated, language about James or Jesus' earthly status may represent later ecclesial memory rather than first-person testimony from the 50s. That possibility weakens some historicist evidence but may simultaneously preserve evidence of a long-lived revelatory or minimally terrestrial Christian tradition. The effects of source skepticism must therefore be applied symmetrically.

3. Priors and Reference Classes

3.1 Carrier's 2025 tragic-hero-king prior

Carrier's more precise prior argument is not merely that Jesus was "mythologized." It is that Jesus belongs to a highly distinctive tragic-hero-king or Rank–Raglan-type mythotype: a class of figures whose biographies accumulate a dense, patterned cluster of hero-myth motifs. Carrier treats the observed historicity rate of sufficiently high-scoring members as empirical information about how often figures of this type turn out to have been historical. In *The Obsolete Paradigm of a Historical Jesus* (2025), he revises the comparison set by adding historical candidates including Alexander the Great, Apollonius of Tyana, and Mithradates, and reports an upper historicity margin of about 25%, rather than the roughly 33% upper margin used in his earlier work.

The 25% figure is best understood as the historicity-friendly edge of Carrier's uncertainty range rather than as a central estimate that then requires another ordinary error bar. That distinction matters when comparing his model with alternatives.

3.2 Nested reference classes

Jesus can belong simultaneously to many reference classes. A broad class such as Jewish prophetic or messianic founders may have a high historical base rate, but a narrower class containing additional information about the extraordinary pattern of Jesus' legendary biography cannot simply be discarded because the broader class yields a higher historicity rate. If the narrower class is genuinely informative and not selected merely to force an answer, its additional information must appear somewhere in the model.

The remaining issue is how strongly the Rank–Raglan class should move the odds. Its sample is small; membership and historical status can be disputed; many features are correlated; survival and literary-selection effects may matter; and it is uncertain whether the class is exchangeable with the process that produced first-century Jesus traditions. Those limitations argue against treating the class frequency as a plug-in probability, but not against giving the information substantial weight.

3.3 Prior versus likelihood: a bookkeeping choice

There are two legitimate Bayesian bookkeeping strategies. Carrier places tragic-hero-king information largely in the prior. An alternative is to begin from a broader generative prior and then score Jesus' extreme and rapid mythologization as evidence. The approaches can be mathematically equivalent if implemented consistently; they cannot be combined without double counting.

The calculation used here adopts the second strategy for transparency. It begins with $P(H)=0.70$ and $P(M)=0.30$ before incorporating Jesus-specific extreme mythologization. This broad starting point reflects the prevalence of historical founders in recent Jewish movements while recognizing genuine ancient mechanisms for cults centered on revelatory, celestial, divine, or otherwise nonhuman salvific figures. Rank–Raglan-type

information is then assigned a substantial mythicist likelihood factor rather than being embedded in the starting prior.

A full Carrier-style 25% conditional prior would imply a much stronger evidentiary penalty against historicity from the mythotype. The present model stops short of that because the exchangeability assumptions remain contestable.

Working treatment of extreme/rapid mythologization: $LR_H \approx 0.45$, or roughly 2.2:1 evidence for mythicism.

4. Mystery-Religion and Religious-Ecology Evidence

The ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern religious environment matters to the prior. It contained divine and semi-divine savior figures, initiation, sacred meals, apotheosis, revelation-founded cults, divine descent and ascent, and traditions of death, disappearance, transformation, or return. This does not establish that Christianity copied a standard “dying and rising god” template; the older Frazerian synthesis was overstated, and Jonathan Z. Smith’s critique remains important. The Bayesian point is narrower: a worshiped salvific figure arising through revelation, scripture, ritual, and myth was culturally possible and therefore not antecedently fantastic.

Religious ecology is not the same thing as the Rank–Raglan tragic-hero-king reference class, and it should not be added as a second large mythicist multiplier after related information has already been counted. Its role here is background generative structure: it helps prevent the broad starting prior from becoming 85–95% historical, but it is not multiplied again as an independent evidence item.

5. Methodological Rules

5.1 Correlated evidence must be grouped

A long list of verse-level likelihood ratios creates spurious confidence because observations are correlated. Pauline kinship language, earthly formulae, revelatory epistemology, and silence all come through the same letters. Gospel typology and Gospel historical setting come through the same narratives. Josephus-related evidence shares authorial, chronological, and transmission dependencies. The calculation therefore uses a small number of compressed evidence families rather than treating each verse as an independent experiment.

5.2 Source skepticism is usually symmetric

If Paul is later or heavily interpolated, James loses first-person evidentiary force—but so does the familiar mythicist argument from a man supposedly writing in the 50s who strangely lacks biography. If Mark’s historical setting is literary construction, some apparent mythicist literary signals mediated through the same narrative also become less secure. Source skepticism usually widens uncertainty and draws likelihoods toward 1.0 before it points strongly in either direction.

5.3 Numerical likelihoods are structured judgments, not direct measurements

The likelihood ratios below are not frequencies read directly from a dataset. They are disciplined comparative judgments about how expected each evidence family is under H versus M. Bayesian analysis does not guarantee convergence: two careful analysts can obtain different posteriors because they disagree about priors, likelihoods, dependence, or hypothesis specification. Its advantage is that those disagreements become explicit. In unique ancient-history questions, direct calibration against repeated ground truth is necessarily limited, so wide sensitivity ranges and resistance to false precision are essential.

6. The Kinship Family: James and the “Brother(s) of the Lord”

The Pauline kinship cluster remains the strongest affirmative evidence for historicity. Galatians 1:19 refers to James as “the brother of the Lord,” while 1 Corinthians 9:5 refers to “the brothers of the Lord” as a

recognizable group. The ordinary familial reading is natural: a particular James identified by relation to Jesus is exactly what one would expect if Jesus had an actual brother or close household relative.

Carrier's response is structural rather than merely lexical. Pauline theology repeatedly describes Christians as adopted children of God, co-heirs with Christ, and siblings within a family whose firstborn is Christ. Carrier argues that the overwhelming majority of Paul's sibling terminology is non-biological and that the two passages most useful to historicists should not simply be exempted from that pattern. On this model, "brothers of the Lord" can designate believers related to Christ through adoption into God's family rather than through biological kinship.

This does not make the cultic or theological reading obviously superior. "James, the brother of the Lord" remains unusually useful as an identifying expression if James is a real relative, and the differentiation in 1 Corinthians 9:5 among apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas requires explanation if all believers are brothers in the same sense. Chrissy M. Hansen's 2025 argument for a familial reading remains relevant. The resulting evidence still favors historicity, but less strongly than a simple ordinary-language reading might suggest.

Working LR_H for the kinship / brothers family ≈ 2.2 , with a plausible range of roughly 1.8–2.5.

6.1 A third explanation under a later or pseudonymous Paul

If Galatians itself is substantially later or pseudonymous, "James, the brother of the Lord" may be a literary or traditional identification written after James had become prominent in Christian memory. The phrase might preserve true memory, construct apostolic history, harmonize leading figures, reinforce a terrestrial Jesus, or simply reproduce a familiar identifier. This is analytically distinct from both interpolation and Carrier's generalized-believer reading and becomes especially important in the late-Paul sensitivity branch.

6.2 Catholic and Eastern Christian traditions

Traditional disputes over Mary's perpetual virginity still clarify the historical contrast. Eastern Christianity often treated Jesus' brothers as sons of Joseph by an earlier marriage; Jerome's Western solution treated them as cousins or close relatives. Those traditions had theological incentives not to make James another biological son of Mary, yet usually preserved a real family or household relation to Jesus. They therefore support the broader "actual kinship/household relation" hypothesis more than Carrier's generalized-believer reading, though their lateness prevents them from carrying large independent weight.

7. Paul's Earthly Formulae: Little Independent Historicity Weight

Galatians 4:4, "born of woman," carries less historical weight than a surface English reading may suggest. Paul uses a form of *ginomai* rather than the more explicit *gennaō*, and Galatians 4 is saturated with allegorical maternity, adoption, slavery, freedom, and inheritance. Carrier's contextual reading therefore makes the phrase less securely biographical than it might initially appear.

Likewise, descent from David "according to the flesh" cannot carry much independent historical weight if messianic theology itself strongly predicts Davidic language. Paul also speaks of crucifixion, burial, handing over, and a supper tradition. These cumulatively constrain highly abstract mythicism, but they remain entangled with Pauline theology and with the kinship and silence evidence. The revised headline model therefore gives the earthly-formula cluster approximately neutral independent weight rather than treating it as an additional historicist multiplier.

Working LR_H for the earthly-formula cluster in isolation ≈ 1.0 .

8. Paul's Silence and Revelatory Epistemology

This remains the strongest major mythicist evidence family. Paul rarely deploys Jesus' earthly teachings, miracles, parables, Galilean episodes, family history, trial details, or concrete ministry biography as authority.

His gospel is repeatedly grounded in revelation and in scripture read as coded disclosure. His own encounter with Christ belongs to the same broad revelatory world as appearances to earlier apostles.

The absence is genuinely surprising under many ordinary historicist reconstructions. A movement built around a recently executed teacher gives some reason to expect more concrete appeal to what that teacher said and did. Carrier's cumulative point gains force when many of the passages that seem most terrestrial can also be interpreted theologically or scripturally.

Three restraints remain. Paul's letters are occasional and topical rather than biographies; there is no clean control group of comparable first-century inter-congregational doctrinal correspondence; and Paul has a positive rhetorical reason to emphasize revelation because his apostolic legitimacy depends on independence from Jerusalem leaders who would otherwise possess superior claims to personal acquaintance. The silence is therefore substantial but not overwhelming evidence for mythicism.

Working LR_H for Pauline silence / revelatory texture ≈ 0.45 , with a plausible range around 0.35–0.60.

9. The Gospels and the Rank–Raglan Information

The Gospels, particularly Mark, are saturated with scriptural typology, patterned scenes, symbolic characterization, irony, miracle motifs, theological architecture, and possibly broader Greco-Roman literary mimesis. Matthew and Luke extensively rewrite Mark; John presents a still more developed theological world. Robyn Faith Walsh's work is useful because it places this literature within ordinary Greco-Roman literary production rather than assuming simple transcription of stable communal oral memory.

Literary construction by itself does not strongly imply a nonexistent protagonist; real people can be rapidly fictionalized. The more diagnostic datum is narrower: Jesus' biography becomes extraordinarily patterned and hero-myth saturated with remarkable speed. That information is already captured in the Rank–Raglan/extreme-mythologization family at $LR_H \approx 0.45$ and should not be multiplied again here. Ordinary Gospel artistry is therefore discussed qualitatively but not independently rescored.

10. Early Anti-Terrestrial Christianity and the Historicization Window

10.1 The historicization objection

Under Carrier-style mythicism, a celestial or minimally terrestrial Christ must become an earthly Jesus of Galilee and Judea within a relatively short period, and that terrestrial narrative must become dominant. Because early Christianity was contentious and decentralized, one might expect overt controversy over such a transformation. This is a real historicist consideration, but its force depends on what the surviving heresiological evidence actually represents.

10.2 Docetism and possible early denial

Carrier's 2025 treatment argues that the modern label "Docetism" can flatten heterogeneous ancient positions into a single doctrine that Jesus merely appeared to have flesh. Once the category is disaggregated, some anti-heretical insistence on real birth, real flesh, real suffering, Pilate, and terrestrial events can plausibly be read as evidence that opponents denied more than the material quality of an already accepted earthly body. At least some lost positions may therefore have been genuinely non-terrestrial or mythicist-like.

The inference is not proven. Surviving heresiological texts are polemical, late relative to origins, and usually do not preserve an opponent calmly stating that Jesus never lived on earth. But the simple objection—"if historicization occurred, where is the controversy?"—is substantially weakened if some of the controversy survives only through hostile categories and orthodox summaries.

Working LR_H for the early-denier / Docetism family ≈ 0.75 , with substantial uncertainty.

11. Acts: Useful Background, Weak Independent Evidence

Acts contains historical settings, political figures, and geographical detail, but it is also theological, harmonizing, and dependent on an already-developed Christian narrative world. It cannot be treated as an independent eyewitness source for Jesus. Its historical texture is somewhat more comfortable under historicity, while its literary smoothing and omissions are somewhat more comfortable under mythicism. The net value remains close to neutral.

Working LR_H for Acts ≈ 0.90 .

12. Josephus, Tacitus, and the Complete External Documentary Pattern

12.1 Josephus

The Testimonium Flavianum cannot be treated as a clean external confirmation because the transmitted text contains unmistakably Christian elements and remains textually disputed. T. C. Schmidt's 2025 work strengthens the case for a substantial Josephan core, but authenticity and independence are separate questions. Josephus wrote roughly six decades after the putative crucifixion, when Christian claims had already circulated for decades. Even a substantially authentic notice may therefore be dependent on Christian or derivative information.

The Antiquities 20 reference to James as “the brother of Jesus who was called Christ” is more widely accepted and stylistically mundane. It matters, especially for interpreting the Pauline kinship language. But if it is already used to support a familial reading of Paul, it cannot then be multiplied again as a wholly independent historicity factor.

12.2 Tacitus and the earlier silence

Tacitus is authentic and hostile to Christians but writes around 115–116 CE. Hostility does not establish archival independence. By then the claim that Christus had been executed under Pilate was part of the public Christian story. At the same time, the lack of earlier independent non-Christian attestation cannot be ignored. Philo was not a comprehensive chronicler of Galilean preachers, and Roman authors had little reason to notice an obscure provincial sect founder, so the silence is not dramatic. But decades of silence followed by late, thin, uncertainly independent notices is modestly more expected under mythicism than a simple count of Josephus plus Tacitus suggests.

Revised working LR_H for the complete external documentary pattern ≈ 0.80 .

13. What If Paul Is Later or Heavily Reworked?

A minority case holds that the Pauline corpus, or substantial portions of it, may have reached canonical form later than conventionally assumed; Nina E. Livesey is one recent representative. The case remains far from consensus and should not become the foundation of the model. It is therefore treated as a sensitivity branch rather than adopted wholesale.

The Bayesian effect is two-sided. A substantially later Paul weakens the first-person force behind James, Davidic descent, and other earthly formulae. It also weakens the classic mythicist argument from a man writing in the 50s who strangely lacks biography. Yet a second-order possibility remains: if a second-century Pauline corpus still presents Christ with little ordinary biography, the corpus may preserve or represent a durable revelatory or minimally terrestrial Christian stream rather than simply erasing the argument from silence.

14. Bayesian Calculation

The calculation is deliberately compact. It begins from broad pre-Jesus odds of 70:30 for historicity, then scores the major evidence families. The purpose is not to pretend that the exact decimal likelihoods are measurable frequencies. It is to expose which judgments are doing the work and how strongly the conclusion depends on them.

Element	Working value	Interpretation
Broad starting prior	$P(H)=0.70$	Recent founder-processes favored, while nonhuman/revelatory cult origins remain culturally real
Extreme/rapid mythologization	$LR_H = 0.45$	Narrow tragic-hero / Rank–Raglan information materially favors mythicism
Pauline silence / revelatory texture	$LR_H = 0.45$	Strong mythicist family, restrained by epistolary genre and Pauline rhetoric
Kinship / brother(s) of the Lord	$LR_H = 2.2$	Strongest historicity family; Pauline family theology makes a non-familial reading materially plausible
Earthly formulae	$LR_H = 1.0$	Near neutral as an independent family
Early anti-terrestrial / Docetism evidence	$LR_H = 0.75$	Modest mythicist evidence; historically suggestive but interpretively uncertain
Acts	$LR_H = 0.90$	Near neutral
External documentary pattern	$LR_H = 0.80$	Late, thin, uncertainly independent attestation plus earlier silence

The raw product of the working evidence factors is $LR_H \approx 0.24$. Because several of the mythicist-leaning families overlap, treating that product as fully independent would overstate the evidence. Applying a modest shrinkage toward neutrality for correlation gives an effective aggregate LR_H of about 0.26. Combined with starting odds of 70:30, that yields a posterior of approximately 38% historical / 62% mythic.

CENTRAL ESTIMATE: approximately 38% historical / 62% mythic.

A deliberately wide uncertainty band is more defensible than a narrow confidence interval. Reasonable alternative treatments of the Rank–Raglan class, James, Pauline silence, and the Docetism evidence can move historicity from roughly the mid-20s to the mid-50s. The point estimate should therefore be read as the center of a live model, not as a claim to measurement accuracy.

15. Why Not Simply Adopt Carrier’s Lower Historicity Estimate?

The principal remaining disagreement is reference-class strength. A 25% historicity upper margin becomes compelling only if the tragic-hero-king class is sufficiently well-defined, non-arbitrarily selected, and exchangeable with the generative process that produced Jesus traditions. The sample is small; historical status and membership can be disputed; the traits are correlated; and the process determining which ancient figures survive in richly narrativized form may itself select for extreme mythology.

Moreover, some Rank–Raglan features are downstream narrative developments. If a real founder and an invented founder can both become massively mythologized once a successful salvation movement forms around them, the class may be less diagnostic of initial existence than its raw historicity rate implies. Carrier’s response—that the whole cluster still carries empirical information—is correct. The unresolved issue is how much information. The revised $LR_H \approx 0.45$ gives that information substantial weight without treating the observed class frequency as a plug-in probability.

A second residual disagreement concerns the specificity of Carrier’s mythic hypothesis. Some evidence supports broad revelatory or non-biographical origins more readily than it supports every element of a particular celestial-crucifixion reconstruction. The model therefore distinguishes “mythicism broadly construed” from the most specific Carrier architecture when assigning the posterior.

16. Why Not Treat Historicity as Near-Certain?

Near-certainty is difficult to justify from the surviving record. First, extreme mythologization cannot simply be washed out by the broader fact that Jewish movements often had real founders. Second, Paul's relative lack of ordinary biography and revelatory epistemology remain materially more expected under mythicism than under a straightforward recent-teacher model. Third, the strongest positive Pauline datum—James—still favors historicity but does not plausibly supply an overwhelming multiplier once Pauline family theology is properly represented. Fourth, the external non-Christian record remains late and thin. Fifth, the heresiological record may preserve more anti-terrestrial Christianity than the conventional “Docetism” label suggests.

None of these points proves nonexistence. Collectively, however, they make a one-in-a-hundred or one-in-a-thousand mythicism probability difficult to defend from the surviving evidence alone.

17. Sensitivity and High-Value Evidence

Stress test	Likely effect	What would justify it
Rank-Raglan LR_H = 0.70	Historicity rises toward the upper 40s	Would follow if mythotype membership is judged only mildly diagnostic
Rank-Raglan LR_H = 0.25	Historicity falls sharply	Approaches a stronger Carrier-style use of the class
James LR_H = 3.0	Historicity rises materially	Requires stronger confidence that marked kinship is familial
James LR_H = 1.5	Historicity falls materially	Requires stronger evidence that “brothers of the Lord” is ordinary theological language
Pauline silence LR_H = 0.65	Historicity rises	Heavier weight on epistolary genre and Paul's rhetorical motives
Pauline silence LR_H = 0.30	Mythicisism rises strongly	Requires treating sparse biography as highly anomalous under H
Early-denier LR_H = 1.0	Historicity rises modestly	If the heresiological material proves irrelevant to terrestrial existence
Explicit early “no earthly Jesus” source	Mythicisism rises sharply	Would transform a suggestive inference into direct evidence
Independent first-century corroboration	Historicity rises sharply	Especially if demonstrably independent of Christian tradition

18. Methodological Implications

First, in evidentially thin historical problems the prior is not a ceremonial opening step; it can dominate the posterior. Carrier deserves substantial credit for making reference-class construction central to the debate rather than allowing consensus to function as an implicit prior.

Second, nested reference classes cannot be handled by simply choosing whichever class yields the preferred answer. Additional diagnostic information must appear somewhere in the model, while double counting must still be avoided. The same discipline applies to correlated textual evidence: a dozen observations drawn from the same source are not a dozen independent experiments.

Third, Bayesian analysis does not guarantee a single answer. Different analysts can use Bayes correctly and still disagree because the substantive judgments entering the model differ. The gain is transparency: disagreement can be localized to priors, likelihood ratios, dependence assumptions, or hypothesis definitions rather than hidden inside qualitative adjectives such as “likely” or “implausible.”

Fourth, calibration is a genuine limitation in unique ancient-history questions. We cannot repeatedly observe whether Jesus existed and compare forecasts with ground truth. Where possible, probabilistic historical

methods can be tested on classes of cases with independently known outcomes, but the present problem does not permit that kind of direct validation. This is a reason for wide uncertainty bands and sensitivity analysis, not a reason to abandon probabilistic reasoning altogether.

19. Conclusion

On the model developed here, the minimal-historicity hypothesis receives approximately 38% probability and broad mythicism approximately 62%, with a defensible uncertainty range of roughly 25% to 55% historical. The estimate is not a claim to numerical measurement accuracy; it is a compact representation of the comparative evidential judgments made explicit throughout the paper.

The case for mythicism rests chiefly on the unusual degree and speed of Jesus' mythologization, the sparse earthly biography and revelatory texture of Paul, the limited independent value of the external documentary record, and the possibility that some early Christian opponents preserved more radically anti-terrestrial Christologies than later labels suggest. The strongest historicist counterweight remains the Pauline kinship material, together with the ordinary prevalence of real charismatic founders in the relevant Jewish environment.

The principal unresolved dispute concerns the evidentiary strength of the tragic-hero-king / Rank–Raglan reference class. The class plainly contains relevant information, but its small size, selection structure, correlated traits, and uncertain exchangeability with the Jesus case make it difficult to treat its observed historicity frequency as a decisive plug-in prior. A second major uncertainty concerns whether “brother(s) of the Lord” is best understood as actual kinship or as theological family language.

The resulting picture is neither mainstream near-certainty nor confidence that historicity is negligible. The surviving evidence, as scored here, favors mythicism but leaves a substantial historical-founder probability. More important than the point estimate is the location of the disagreement: future evidence or argument capable of changing the treatment of the Rank–Raglan class, James, Pauline dating, or early anti-terrestrial Christianity would materially move the result.

Central conclusion: approximately 38% historical / 62% mythic.

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Acknowledgments and Analytical Provenance

Richard Carrier is thanked for comments on an earlier analysis that helped ensure a more accurate reconstruction of his 2025 reference-class argument and related claims. He has not reviewed or endorsed this edition, and the numerical judgments here are independent of his own posterior.

Rodney Malpert originated the project and several analytical lines that remain central to the paper, including the religious-ecology correction without double counting; the *ginomai/gennaō* issue in Galatians 4:4; the insistence that the external-evidence pattern include earlier silence as well as Josephus and Tacitus; the possibility that some “Docetic” opponents preserved radically non-terrestrial Christologies; the late-Paul persistence argument; and the later-pseudonymous explanation of “James, the brother of the Lord.” Some of these points converge with arguments Carrier develops in greater historical detail; the convergence is acknowledged without claiming priority beyond this project.

Claude and ChatGPT served as adversarial analytical collaborators: reconstructing competing arguments, testing priors and likelihood ratios, checking sensitivity, and helping synthesize the literature. Their use is part of the method rather than a substitute for source criticism. The paper therefore presents its numerical assumptions openly so that readers can revise them and see how the posterior changes.

About the Human Author

Rodney Malpert holds a Juris Doctor (J.D.) and Master of Arts (M.A.) from Cornell University and completed all requirements for the Ph.D. in Government except the dissertation. His Cornell graduate work also included substantial coursework in analytic philosophy. He practiced law for many years in Silicon Valley and has taught law as an adjunct professor at Southern Methodist University and Arizona State University. He achieved the rank of Senior Master with the United States Chess Federation. Beyond his formal academic and professional training, he has pursued extensive independent study across philosophy, science, history, and related fields, including hundreds of courses in The Great Courses series and sustained book and journal study. His current research uses human-AI collaboration to examine questions at the intersection of history, religion, probability, and the evaluation of contested evidence.

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