

## APPENDIX

Is the story of Yeshua "just a myth" – or is it literally true? Most people think that a "myth" is merely a made-up fiction, an untrue story, but many Bible scholars think of "myth" as a description in terms of the world about what is beyond this world, the nature of our existence in the universe. So if we use the word "myth," we must be careful to explain what we mean: it is both beyond our knowledge of the material world, and may also be historically true. It reveals the Logos, the logic or intelligence or meaning of the universe. A recent book on this topic is *Jesus is No Myth: The Fingerprints of God on the Gospels*<sup>1</sup> by David Marshall who deals with skeptics including Reza Azlan, Bart Ehrman, and Richard Carrier in the search for the "real" Jesus. But perhaps this isn't even the right question to ask. We can't get the right answer if we don't ask the right question. Various Bible scholars have used different methodologies in dealing with Scripture: The "allegorical method" used by Philo, Origen and some later Bible scholars interpret Scripture as metaphor (allegory), saying that the surface reading is for the uninitiated but the deeper meaning is to be found by its referring to something more spiritual. The problem with this approach is that allegorical interpretations often seem wildly imaginative and have little connection to the surface reading of the text, almost as if the interpreter is forcing the text to support a predetermined "spiritual" hypothesis. Different allegorical interpretations can vary so much that one would conclude they are not describing the same event.

A modern, secularized version of the "allegorical method" would be to view the Bible as merely mythos literature on a par with the literature of other religions, which is often the way "The Bible As Literature" courses are taught in most secular universities and some seminaries today.

(Secularism is a de-spiritualizing of reality based on the notion that only the material universe is real, that there is no higher reality.) This is the approach taken by the "Source Criticism" school of Bible critics, such as Julius Wellhausen who held that there were four main authors or editors of the Old Testament: according to Prof. Robert Miller in Lecture 2 of his video course "Understanding the Old Testament" at [TheGreatCourses.com](http://TheGreatCourses.com) – "*Supposedly, Genesis 1 is the latest of all of the sources, and it comes from around 400 BCE, or the time of Ezra. Chapter 2 of Genesis, on the other hand, is supposedly from the oldest of the four sources, the Yahwist. This was from the 10th century BCE, the time of Solomon. The other two sources fit in between. However, almost no scholar buys this theory anymore. Nineteenth-century scholars did not strictly address what they*

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall, David *Jesus is No Myth: The Fingerprints of God on the Gospels* (Kuai Mu Press, 2016) Kindle version.

considered sources. For Wellhausen, they were authors, making things up from their imagination or stories they had heard from older generations. An alternative would be to think of them as strictly compilers." Thus, "Source Criticism" (sometimes called "Higher Criticism" or "Literary Criticism") appears aimed at challenging the "literal inspiration" approach by asserting that the Bible we have today is merely a manmade, material artifact, a product of various scribes over many centuries compiling oral tradition and previous documents, then cut-and-paste editing them together, or they just made things up.

The second methodology is the "literal method" used by many conservative and fundamentalist Bible scholars who insist that the original manuscripts are divinely inspired, word-for-word inerrant, and very close to what we have today: this is often called the "verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture," the method that the present author was raised to believe and was held by many of his first seminary's professors. But as he began to compare various accounts in the four Gospels, the present author realized that there were so many discrepancies in the word-for-word details by comparing similar Gospel accounts that the literal approach could not hold up to the evidence. Also, the claim that the original manuscripts are literally inspired is incapable of proof or disproof because we do not have any original manuscripts, only copies of copies and the various copies have slight differences – trying to resolve these differences in order to arrive at a version closest to the original texts is called "Textual Criticism." In addition, translations into other languages inevitably result in shades of meaning that may differ slightly from the source text. So critics will object that if it isn't literally true, it must be just a myth, a made-up fairy tale. But ascribing literal, word-for-word inerrancy to Scripture is similar to ascribing infallibility to a religious leader: both inerrancy and infallibility are absolute, infinite qualities that can only be ascribed to God, Who alone is worthy of our worship; anything else is idolatry. *"You study the Scriptures thoroughly, because you think in them you possess eternal life, but it is these same Scriptures that testify about Me"* (Jn. 5:39). Bibliolatry is sub-par Christianity.

Here are a few examples of difficulties with the "literal method": compare Mk. 1:7-8 – *"After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and loosen. I baptized you in water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit."* and Luke 3:16 – *"I indeed baptize you with water, but he comes who is mightier than I, the latchet of whose sandals I am not worthy to loosen. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire."* A comparison of the literal, word-for-word text and word order shows they differ although the meaning is almost identical. Or Mt. 8:5-13 about the centurion's servant: Matthew tells us the centurion came to Yeshua, but Lk. 7:1-

10 tells us some Jewish elders came to Yeshua on his behalf. Also, both Mt. 22:34-40 and Mk. 12:28-34 describe a rather positive meeting of a scribe with Yeshua in which the Lord tells the two great commandments and in Mark the Lord commends the scribe, but Lk. 10:25-37 portrays the scribe telling the two great commandments, to which in a somewhat confrontational tone the Lord tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Are they two separate events, or is it one event related to us from each author's point of view? We don't know for sure.

Again, two sections (or is it just one?) really puzzle Bible scholars: in Lk. 7:36-50, early in Luke's Gospel, he tells about a woman, a sinner, who came into Simon the Pharisee's house and anointed Yesous' feet, upon which the disciples complained about the waste of precious ointment; but Mt. 26:6-13 and Mk. 14:3-9 in Holy Week tell us that a woman anointed his feet in Simon the leper's house, and Jn. 11:55 - 12:11 tell us it was Mary who anointed his feet in the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary; and Judas complained about it. Were these two separate events, or just one? Did it take place at the start of Yeshua's ministry, or during Holy Week? Was Simon the same person as Lazarus, or perhaps his father? Was he a Pharisee, or a leper, or both? Was Mary the sinful woman? Did only Judas complain – *"Why this waste?"* or did all of the disciples complain? But the real meaning is that Yeshua forgave the woman and praised her for this expensive act of worship, also that it's not wrong or wasteful to do something beautiful for the Lord.

Also, see the story about the blind beggar(s): Mt. 20:29-34 tells us there were two beggars, but Mk. 10:46-52 and Lk. 18:35-43 tell us there was one beggar, and his name is Bartimaeus. In Yeshua's triumphal entry to Jerusalem, Mt. 21:1-11 tells us – *"you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them"* (two donkeys), but Mk. 11:1-11 and Lk. 19:29-44 tell us – *"you will find a young donkey tied, on which no one has sat. Untie it"* (one donkey). Which is correct? The solution is that Matthew is writing in Aramaic, which uses repetition in slightly different words for emphasis. So a literal approach must give way to a deeper understanding of the Biblical languages: the meaning that is being communicated. And see [the story about Yeshua cursing the fig tree](#): Mt. 21:18-19a tells us that the fig tree withered immediately, but Mk. 11:12-14 tells us that it withered by the next morning. So when did the fig tree wither? When it withered is not the point: the meaning is that we must bear fruit, or we risk being cursed.

These minor details are not worth nitpicking and arguing over: it's OK to say we just don't know for sure about the fine details. You can find many more such examples, but these suffice to illustrate that a literal, word-for-word interpretation does not hold up. If the literalists reply that

it is the original manuscripts which were word-for-word inspired, then we don't have an inspired Bible today because we don't have the original manuscripts, we only have partial copies and ancient translations.

This either-or dualism of myth/allegory vs. literalism is a false dichotomy. It is the wrong question to ask. Searching for a resolution to this dilemma led the present author to adopt the "historico-grammatical method" developed by the Antiochian school of Bible scholars in the fourth century A.D., the chief proponent of this being St. John Chrysostom whose voluminous Bible commentaries exemplify this approach. It posits a higher, spiritual reality: God exists; and it views Scripture as divine revelation but examines and interprets it in its historical, cultural setting and uses the normal grammatical meaning of the words in their syntactical context. This methodology best answers the questions: What is the style of writing in each section: is it poetry (the Psalms), allegory (Yeshua's parables), or is it historical? What is the meaning and message of the passage in question, in light of the historical and grammatical setting?

History is not merely a compilation of raw data – single words and phrases – but rather it is arranging these facts in a narrative, a story, in order to make meaning of the past. What ideas is the infinite God conveying to us readers by means of finite languages of fallible authors in the often messy context of human history? Many Evangelical Protestants today have adopted this historico-grammatical method, while holding to "inerrancy" in this sense of meaning, not word-for-word divine dictation. Scripture is viewed as one part of God's process of working through His saints, His called-out but imperfect people, preserved orally or in writing and handed down (in Greek "*paradidomai*" – "traditioned," see 2 Thes. 2:15) from generation to generation. When various third-party witnesses each write a report of a car accident, the details may differ slightly but the historicity of the event remains true: it really happened, it wasn't just a made-up "myth." Thus the "historico-grammatical method" resolves the dualistic clash between the almost mythical "allegorical method" and the strictly "literal method."