

ROMANS 1:3 AND THE CELESTIAL JESUS: A REBUTTAL TO  
REVISIONIST INTERPRETATIONS OF JESUS'S  
DESCENDANCE FROM DAVID IN PAUL

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In the last thirty years, popularity for the idea that Jesus of Nazareth never existed as a historical figure (better known as “mythicist”<sup>2</sup>) has grown among laypeople. Until this time, relatively few were exposed to mythicism, though it has (contra Ehrman) persisted without hiatus for approximately the last 394 years.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Barna’s recent survey indicates that nearly 40 percent of the population of the UK doubts the historicity of

1. I would like to thank Brak Avraham for his tireless help in tracking down sources and critiquing my argumentation and ideas with this piece. I must also thank many of my friends and family for their support, criticisms, and encouragement with this piece as well. Without them, this piece would have never happened.

2. The term “mythicist” was initially used for the works of Schleiermacher and Strauss (Sacks, “Christliche Polemik,” 395 and Matheson, *German Theology*, 134–63). After its application to the “Christ Myth Theory” in the early twentieth century by Thorburn and others, it became standard both in and out of academia (Thorburn, *Jesus the Christ*, 1–25; Howell-Smith, *Jesus Not a Myth*, 3; Robertson, *Jesus*, vii–xiv; for academics today see Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*; Casey, *Jesus*; Gullotta, “On Richard Carrier’s Doubts”; Meggitt, “More Ingenious than Learned?”). For further discussion of the term “mythicist,” see Meggitt, “More Ingenious than Learned?” 449–50.

3. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 17. The earliest evidence comes from Grotius in 1627 (*De veritate religionis Christianae*, 39–40). For a more complete look at early mythicism, see Hansen, *The Earliest Mythicist References*, 5–43. See also Drews, *Die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit*; Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist*, 428–30; Weaver, *The Historical Jesus*, 45–72, 300–304; Papoušek, “The Soviet School.”

Jesus or has no opinion on whether he existed or not, while it has risen to 8 percent in the USA.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, mythicism has been characterized by popularity among laity and the rather eccentric works which it has produced.<sup>5</sup> Despite these circumstances, a number of academics have now come forward to identify with those doubting the historicity of Jesus, including a number of well-known and respected figures.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, since 1993 there have been four peer-reviewed books published advocating mythicism/agnosticism, namely those from Magne, Brodie, Carrier, and Lataster.<sup>7</sup> There have been a number of mythicist/agnostic academic articles published during that time as well.<sup>8</sup> Of the four books, Brodie's and Carrier's are the only ones to have received any detailed

4. Barna Group, "What Do Americans Believe," April 1, 2015 and Barna Group, "Perceptions of Jesus," February 10, 2016.

5. One of the most noteworthy eccentricities being Gadalla's theory that Jesus was actually King Tutankhamen. See Gadalla, *Tut-Ankh-Amen*. Others border on or are literal conspiracy theories. For example, Salm, *The Myth of Nazareth*, who theorizes a conspiracy and coverup about Nazareth. There are various similar issues with Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy*, who theorizes a conspiracy to cover up the nonexistence of Jesus, including destruction of evidence and more.

6. Yan, "Yesu"; Kryvelev, *Christ*; Magne, *From Christianity to Gnosis*; Price, *Deconstructing Jesus*; Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*; Droge, "Cynics or Luddites?"; Droge, "Jesus and Ned Ludd"; Brodie, *Beyond the Quest*; Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*; Boix, *Érase una vez*; Simms, "Jesus the Jew"; Detering, *Buddha*; Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity*.

7. Magne, *From Christianity to Gnosis*; Brodie, *Beyond the Quest*; Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*; Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity*.

8. Yan, "Yesu"; Yu, "Shi nian lai wo"; Torstendahl, "Comments"; Ellegård, "Theologians as Historians"; Droge, "Cynics or Luddites?"; Droge, "Jesus and Ned Ludd"; Law, "Evidence, Miracles, and the Existence"; Lataster, Review of *On the Historicity of Jesus*; Lataster, "The Fourth Quest"; Lataster, Review of *Jesus: Evidence and Argument*; Lataster, "Bayesian Reasoning"; Lataster, "Questioning the Plausibility"; Lataster, "On Richard Swinburne"; Lataster, "Bart Ehrman"; Lataster, "The (Overwhelming) Improbability"; Lataster, "The Case Against Theism"; Lataster, "How to Show"; and Lataster, "Warranted Skepticism."

rebuttal,<sup>9</sup> while Magne's and Lataster's have been ignored, making little impact so far.

Necessary for mythicists is the ability to explain away the Pauline Epistles as witnesses to the historicity of Jesus, as they are the earliest and most valuable sources for his existence, written within fifteen to thirty years of Jesus's life.<sup>10</sup> The most enigmatic text for them to argue against has been Rom 1:3, which presents Jesus as a descendant of David. There have been a number of ways in which this has been accomplished, a popular one being reliance on more or less *ad hoc* interpolation theses, which have been dismissed by a number of academics.<sup>11</sup> In the present article, the focus will be on the thesis presented by Richard Carrier in *On the Historicity of Jesus*, which attempts to reinterpret the passage as being essentially a pesher. Despite Carrier's interpretation of Rom 1:3 not being well-received, there have been no in-depth discussions of it in literature, the most notable refutation being a short comment in Simon Gathercole's recent paper.<sup>12</sup> As such, this lack of proper rebuttal gives reason for a more thorough investigation of this issue.

9. Contra Brodie, see Corley, Review of *Beyond the Quest*. Contra Carrier, see Petterson, Review of *On the Historicity of Jesus*; Gullotta, "On Richard Carrier's Doubts"; Gathercole, "The Historical and Human." For rebuttals to both, see Litwa, *How the Gospels Became History*, 22–45.

10. This is especially the case in light of extrabiblical witnesses being problematic for reconstructing a life of Jesus due to the unknown provenance of their information. See Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*.

11. For interpolation theories (not all mythicist) see O'Neill, *Romans*, 25–34; Detering, *The Fabricated Paul*, 62; Dalton and Dalton, *Jesus Christ*, 129; Price, *The Amazing Colossal Apostle*, 254–55. For a refutation of their evidence, see Calhoun, *Paul's Definitions*, 104n43; BeDuhn, *The First Edition*, 295; Hatch, "On the Relationship," 187–99. See also, Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 10.21–24. Lenzman, *L'Origine du christianisme*, 43–44; Kryvelev, *Christ*, 177–79; Detering, *Paulusbrieve ohne Paulus?*; Detering, *The Fabricated Paul*; Detering, *Inzenierte Falschungen*; Zindler, *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew*, 193; Price, "Does the Christ Myth?"; Price, *The Amazing Colossal Apostle*; Brodie, *Beyond the Quest*, 137–54; and Salm, *NazarethGate*, 408, all suggest that Paul did not write any of the letters ascribed to him (following the "Dutch Radical" school) which is a positions that has been sufficiently rebutted by Edward Verhoef, "The Authenticity of the Pauline Epistles."

12. Gathercole, "The Historical and Human," 191–92.

*Carrier's Thesis*

Carrier's argumentation is directed at Rom 1:3 from multiple angles. First, Carrier seeks to establish that the terminology used in the passage, if taken literally, could be construed to mean that Jesus's body was manufactured by God.<sup>13</sup> The relevant portion of the verse reads, "concerning his son, born [γενομένου] of the seed of David according to the flesh."<sup>14</sup>

Carrier's principle argument for this is that Paul almost never uses γίνομαι (in the aorist masculine genitive form γενομένου in Rom 1:3) to refer to birth (except Gal 4:4 which he interprets as allegorical as will be shown below). More frequently, he uses the term for the act of making or the manufacturing of something (Carrier likening this to 1 Cor 15:45 with the making of Adam and 1 Cor 15:37 with the making of "resurrection bodies").<sup>15</sup> The second major part of his argument is to make the case that if one reads 2 Sam 7:12–14a allegorically, that it may be possible to conclude from this prophecy that God would literally construct the future Messiah out of David's semen, which Carrier claims is possible if read "like a peshet."<sup>16</sup> Carrier's final argument is to present possible ancient sources analogous to this concept. He cites in a footnote a narrative of the demoness Igrat and King David as recorded by the School of the RaShBa (thirteenth-fourteenth centuries CE), and later cites Irenaeus in defense of his positions on Gal 4:4 and Rom 1:3.<sup>17</sup> Since then, he has also

13. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 575–76.

14. Translation mine. περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα (Rom 1:3).

15. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 576.

16. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 576. Cf. Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle*, 98–99, where the author argues similarly that this account is ahistorical with a celestial Christ and the reading of Christ as a Davidic descendant incidentally led to historicity. Verenna, "Born under the Law," 152, instead argues that it is an allegory comparable to Gal 4:21–31 (the allegory of Hagar and Sarah), which he also argues is the case for Gal 4:4. As with the vast majority of his work, Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity*, 421–24 defends Carrier's interpretation of Rom 1:3 mostly by appealing to Christians and Jews believing "absurd things," however, he fails to provide any supporting evidence.

17. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 580–81.

added (in blog posts and a subsequent book) appeals to a Zoroastrian tradition which has the sperm of Zoroaster being preserved to be used for the final Saoshyant.<sup>18</sup> Based on this evidence, Carrier concludes that a mythical reading of Paul's text is not only possible but "easily read out of this scripture."<sup>19</sup> He goes as far as to say this is the "simplest" interpretation.<sup>20</sup> His argumentation can be broken down into three major categories: grammar, prophetic imagery, and historical precedent. I will address each of these in turn, though there is much to go through.

### *Grammar*

The grammar of the text does not lend itself to Carrier's reading of Rom 1:3. We can look at analogs within the LXX and find that there are a few examples where similar language is used for physical birth (Gen 21:3, 46:27, 48:5). We can also appeal to other Jewish texts which use the terminology to refer to birth.<sup>21</sup> Of particular importance for establishing the semantic range of *γίνομαι*, in fact, is Josephus's *Ant.* 1.150 where *γίνομαι* and *γεννάω* (Paul's supposedly more "common" term for birth<sup>22</sup>) are interchangeable. For Carrier's argument, it is worth noting Philo's use of *γίνομαι* to refer to the birth of Moses twice (*Moses* 2.192–193 in the forms *γενομένων* and *γενόμενος*), since Carrier attempts to draw a strong connection between Philo and Paul,

18. Carrier, "The Cosmic Seed of David"; Carrier, *Jesus from Outer Space*, 187.

19. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 577.

20. Carrier, *Jesus from Outer Space*, 185–90.

21. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.150; 1.303–304; 7.154; 15.11; 20.20–21; Philo, *Moses* 2.192–193; Philo, *Virtues* 37.202. We can also point to Greco-Roman testimony: Strabo, *Geogr.* 10.15; Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 4.62; 4.67; 4.72; 4.75; Plato, *Resp.* 8.553; Plato, *Alc.* 1.121; Isocrates, *Hel. enc.* 27; Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.146; Marcellinus, *Thuc.* 54; Hippocrates of Cos, *Nat puer.* Introduction 8.481–482; Plutarch, *Mor.*; Plutarch, *Vit. X orat.* 4.836; Plutarch, *Thes.* 8; Plutarch, *Mar.* 3; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 1.40.2; 1.53.4; *PGM* 4.719–724 (see Radcliffe, "There and Back Again," 194).

22. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 576.

though leading scholars on Philo do not.<sup>23</sup> Josephus, in turn, uses *γίνομαι* for birth on numerous occasions (*Ant.* 1.150; 1.303–304; 7.154; 15.11; and 20.20–21). Given the wide usage of this term by both Jewish and Greco-Roman authors for birth, it stands to reason that Paul’s usage should not be considered necessarily unusual. Carrier’s attempt to read *σπέρματος* in Rom 1:3 in a literal fashion is problematic as well, since it is used in Jewish literature often as a metaphor genealogical descent (either immediate or not).<sup>24</sup>

Carrier’s use of 1 Cor 15:45, wherein he argues that Adam’s body is manufactured by God, hinders his interpretation since Paul’s entire purpose in this passage is both noting that Adam is historical (as the founder of the human race) and that Adam had a physical (earthly) body.<sup>25</sup> His contrast in the passage is Christ’s raised up, resurrected, i.e., spiritual, body meaning initially he had a body equivalent to Adam’s, i.e., an earthly historical one.<sup>26</sup> As such, this parallel between them could help establish that Paul thought of Jesus as a historical person. In addition, in LXX Gen 2:7, where Adam is made, the text uses *ἔπλασεν* for the forming of Adam’s body and when Adam’s body comes alive it uses *εγένετο*, the aorist indicative meaning “became.” Therefore, Paul is not referencing the manufacturing of Adam’s body in his citation of LXX Gen 2:7, but a change of state in which Adam’s body is made alive. As such, there is no bodily

23. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 200–205. This is done also by Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity*, 303–8, 325. For a more critical analysis of Philo, see Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 66–74.

24. LXX Gen 4:25; 15:1–5; LXX 1 Sam 20:42; LXX 2 Sam 22:51; LXX 1 Kgs 2:33. See also Philo, *Posterity* 3.10–11; 36.124–125; 49.170–171; 50.172–173; 53.180; Philo, *Moses* 1.279; Philo, *Heir* 2–3; 65–66; 86–87; Josephus, *Ant.* 5.220; 9.109; 9.143–144; 11.304. See also Greco-Roman writers: Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 290; Libanius, *Or.* 13.6, referring to the line of descent from Aeacus to Achilles.

25. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 597–98 and Fee, *Corinthians*, 788–90.

26. Fee, *Corinthians*, 788–90. Carrier would also disregard the historicity of Adam but Paul does not, which is what makes Carrier’s parallel less convincing.

construction happening in 1 Cor 15:45, which the grammar lends itself to.<sup>27</sup> Carrier has misunderstood the passage.

Lastly, Carrier's appeal to the fact that the term *γίνομαι* is not frequently used to refer to birth is somewhat irrelevant as Gathercole points out, since Paul's discussion of birth is infrequent anyways.<sup>28</sup> Gathercole also highlights a distinction that Carrier has missed. When Paul talks of these other births, he uses *γεννάω* with regard to the immediate parents.<sup>29</sup> This means that *γίνομαι* in Rom 1:3 would make more sense, since he is talking of genealogical descent, not immediate family. This means there is no significant reason to take the use of *γίνομαι* as a problem for the traditional reading of the passage.<sup>30</sup>

### *Prophetic Imagery and Historical Precedent*

As the grammatical arguments were found to be unconvincing, we must turn to Carrier's use of prophetic imagery and a claimed historical precedent for his interpretation of Rom 1:3. The first issue is to address his arguments for how 2 Sam 7:12–14a was

27. Likewise, 1 Cor 15:37 uses *γενησόμενον* as in "to be" (future tense) but not indicating the manufacture of bodies. The idea that the "resurrection body" is manufactured by God (Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 576) is a misconstruing of 1 Cor 15:37 and 2 Cor 5:1–5. As Keener notes, 2 Cor 5:1–5 (in parallel with 1 Cor 15:51–54) actually indicates that the body we die in "will be changed" (*ἀλλαγισόμεθα*), not manufactured (Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, 179). At no point is *γίνομαι* used to indicate these bodies are constructed by God.

28. Gathercole, "The Historical and Human," 191n32. In total, Paul only speaks of birth on three occasions (Rom 9:11; Gal 4:23 and 4:29), excluding Phil 2:7, Rom 1:3, and Gal 4:4. If one included those, the semantic range would indicate Paul (like other Jewish authors) used the terms interchangeably.

29. Gathercole, "The Historical and Human," 191n32.

30. That there were later alterations in some manuscripts from *γίνομαι* to *γεννάω* is likely a result of attempts to alter the text in polemics against Docetists and Gnostics (Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 238–39). In the Gnostic reading, Christ is born but he does not take human nature, as Ehrman notes (*The Orthodox Corruption*, 239). The alteration is to make it known he really did take on human nature from his mother. This alteration has to do with the nature of Jesus's presence on earth, not to make a distinction between "make" and "born" as Carrier claims (*On the Historicity of Jesus*, 580).

used by Paul. Carrier claims that this passage, if read like a pesh-er, could lead one to interpret Rom 1:3 as the “cosmic sperm bank” (as Carrier refers to it) as a way to “save” the prophecy from being incorrect, since David’s descendants did not eternally reign.<sup>31</sup> However, this case has a number of weaknesses. First, there is no attested reading from any known pesh-er about the storing of celestial semen to construct a messianic figure. In fact, the pesh-er 4Q174 i.10–13 interprets 2 Sam 7:12–14a as an eschatological figure of the Davidic line, not a purely celestial figure manufactured from cosmic semen.<sup>32</sup> Thus, “if read like a pesh-er,” we would have no reason to accept Carrier’s interpretation, since this actual pesh-er does not interpret the prophecy this way. Carrier’s pesh-er claim is, as a result, specious from the start. Second, Carrier appeals to the original intent of the author as indicating that the ruling line from David would be unbroken. For Carrier, this prophecy was about David’s immediate son; thus, reading Rom 1:3, which alludes to 2 Sam 7:12–14a, would cause a problem with the prophecy (since the line of David was broken). Following this, Carrier argues that Paul may have read the passage as indicating that God would raise up an eternal son of David to rule in perpetuity by literally taking David’s sperm, since (for Carrier) this is the only way he sees to save the prophecy.<sup>33</sup> The appeal to the original intent of the author is rather irrelevant, however. Paul could have read this as indicating that David’s *eventual* descendant would then take the throne (since *γίνομαι* and *σπέρμα* were used for genealogical descent in Jewish writings), which would be eternal after that point. Third, Jewish literature was still interpreting the possibility of a human Messiah of the line of David even after the line was broken, such as in the Psalms of Solomon and DSS, as well as other literature.<sup>34</sup> Since this is the case, there is no need to agree with Carrier’s more strained interpretation.

31. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 577.

32. Johnson, “Romans 1:3–4,” 471–72.

33. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 576.

34. Whitsett, “Son of God,” 677–78. The genealogies in Matt 1:1–17 and Luke 3:22–38 provide a case in point to this as well.

The search for a historical precedent for the “cosmic sperm bank,” likewise turns up very little. Initially, Carrier cites an encyclopedia in support of his thesis.<sup>35</sup> The encyclopedia cites Raphael Patai’s translation of a teaching from the School of the RaShBa. Carrier interprets this teaching as relaying a story of demons “Running their own cosmic sperm bank, even stealing David’s sperm for it.”<sup>36</sup> We shall turn directly to Patai, who gives us this legend:

Then came two women harlots to King Solomon. They were Lilith and Igrat. Lilith who strangles children because she cannot make of them a veil for herself to serve as a hiding place for her. And the second is Igrat. One night King David slept in the camp in the desert, and Igrat coupled with him in his dream. And he had emission, and she conceived and bore Adad [king of Edom]. When they asked him, “What is your name?” he said, “Sh’mi Ad, Ad Sh’mi [My name is Ad, Ad is my name].” and they called him Ashm’dai. He is Ashmodai, king of the demons, who deprived Solomon of his kingship and sat on his throne, and therefore he was of the seed of the king of Edom (1 Kgs 11:14), for he came from the side of the kingdom of evil. These two women strangled the son of the Shunamite woman . . . . All [the four queens of the demons, Lilith, Igrat, Mahalath and Naamah] and all their cohorts give birth to children, except Lilith alone, who does not bear, but is just a fornication in the world . . . .<sup>37</sup>

Reading from the source one finds that Carrier has misrepresented it. There is no concept of a demon storing or stealing David’s semen, nor is the semen used to beget sons by “foreign mothers.”<sup>38</sup> Instead, the demoness Igrat copulates with David while he sleeps and then she becomes pregnant and gives birth to the king of Edom, Adad. It seems that Carrier’s claim based on this text is a misrepresentation made in order to artificially bolster his interpretation of Rom 1:3, since there is no way to read a “cosmic sperm bank” out of this story. In *Jesus from Outer Space*, Carrier likewise still uses the RaShBa teaching and

35. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 576 and 576n85.

36. Dennis, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth*, 126.

37. From Patai, *Gates of the Old City*, 459.

38. Carrier, “What Did Paul Mean.”

misrepresents it as semen being “grabbed by demons who could inseminate themselves with it,”<sup>39</sup> again misrepresenting what is actual sexual activity, not the stealing of semen.

Carrier’s supplements in *Jesus from Outer Space* likewise do not aid his case. In this work, he cites *b. Nid.* 16b (from the Babylonian Talmud) and argues that because Jewish lore could conceive of semen being brought before God to judge what its fate shall be, that they easily could have come up with the idea that God could personally take and “store” semen in heaven.<sup>40</sup> This is a stretch because not only has he failed to provide any evidence that semen is stored in the heavens in any text (in fact, *b. Nid.* 16b never states the semen is taken into heaven but is brought before God),<sup>41</sup> he has failed to show that the temporary presence of an *angel* guarding a drop of semen and presenting it before God is somehow analogous. Furthermore, the tradition is said to stem from Rabbi Hanina ben Pappa, who lived in the third-fourth centuries CE. As such, he also fails to provide anything that dates to the time of Paul. However, even if one granted that Carrier’s misrepresentation were accurate, there would still be an issue that angels/demons handling semen is not the same as God handling semen. Furthermore, that someone *might* have conceived of this happening or that it is *possible* they *could* have, is not evidence that anyone actually *did* think of this. There is no evidence in Jewish literature for a “cosmic sperm bank.”

Similar problems are found when one looks at Carrier’s use of Irenaeus to justify his celestial semen reading. Carrier cites Irenaeus’s work, *Haer.* 1.1.1, 1.5.6, 1.8.4, and 1.30 as supporting his idea that Jesus could be conceived of having been born in the heavens of cosmic semen. However, the reality is that these passages attest to no such thing. To begin with, the seed concept in

39. Carrier, *Jesus from Outer Space*, 186.

40. Carrier, *Jesus from Outer Space*, 186.

41. When phrasing such as “brought before God” or similar is used, it is not indicative of the semen being brought up into heaven. One can compare this to similar language, such as Moses lying prostrate “before the LORD” in Deut 9:25. See also *b. Ber.* 59b and tractate *Roš Haš.* 16b for similar language used in other contexts.

1.1.1 is metaphorical not literal, as are 1.5.6 and 1.8.4. We can look at the case example from 1.1.1 where Irenaeus states:

At one time this Profundity decided to emit from himself the Beginning of all things. This emission *would be as a* “seed” which he decided to emit and deposit *as it were in the womb* of Silence, who co-existed with him. After she had received this “seed” and had become pregnant, she gave birth to Mind, who was both similar and equal to his Father who emitted him; and he alone comprehended his (Father’s) greatness.<sup>42</sup>

The “seed” is not literal as the phrases “would be as a” and “as it were in” indicate; this is metaphorical language being used, i.e. the emission of Profundity was like the emission of semen into a womb, but this is not literal. It more likely seems to be the case that “Mind” is an emission directly of “Profundity,” and the “seed” language is a metaphorical way of describing the emission of “Mind.” In short, the “emission” is “Mind” coming from the “Father’s” thought.<sup>43</sup> The last one, 1.30.12 shows that Carrier may not have read the full text, as these beliefs of the Ophites that Irenaeus catalogs have a separationist Christology, believing that the historical Jesus and the Christ are separate beings.<sup>44</sup> This is exemplified when it is explicitly stated that Jesus was born of a human virgin (1.30.12): “Now Jesus, inasmuch as he was begotten by a Virgin by God’s action, was wiser and purer than all men. On him Christ, united with Wisdom, descended; and thus, was formed Jesus Christ.”<sup>45</sup> These Gnostics did not conceive of Jesus as a purely celestial being forged from celestial semen, instead the Christ and Jesus are separate figures, the latter a human. As a final note, the Christ’s generation has no birth language used at all (1.30.2):

After that, [the generation of the First-Woman] First-Man, together with his son, took delight in the beauty of Spirit, who is the woman, and by illuminating her, generated from her an incorruptible Light,

42. Translation from Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 23. Emphasis mine.

43. Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 12, 44–49.

44. For discussion on separationist Christology see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 223–25.

45. Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 101.

the Third-Man, whom they call Christ, the son of First-Man and Second-Man and of First-Woman.<sup>46</sup>

Given this, we can conclude that Carrier's suppositions are incorrect. There is no concept of the Christ being born up in the heavens from celestial semen. Instead, the Christ is a generation caused by the light of the First-Man and Second-Man and the First-Woman. In expanding on this, Irenaeus only further disproves Carrier's thesis (1.30.1–2), as he relays how the greatness of their lights caused the First-Woman to be filled with the light and overflow on her left side, so that Christ emanates from the right and is caught up into the Aeon. Jesus and Christ are not born in the heavens of a celestial semen in Irenaeus's summaries of these Gnostic beliefs, Carrier has misunderstood the metaphorical language.

Carrier's other support has been the use of a Zoroastrian tradition, citing Nicholas Covington.<sup>47</sup> Covington argues that since Zoroastrians believed that their own future figures (the three prophets Aushetar, Aushetarmah, and Saoshyant) would be born of a virgin with the saved sperm of Zoroaster, that this same concept could be thereby applied to Christianity via some kind of cultural influence (direct or indirect).<sup>48</sup> However, for all of these claims there is one major problem, which mitigates the usefulness of the Zoroastrian tradition: they all postdate Paul by several hundred years. In the case of the Denkard tradition, it postdates Paul by over eight hundred years (in Denkard 7).<sup>49</sup> The tradition can be summarized as:

A legend developed that Zoroaster had deposited sperm into a lake, and in each of the predicated time periods, a pure virgin would bathe in the lake [Kayânsê], become impregnated by Zoroaster's sperm and give birth to his son, who would be the next prophet.<sup>50</sup>

46. Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 96.

47. Covington, "Seed of David." Covington also links Rev 12:1–5 with a possible cosmic birth of Christ but the image of the woman in this passage is likely a symbol, not literal; see Pataki, "A Non-Combat Myth," 259–60.

48. Carrier likewise insinuates this, see *Jesus from Outer Space*, 187.

49. See Gignoux, "Denkard," 284–89.

50. Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 123.

Here we have an earthly lake (not a celestial one) which was traditionally located in Iran, where human virgins would eventually become pregnant by the preserved seminal fluids of Zoroaster.<sup>51</sup> Not only is the text dated over eight hundred years after Paul's writing (and therefore anachronistic for Carrier's use), but also is not evidence of a "cosmic sperm bank." Furthermore, Carrier's references to *Yasht* 19.92 and *Vendidad* 19.5 do not support his claims at all.<sup>52</sup> The *Vendidad* (which contra Carrier does not pre-date Christianity in its current form)<sup>53</sup> does not talk of any cosmically stored semen, in fact it never speaks of semen whatsoever in 19.5. *Yasht* 19.92 likewise also never mentions semen. In addition, neither of them refers to the "messiah" (as Carrier calls the Saoshyant in error)<sup>54</sup> as a descendant of Zoroaster in those passages (in fact, Zoroaster is never mentioned in *Yasht* 19 and Zoroaster's statements in *Vendidad* 19.5 do not claim the Saoshyant is his descendant). The only thing that they corroborate is that the Saoshyant will arise from the real-life lake of Kayânsê. *Denkard* 7, which speaks of the Saoshyant's descent from Zoroaster, also never insinuates that the semen is celestially preserved. Therefore, there is no convincing parallel between these passages and Carrier's "cosmic sperm bank." It is noteworthy that even other mythicists, such as Robert M. Price, have criticized the use of Zoroastrian tradition by Carrier here as well.<sup>55</sup>

Lastly, when it comes to extrabiblical evidence, it is worth noting that Carrier misrepresents Pausanias and Arnobius on Attis (Carrier also never cites which sources he found these references in). He claims that Attis's semen is stored in a "magical almond" after his genitals are cut off.<sup>56</sup> All of this is incorrect,

51. Yamamoto, "The Zoroastrian Temple Cult," 43.

52. Carrier, *Jesus from Outer Space*, 187.

53. Contra Carrier (*Jesus from Outer Space*, 187), all of the Avesta texts in their current form have originated from the third to seventh centuries CE in the Sassanian Empire from the single copy called the "Sassanian Archetype." See Forston, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 230. This means they post-date Paul by two to six centuries.

54. Carrier, *Jesus from Outer Space*, 187.

55. Price, Review of *Jesus from Outer Space*, 134.

56. Carrier, *Jesus from Outer Space*, 187.

however. Pausanias's *Description of Greece* 7.19 never states this at all and neither does Arnobius. This is because Attis is the one born from the almond in Pausanias's account, not the one whose genitals were cut off and grew the almond tree (this was Agdistis). Meanwhile, Cybele's tears grow the almond tree in Arnobius's account (*Adversus Gentes* 5.7). Carrier has misread the Pausanias myth, has confused Attis and Agdistis, and claimed (without any evidence) that both Pausanias and Arnobius attest to his reading. He also cites the potion made of Dionysus's body that Semele drinks in *Fables* 167 by Pseudo-Hyginus; however, this story also never mentions semen and, contra Carrier's claim, it is not conceptually related to "'seed' being stored in a potion."<sup>57</sup> These issues exempt the Attis and Dionysus myths from being analogous to Carrier's "cosmic sperm bank."<sup>58</sup>

It should be noted with almost all sources cited that Carrier only has disparate works from various times, places, and languages, that he must piece together to create his historical support. Carrier's attempts to justify his "cosmic sperm bank" are almost all anachronistic, with the Zoroastrian, Talmudic, Irenaeus, and RaShBa examples being untenable due to postdating Paul by centuries (and this is ignoring the fact that they have no analogous material to the "cosmic sperm bank"). The only other support that Carrier can then offer is an interpretation of Phil 2:7 which reads: "but he emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, having come into being [or been born] in the likeness of man."<sup>59</sup> Carrier reads the passage literally, thus having Jesus manufactured once again. Yet, there is no clear indication that Paul is saying that Jesus's body was manufactured. Since *γίνομαι* has the semantic range of "coming into being" (1 Cor 15:37 used for the body that "will be") or something similar, it does not

57. Carrier, *Jesus from Outer Space*, 187.

58. As a closing point, it is worth noting that Carrier rejects the fact that "other authors" use *γίνομαι* when comparing them to Paul (Carrier, "The Cosmic Seed") but has no similar qualms about creating strained interpretations of these sources for analogs to his interpretation of Rom 1:3, as seen here.

59. Translation mine. ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος (Phil 2:7).

necessarily indicate “manufacture” as Carrier would wish. Jesus came into being in the likeness of flesh. However, not just any flesh. Had Carrier cross referenced this and looked at more research on this issue, he would know that there is a formulaic parallel between Phil 2:7 and Rom 8:3, where Jesus appears in the form of *sinful* flesh.<sup>60</sup>

The translation of *γίνομαι* as indicating birth is valid, as we have evidence it was used widely this way by Jewish and Greco-Roman writers. Even on Carrier’s own thesis, while one could assume that Gal 4:4 is “allegorical” (even though this is based on an allegory that does not even start for another seventeen verses, see Gal 4:21–31) it is still proof that Paul uses *γίνομαι* for birth (unless Carrier inexplicably wishes to argue that this allegorical mother assembled Jesus, akin to the 2005 film *Robots*, or that this child is “manufactured” of a woman, a reading not attested by other authors). Regardless, even if we translate it as “having come into being” in some fashion, when paralleled with Rom 8:3 the context is clarified: Paul is talking about Jesus’s appearance in *sinful* flesh. We need not take this as indicating his body was “manufactured.” Thus, the use of Phil 2:7 fails to aid Carrier’s thesis. Either it is about Jesus coming into being in the appearance of sinful flesh, or it is about him being born as a human in the appearance of sinful flesh. But because it is closely paralleled with Rom 8:3, this excludes the idea of him being “manufactured” in sinful flesh, as Rom 8:3 never uses *γίνομαι*, which helps us then know what Paul means in Phil 2:7.

Contextually, there is one other potential issue with Carrier’s thesis which has to do with ritual cleanliness. Ritual cleanliness refers to the state of purity of one who is participating in a ritual, and uncleanness occurs when one comes into some kind of contact with things which are ritually unclean (or does something which renders one unclean).<sup>61</sup> One manner of becoming unclean

60. Justnes, “Un-Pauline Paul?” 145–59. For detailed looks at Rom 1:8, see Moo, *Romans*, 500–504; Hultgren, *Romans*, 298–300; Longenecker, *Epistle to the Romans*, 694–96.

61. For ritual impurity, see Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 22–23.

is coming into contact with seminal fluids. The idea that coming into contact with semen made one ritually unclean, and therefore unable to participate in rituals (such as at the Temple) until purified, is found throughout Jewish literature, including in times contemporaneous with Paul.<sup>62</sup> In fact, if one improperly comes into contact with even a semen stained artifact or article of clothing they can become ritually unclean according to 4Q274 i.4a.<sup>63</sup> This form of uncleanness is worth exploring in the context of some of the passages such as *b. Nid.* 16b. In the case of *b. Nid.* 16b, though semen is presented before God (as noted above, this does not necessarily mean in heaven), it is not handled directly by him but by an angel who is in charge of conception, Lailah. The semen is not stored or saved in the heavens. This is a temporary event wherein God judges the fate of each drop of semen brought before him. A similar account is found in Midrash *Tanḥuma Pekudei, Siman 3*, wherein Lailah is told by God to take a drop of semen in *its* (the angel's) hand and then divide the drop into three-hundred sixty-five pieces. This is done and Lailah asks God to judge what this drop's fate shall be and he does so. And, as with *b. Nid.* 16b, the semen is not stated to be present in heaven at any point.

All of this makes sense in the context of the division between holy and common things, which are clean and unclean.<sup>64</sup> All things which are holy are reserved for God and must be clean (Ezek 44:23)<sup>65</sup> and this would presumably mean that heaven itself must be clean as it is the abode of God, akin to how the Temple must be clean, hence, those who entered the Temple had to be purified.<sup>66</sup> Though common things can be clean or unclean, holy things must be exclusively clean.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, it makes no sense for semen to be present in heaven in a “cosmic sperm

62. DSS 11Q19 v1.7–17. See also *m. Kelim* 1.1–4; *b. B. Qam.* 82b; *b. Ber.* 22a; *b. Nid.* 13a. Also see Lev 15:16. For more on ritual impurity regarding contact with semen, see Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, 58–66.

63. Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 250–51.

64. Ezek 22:26.

65. Cf. Lev 10:10. See also Sprinkle, “The Rationale.”

66. Poirer, “Purity Beyond the Temple,” 249.

67. Wenham, *Leviticus*, 19.

bank” which God has directly handled, since the holy and the unclean cannot come into contact.<sup>68</sup> This would further explain why all of Carrier’s cited examples have angels or demons handling semen, and do not state that the semen is brought up into heaven. Given this, the concept of cleanliness may impede Carrier’s argumentation, at least his search for analogs within Jewish literature. Carrier’s claims that demons and angels handling semen could be an analog to God doing so does not seem justified when historical context is applied.

It seems to be the case that Carrier has no evidence that can be used to defend his interpretation of Rom 1:3. Paul would have had to be entirely innovative on this matter, which seems far less likely than him being situated within the Jewish traditions of interpreting 2 Sam 7:12–14a and Ps 2 as relating an earthly Messiah and applying them to a man named Jesus, who existed not too long before Paul was writing (see 1 Thess 2:14–16).<sup>69</sup>

#### *Additional Notes*

There are a few other issues with Carrier’s argumentation which prevent the present author from finding it convincing. Romans 9:3–5 explicitly traces Jesus’s lineage “according to the flesh”<sup>70</sup> from the patriarchs of Israel. Romans 15:8 remarks that Jesus is “of [the] circumcision”<sup>71</sup> which is most likely a metaphor for him being Jewish.<sup>72</sup> Using various parts of Scripture, Paul further argues (Rom 15:9–12) that Jesus is the “root of Jesse”<sup>73</sup> and

68. Wenham, *Leviticus*, 19–20.

69. Carrier claims 1 Thess 2:14–16 is an interpolation but on specious grounds, without addressing the wider consensus that has developed that the passage is authentic, see Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 124; Still, *Conflict at Thessalonica*, 32–35; Luckensmeyer, *The Eschatology of First Thessalonians*, 115–71; van Houwelingen, “They Displease God,” 115–29; Jensen, “The (In)authenticity,” 59–79.

70. Gk. *κατὰ σάρκα*.

71. Gk. *γεγενῆσθαι περιτομῆς*.

72. Cf. Rom 3:30. See Moo, *Romans*, 875–77.

73. Gk. *ρίζα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*. Cf. Rev 5:5, 22:16, and LXX Isa 11:10, *ρίζα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*, which Paul is citing.

he will rule over the nations. Galatians 3:16 states that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham, using *σπέρμα* language once more. Genealogical and ethnic references like this make more sense if talking about an earthly human being rather than a celestial figure. Taking all of this into account, it becomes very noticeable that Carrier's argumentation is strained in its attempt to interpret Jesus as having been "manufactured" of the seed of David in the cosmic realm. Jesus would not be "born under the law"<sup>74</sup> (Gal 4:4) if he were made in the heavens; he would not be "of [the] circumcision" (Rom 15:8) if he were not actually born a human under the law; and there is no semantic justification to read Rom 1:3 as indicating such, unless Carrier wishes to propose such an absurdity as Jesus being born in a celestial and ethnic nation, where a celestial Mohel performs a celestial *brit milah* on a celestial Jesus, who is then brought up and raised under a celestial set Jewish of laws, in a celestial Roman Palestine, and executed celestially using a Roman method of capital punishment.

### *Conclusions*

The language that Paul uses is in no way indicative of Jesus being manufactured in the heavens by God. However, even after all of this, the case for Carrier continues to weaken. There is also no precedent for God creating people from the semen of other figures by storing it in the heavens, or in any other fashion that the present author is currently aware. More important still is that the entire idea of semen being in heaven would have possibly made no sense in this passage either, as coming into contact with semen made one unclean, which in a Jewish context would mean that it could not be in contact with things which are holy, i.e., those set aside for God. This means that Paul either: (a) attested for the first time in history to a "cosmic sperm bank" with no precedent in any other literature; or (b) believed that there was a human descendent of David named Jesus. The genealogical language would be in line with Septuagintal, Hellenistic, and Jewish writings, and with Paul's own traditions that he would be

74. Gk. *γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον*.

familiar with. There is no apparent precedent for God manufacturing people with the semen of other figures stored in the heavens in any of our ancient sources. Indeed, not even in non-Jewish sources has Carrier been able to provide any relevant or applicable analog (and neither have those supporting him such as Covington). The simplest and most concise explanation of this passage (and with the most data in support of it) is that Paul thought Jesus was a descendant of David in a historical and earthly way, presenting him as the human Messiah. This understanding provides firm ground on which to then establish that a historical Jesus is the most likely explanation behind various other passages throughout the authentic Pauline epistles and undermines the case of mythicists and other skeptics of his existence.<sup>75</sup>

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75. See Rom 9:3–5; 15:8; 15:9–12; 1 Cor 2:8–9; 7:10–11; 9:14; 11:23–26; 15:3–8; 2 Cor 5:19–21; 13:4; Gal 2:21; 3:16; 4:4–5; 6:2; Phil 2:5–8; 1 Thess 2:14–16. Among others, see Byrskog, "The Historicity of Jesus" and Price, "Apocryphal Apparitions." More recently Price, *The Amazing Colossal Apostle*, 357–58, 360–63 argues that 1 Cor 15:3–8 is an interpolation. This has been refuted by Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 540, 545–46. Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity*, 266–68 has also adopted this recourse to conjectural emendations with very little discussion of scholarship on these issues. More extreme, but not mythicist, has been Doughty, "Pauline Paradigms." See also, O'Neill, *Romans*, *passim*; Detering, "The Dutch Radical Approach"; Barkinol, "The Non-Pauline Origin."

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