

How high is the likelihood that Jesus from Nazareth is the Christ?

Evidence from the law of probability and ancient Non-Christian data

von Klaus Grobys

And Jesus said to them: „Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you. For each one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened.“ (Mat 7,7-8)

About 30% of the entire bible is devoted to prophecy. The bible, often referred to as Holy Scripture, entitles itself to be inspired by God because it claims that prophecies being made are going to be fulfilled in the future. The trustworthiness of the New Testament is often challenged for several reasons. Facing these difficulties, it seems to be necessary to figure out prophecies that on the one hand are written clearly before the event occurred. On the other hand, the historical facts on which the prophecies can be ascertained to be fulfilled should come from Non-Christian but well accepted historical sources. The age determination of the book concerning the cited prophecy should be in line with standard archeological age determination, for instance the C-14 method. After figuring out ten different historical facts, the corresponding prophecies with respect to the Old Testament's book of Isaiah are analyzed. Though, the results are in line with Stoner, as the overall probability of someone would fulfill all these ten analyzed prophecies purely by chance is estimated being equal to 2.7×10^{-10} . As a consequence, the hypothesis that Jesus from Nazareth is the Christ cannot be rejected on any reasonable statistical significance level. This is suggested to be the evidence, when considering ancient Non-Christian sources, only.

INTRODUCTION

About 30% of the entire bible is devoted to prophecy. Basically, a prophecy is a message involving a prediction about something that is going to happen, generally spoken by an authority such as a priest. Generally, this message may involve inspiration, revelation or interpretation. The bible, often referred to as the Holy Scripture, entitles itself to be inspired by God, because it claims that prophecies being made are going to be fulfilled in future periods. In order to figure out prophecies, the message should meet at least the following requirements: First, the message should be written down, respectively, expressed undoubtedly before the event occurred. Second, the event's fulfillment should not be able to be exacted. Third, the message should not be expressed vague, but precisely. Fourth, the event's incidence should be historically documented.¹

The mathematician Peter W. Stoner (1888-1980), who was Chairman of the science division, Westmont College (1953-57), and his research team analyzed the mathematical probability concerning biblical prophecies being fulfilled. One part concerning his research studies that took more than 10 years were to allocate feasible probabilities while accounting for dependencies between these events.² For

instance, the probability of getting a value of one, when throwing a six-sided die, is equal to 1/6. If the six-sided die is assumed to be fair, the probability of getting a value of one again when throwing the die a second time is of course 1/6 times 1/6 (=1/36) as long as the assumption of the experiment's independency holds. This multiplication principle is often illustrated in tree diagrams.³ Of course, this example, which is often referred to when probability theory is introduced, may be one of the simplest cases regarding probability allocation. Therefore, one may get a clue of the difficulties which Stoner's team faced during their long run research studies.

The Old Testament contains more than 300 prophecies concerning the Christ. Though, Stoner and his research team took only eight prophecies fulfilled by Jesus into account and determined the odds of one person fulfilling just those eight. The results were amazing: They calculated the odds at 1 in 10 to the power of 17 (likelihood= 10^{-17}).⁴

Even though the event that Jesus is the predicted Christ "by chance" cannot be justified in accordance to the law of probability, there remains still uncertainty and skepticism. The trustworthiness of the New Testament is often

¹ See „Biblische Prophezeiungen und mathematische Wahrscheinlichkeiten“ by P. Zöllner-Greer in Professorenforum-Journal Vol.7, No.2.

² See Stoner, P.W and Newman, R.C.: *Science Speaks*, Moody Bible Institute Chicago 1958 and 1976.

³ See Hogg, R.V and Tanis, E.A: *Probability And Statistical Inference*, Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006.

⁴ See Stoner, P.W and Newman, R.C.: *Science Speaks*, Moody Bible Institute Chicago 1958 and 1976.

challenged due to several reasons. The first major reason for critics to challenge the New Testament is as following. Critics argue that the authors of the gospels adjusted the Old Testament in such way that prophecies only seemed to have been fulfilled. For instance, the four evangelists Mark, Matthew, Luke and John gave different views concerning Jesus' crucifixion (see Mar 15,40; Mat 27,55-57; Luk 23,49 and Joh 19,25-26).⁵ Consequently, critics argue that it seems not to be plausible that Jesus said the words of Psalms 22,2 when he was crucified (see Mat 27,46). If the report in accordance to Mark was true and "women were watching from a distance" (see Mar 15,40), they would have hardly heard these words.

The second major reason why challenging biblical prophecies is the exact age determination of the bible's books. For instance, the prediction concerning the destruction of Tyre, given in Ezekiel chapter 26, led to different discussions. Apart from the question if only Nebuchadnezzar or also another king, namely Alexander the Great, should have been involved in order to make the prophecy come true, critics are concerned about the exact date when this prophecy was made. The range of time when the book of Ezekiel was written may run from 600-560 BC. However, Nebuchadnezzar started to besiege Tyre already in 586 BC. Thus, the probability of $1,33 \cdot 10^{-18}$ which was calculated from Stoner's team would not be true if the book of Ezekiel was written after 586 BC being often referred to as "after-the-event authorship".

Another example may be the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The age determination regarding the gospel of Mark is estimated to be between AD 60 and 70. Even if the C-14-method has shown that the papyrus fragment PQ5⁶ which was identified with Mar 6,52-53, results in a dating between AD 40-50, some critics still suppose that the chapter 13 of Mark's gospel was added afterwards. Other researchers argue against it because Mar 13,18 would make no sense in this context. The event concerning Jerusalem's siege and destruction occurred in the summer AD 70, though, in Mar 13,18 the premonition is made "and pray that your flight is not in the winter".⁷

Facing these difficulties it seems to be necessary to figure out prophecies that are on the one hand written clearly before the event occurred. Thereby, the age determination of the cited prophecy should be in line with standard archaeological age determination, like the C-14 method for instance. On the other hand, the historical facts on which the prophecies can be ascertained to be fulfilled should come from Non-Christian but well accepted historical sources. Though, to the best of my knowledge there are no dispositive studies that take those restrictions into account. In this work, however, I attempt to remedy this.

⁵ See Nürnberger, C.: *Das Christentum*, Rowohlt Berlin, 2008.

⁶ The archeological age determination concerning the gospel of Mark could not be rejected.

⁷ See Jaros, K.: *Das Neue Testament und seine Autoren*, Böhlau, 2008.

BACKGROUND

Apart from Old Testament prophecies that might have been fulfilled during the time before Jesus' birth, Stoner and his team also investigated to what extent Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Thereby, Stoner takes into account the eight well known prophecies concerning Jesus Christ and determines the probability of them being fulfilled by both, only one person, namely Jesus from Nazareth and at the same time "randomly". The eight well known prophecies are as following:

H1: Christ's place of birth (=Bethlehem) (Mi. 5,1)

H2: Christ's messenger (=John the Baptist), who will clear the way before (Mal 3,1)

H3: He (=The Christ) is riding on an donkey, even on a colt (Zec 9,9)

H4: He (=The Christ) was betrayed in favor of thirty pieces of silver (Zec 11,12)

H5: He (=Judas Iscariot) took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord (Zec 11,13)

H6: He (=The Christ) was betrayed from a friend (Zec 13,6)

H7: He (=The Christ) did not open his mouth when he was brought to trial (Isa 53,7)

H8: Piercers in his (=The Christ's) hands and feet (Psa 22,16)

Stoner points out that there are no previously set restrictions with respect to H1, as this is the first prophecy to be considered. The questions should consequently be: How many, the world over, has been born in Bethlehem? He comes to the conclusion that the best estimate which can be made of this comes from the attempt to find out the average population of Bethlehem, from Micah down to the present time, and divide it by the average population of the earth during the same period. Thus, he estimated a probability of $2.8 \cdot 10^{-5}$.⁸

In order to find an accurate estimate for the second prophecies' likelihood, the following question has to be considered: Of the men who have been born in the town Bethlehem, one man in how many has had a forerunner to prepare his way? In order to come up with a conservative estimate, Stoner asserts the probability to be 10^{-3} . The corresponding question concerning the third prophecy is as consequence: One man in how many who was born in Bethlehem and have had a forerunner did enter Jerusalem as a king riding on a donkey? Even if the probability may be much smaller Stoner used 10^{-2} as an estimate. The fourth prophecy aims at the question: One man in how many, the world over, has been betrayed by a friend in favor of thirty pieces of silver? Stoner employed a probability of 10^{-3} . The question concerning the fifth prophecy considered here, may be as following: Of the people who have been betrayed, one in how many has been betrayed for precise thirty pieces of silver? The likelihood's

⁸ See <http://www.sciencespeaks.net/>, accessed on 30.Jan. 2010, 13.52 AM.

estimate used here is 10^{-4} . The question with respect to the sixth prophecy is quite specific: One man in how many after receiving a graft for the betrayal of a friend had given back the money, had it refused, had thrown it on the floor in the house of the Lord, and then had it used to purchase a field from the potter? As the prophecy is very specific, the probability estimate used is 10^{-5} . Concerning the seventh prophecy, the question to be considered may be: One man in how many after fulfilling the above prophecies, when he is aggrieved, afflicted and is on trial for his life, though innocent, will make no advocacy for himself? Again, in order to give a conservative estimate, Stoner used 10^{-3} . The question of interest regarding the last prophecy which is considered in this context may be: One man in how many, from the time of David on, has died by crucifixion? After studying the approaches of execution down through the ages and their frequency, an estimate of 10^{-4} seems to be accurate in accordance to Stoner. Consequently, the overall likelihood is given by multiplication and thus 10^{-28} . Dividing the latter figure by 10^{-11} , as the estimated total number of people who have lived since the time of these prophecies is assumed to be roughly 100 Billion, gives a likelihood equal to 10^{-17} .⁹

Obviously, the law of probability cannot help to explain the prophecies' fulfillment "by chance". However, when applying those prophecies in order to prove that Jesus from Nazareth is the prophesied Messiah, the implied assumption is definitely that the New Testament's reports are true, respectively, reliable. One of the critics' major argumentation is that the authors of the gospels adjusted the Old Testament in such way that prophecies only seemed to have been fulfilled. A crucial point may be the *Virgin birth of Jesus*: Both evangelists, Mathew and Luke report the so called *Virgin birth of Jesus* as written down in Mat 1,18-25 and Luk 1,26-38. The prophecy which they built their report on is given in Isa 7,14. First, critics argue this context is not referred to the Messiah. Second, the original Hebrew word עלמה ('almâh) which is translated with *virgin* can also mean *young woman* in contrast.

In order to account for this sort of skepticism, one may consider Old Testament's prophecies only, that are definitely supported from ancient Non-Christian sources.

EVIDENCE FROM HISTORICAL ANCIENT NON-CHRISTIAN DATA

In order to account for the first major reason concerning the critics' skepticism in the following, only ancient Non-Christian sources are taken into account. Even though critics usually share the often mentioned opinion that everything one knows about Jesus is recorded in the New Testament and in particular the Gospels, in the following, ancient historian's reports, government officials, Jewish sources

⁹ See <http://www.sciencespeaks.net/>, accessed on 30.Jan. 2010, 14.09 AM.

and other Gentile sources are analyzed which of them provide explicit and implicit information concerning the historical Jesus. The data is analyzed with respect to its explicit and implicit information which may be of interest here and compared with precise prophecies of the Old Testament. Considering this, it is important to use reliable and well accepted ancient data.

The well known and likewise honored Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (about AD 55-120) composed two famous works. The *Annals* which is one of them covers the period from Augustus' death in AD 14 to that of Nero AD 68 and was written about AD 115. The *Annals* report several facts, both explicit and implicit, regarding Christ and the Christians. The following extract of the *Annals* as cited in accordance to Habermas is as following¹⁰:

*Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. [...].*¹¹

One may ascertain the following explicit and implicit information: (F5) Jesus was put to death by the Roman procurator Pontius Pilatus during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. (F10) Temporarily Christ's followers seemed to have disappeared. The latter can be concluded by Tacitus' statement "a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, [...]". (F2) This Jewish sect became very popular in Rome. In other words, there were more and more followers in Rome who accepted and confessed Jesus Christ to be their religious leader, respectively, their religious head. A last fact that may be of interest is that Christ's followers carried his doctrine to Rome. The converse argument is, as a consequence, that (F9) Christ must have taught them the doctrine before.

Another Roman historian who makes references to Jesus Christ and the Christians is Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (about AD 71-135). Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus was born in the province of Africa, in Hippo Regius, close to the modern Annaba in northeast Algeria. He was chief secretary of Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138), had access to imperial records¹² and made the following reference

¹⁰ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

¹¹ Tacitus, 15.44.

¹² See Graves, R. „Introduction“ to 'Suetonius' *The twelve Caesars*, transl. by Robert Graves, Baltimore, Penguin, 1957.

to Jesus in the section on Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) as cited in accordance to Habermas:¹³

Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city.

Suetonius' second reference concerning the Christians is in the context of the torture under Nero as also cited by Habermas¹⁴:

After the great fire at Rome ... Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous belief.

Suetonius' references provide the following information: He claims that it was Christ who caused the Jews in Rome to make waves. This is obviously a result of (F9) Christ's teachings.

The Christians are considered as being a Jewish sect that practices a new belief. A new belief is obviously based on (F7) new teachings, a new sort of doctrine. Tacitus and Suetonius obviously agree on the point that the Christians were "evil and mischievous people". A converse argument is that also (F4) Jesus Christ was considered as evildoer because he was obviously seen as the "instigator of the evil".

Aside from Roman historians, there is also data available from well honored Jewish historians. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (about AD 38-97) became the court historian for Emperor Vespasian after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The *Antiquities* which is one of his most famous works exhibit some interesting references concerning Jesus Christ. Schlomo Pines, who was Professor of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, released in 1972 the results of a study on an Arabic manuscript that contains Josephus' reference to Jesus. The following extract is cited in accordance to Habermas:¹⁵

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. [...]

Josephus' *Antiquities* exhibit the following historical information: (F1) Jesus was known as a wise and righteous man who had a good conduct. (F2) People from other nations, often referred to as heathens, became his followers. (F5) Jesus died by crucifixion. If people became "disciples"

¹³ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

they should have to be taught before. Therefore, a converse argument is that (F9) Jesus appeared as a teacher.

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (about AD 61-112), known as Pliny the Younger, was a Roman official and writer, famous for his letters which are an important source for Roman history. Pliny the Younger travelled to Rome for the later stages of his education, and enjoyed a successful career in law and government. He entered the senate in the late AD 80s and became consul in AD 100. Apart from that he delivered his Panegyricus in honour of the emperor Trajan.¹⁶ The first nine books of Pliny's letters which have attained the status of literary classics, were written to friends and colleagues. They are formal literary compositions which set out to give a picture of the times covering political events such as senatorial debates, elections and trials as well as social and domestic matters, different sorts of advice and topographical descriptions as well. The tenth book, though, consists of letters to and from the emperor Trajan, mostly written during Pliny's governorship (about AD 111-112).¹⁷ The tenth letter contains a reference to Christ and the early Christians. The following extract of the tenth letter is cited in accordance to Habermas¹⁸:

They (the Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.

Pliny the Younger's letter exhibits the following explicit and implicit facts: (F6) Christ was worshipped by the Christians as deity. The oath gives implicitly a hint to (F9) Christ's ethical teachings.¹⁹

The Talmud which is the comprehensive written version of the Jewish oral law and the subsequent commentaries on it, was completed in the 2nd century. The Talmud is known to be the source from which the code of Jewish law is derived. It is made up of the Mishnah as well as the Gemara, whereas the Mishnah is the original written version of the oral law and the Gemara is the record of

¹⁶ See

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/pliny_the_younger.shtml, accessed on 29.Jan. 2010, 10.45 AM.

¹⁷ See

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/pliny_the_younger.shtml, accessed on 29.Jan. 2010, 10.48 AM.

¹⁸ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the rabbinic discussions. It includes their differences of conclusions. The Talmud is also known by the name “Shas” which is a Hebrew abbreviation for the expression *Shishah Sedarim* or the six orders of the Mishnah. The Sanhedrin is the name given in the Mishna to the council of seventy-one Jewish sages who constituted the Supreme Court and legislative body in Judea during the Roman period.²⁰ The first date at which a Sanhedrin is mentioned is AD 57.²¹ An important quotation concerning Jesus Christ can be found in Sanhedrin 43a, dating from the early period. The following extract of Sanhedrin 43a is cited in accordance to Habermas²²:

*On the eve of the Passover Yeshu (Jesus) was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried: “He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!*²³

From this extract of the Talmud, one recognizes the following facts: (F5) Jesus was crucified. The expression “hanged” which is the same as in Galater 3,13 (greek: κρεμάννυμι (kremannumi), spoken as *krem-an'-noo-mee*) has the meaning of crucifixion. Furthermore, it is reported that Jesus was judged by the Jews to be guilty of sorcery and disloyalty in leading the Jewish people astray by his teachings. This means (F3) that the Jewish religious leadership dismissed Jesus’ teachings. As a consequence, the Jewish religious leadership (F3) took exception to Jesus and was so angry about him that they planned to kill him. Implicitly one may assert that (F4) Jesus was considered as evildoer (“enticed Israel to apostasy”) and that he apart from that (F7) came up with new teachings (“he has practiced sorcery”) which were considered as being apostate. Moreover, people were invited to defend him but nobody did. Hence, the reverse argument is that (H10) nobody wanted to be associated with him; most probably in order to protect them.

Furthermore, the second century Assyrian rhetorician Lucian of Samosata (about AD 125 – 180) who was known

as Greek satirist made some comments about Christ, the Christians and their behavior. The following extract is taken from his satiric text *The death of Peregrine*²⁴:

*It was now that he came across the priests and scribes of the Christians, in Palestine, and picked up their queer creed. I can tell you, he pretty soon convinced them of his superiority; prophet, elder, ruler of the Synagogue--he was everything at once; expounded their books, commented on them, wrote books himself. They took him for a God, accepted his laws, and declared him their president. The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day,--the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. Well, the end of it was that Proteus was arrested and thrown into prison. This was the very thing to lend an air to his favorite arts of clap-trap and wonder-working; he was now a made man. The Christians took it all very seriously: he was no sooner in prison, than they began trying every means to get him out again,--but without success. [...] You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.*²⁵

In the process of his critique Lucian relates some important historical facts regarding Jesus and the early Christians. First of all, (F6) Jesus was worshipped by the Christians as deity. (F5) Jesus died by crucifixion. Even though Lucian uses the expression “sage” here in a satiric meaning, he delivers implicitly the fact that (F1) Jesus was known to be a wise man. In accordance to Habermas, applying the expression “sage” would especially be in a Greek context to compare Jesus to the Greek philosophers and wise men at this time.²⁶ Moreover, (F7) Jesus introduced a new doctrine in Palestine and (F9) appeared as a teacher.

Mara Bar-Serapion was a Syrian stoic philosopher who made a reference to Jesus Christ sometime around AD 73. He left a legacy manuscript to his son Serapion (AD 73-

²⁰ See http://www.thesanhedrin.org/en/index.php/The_Re-established_Jewish_Sanhedrin, accessed on 29.Jan. 2010, 11.19 AM.

²¹ See <http://www.judentum.org/talmud/traktate/sanhedrin/index.html>, accessed on 29.Jan. 2010, 11.22 AM.

²² See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

²³ See also http://www.israelect.com/Come-and-Hear/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_43.html, accessed on 29.Jan. 2010, 12.05 AM.

²⁴ The text *The death of Peregrine* in *The works of Lucian of Samosata* Vol. IV was translated by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1905.

²⁵ See <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/w14/w1420.htm>, accessed on 29.Jan. 2010, 12.20 AM.

²⁶ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

132) that was first edited in the nineteenth century by the English Orientalist William Cureton (1808-1864). This letter is now in the possession of the British Museum.

What are we to say, when the wise are dragged by force by the hands of tyrants, and their wisdom is deprived of its freedom by slander, and they are plundered for their superior intelligence, without the opportunity of making a defence? They are not wholly to be pitied. For what benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death, seeing that they received as retribution for it famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, seeing that in one hour the whole of their country was covered with sand? Or the Jews by the murder of their Wise King, seeing that from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them? For with justice did God grant a recompense to the wisdom of all three of them. For the Athenians died by famine; and the people of Samos were covered by the sea without remedy; and the Jews, brought to desolation and expelled from their kingdom, are driven away into every land. Nay, Socrates did "not" die, because of Plato; nor yet Pythagoras, because of the statue of Hera; nor yet the Wise King, because of the new laws which he enacted.²⁷

From Mara Bar-Serapion's text the following facts can be asserted: (F1) Jesus was considered as wise and righteous man. (F7) Jesus enacted a new doctrine. Even if some critics still think that the expression "Wise King" does not correspond to Jesus Christ, most theologians probably agree on the item that the whole context exhibits strong evidence to be related to Jesus from Nazareth. Thus, Jesus Christ was seen as (F6) "The Jew's King" who (F3) was rejected and (F5) killed by his own people. Apart from that, Jesus was killed (F8) unjustly by the Jews who paid for their misdeeds by suffering judgment soon afterwards. As a result, some people thought the capital town Jerusalem was therefore destroyed by the Roman armies. Apart from that, they (the Jews) were "driven away into every land". Furthermore, Mara Bar-Serapion mentions that Jesus lived on in the (F9) teachings he gave to his disciples. Habermas mentions, that

Mara Bar-Serapion was almost certainly not a Christian. Rather, he follows Lucian and others in the popular comparison of Jesus to philosophers and other wise men in the ancient world.²⁸

²⁷ See British Museum, Syriac Manuscript, Additional 14,658. For this text, see <http://ebooks.gutenberg.us/WorldeBookLibrary.com/letmara.htm>, accessed on 29.Jan. 2010, 12.58 AM.

²⁸ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

In line with the ancient Non-Christian sources one can summarize the following historical facts which are of interest in this work:

(F1) Jesus Christ was known as a wise and righteous man.

(F2) Other nations, which were often referred to as being the heathens, accepted and confessed Jesus Christ's teachings.

(F3) Basically, the Jewish people, especially the religious leadership, took exception to Jesus Christ and his doctrine.

(F4) Jesus Christ was ranked among to the evildoers.

(F5) Jesus Christ was crucified.

(F6) Jesus Christ was called for the Christian's God and King of the Jews and he was worshipped by the Christians.

(F7) Jesus Christ enacted a doctrine that was considered as new teachings.

(F8) Jesus Christ was condemned and killed unjustly by the Jews.

(F9) Jesus Christ appeared as a teacher.

(F10) There was a time when even Jesus Christ's followers did not want to be associated with him.

These historical facts cannot be rejected from critics who consider the New Testament as being "after-the-event authorship" because all these facts are documented in reliable, well accepted ancient Non-Christian sources. Even the age determination is clear. Consequently, this approach accounts for the first major reason concerning the critics' skepticism, as mentioned earlier. In order to account for the second major reason in the following, only prophecies are taken into account which can be proven archeologically to be written long time before Jesus Christ's time on earth.

OLD TESTAMENTS PROPHECIES

In order to account for the second major reason concerning the skepticism in the following, only the Old Testaments *book of Isaiah* is considered. Even if the *book of Isaiah* is said to be written between 701 and 681 BC, critics might have doubted any way until 1947. A copy of the entire scroll (1QIs-a) of the *book of Isaiah* was found in 1947, containing all 66 chapters. The age determination was performed four times by employing the carbon-14 method, including the University of Arizona in 1995 and a study at ETH-Zurich in 1990/91. The studies produced calibrated date ranges between 335-324 BC and 202-107 BC.²⁹ The theologian and educator Gleason Leonard Archer (1916-2004), who in 1944 was awarded a PhD at Harvard University in Classics, comes due to an analysis of the Isaiah Dead Sea Scroll to the conclusion that approximately 95% of the Old Testament's text is without any variation, regardless of the textual tradition.

²⁹ See Price, R.: *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Harvest House Publishers, Inc, 1996.

The remaining uncertainties mostly amount to a simple discrepancy in word order.³⁰

The *book of Isaiah*, which is well accepted by the Jewish Religion, too, had the following purpose: The Prophet Isaiah was primarily called to prophesy to the Kingdom of Judah, because Judah was going through times of revival as well as times of rebellion. Even though Judah was threatened with destruction by Assyria and Egypt, it was spared because of God's mercy as documented in the *book of Isaiah*. Apart from that, Isaiah proclaimed a message of repentance from sin and hopeful expectation of God's deliverance in the future.

Basically, the *book of Isaiah* consists of two large parts (chap. 1 - 35 and 40 - 66) which are separated by a historical part (chap. 36 - 39). The second major part (chap. 40 - 66) deals with the relation of God's people to the Messiah (Christ) and ends with the description of Christ's reign. Even critics agree on that. In particular Isa 52,13-53,12 is definitely referred to the Messiah's appearance, suffering and death.

In the following, prophecies mainly exhibited in the *book of Isaiah* are analyzed in order to figure out, if they really predict what is documented by the historical data. Considering Isa 11,2; 11,5; 42,3; 53,9 and 53,11 one comes clearly to the conclusion that some of (P1) the Messiah's personal attributes will be "righteousness" and "wise": Thus it is prophesied that "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might" shall rest on the Messiah (Isa 11,2) and "with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and shall decide with uprightness for the meek of the earth" (Isa 11,5). The Messiah "shall bring out judgment to truth" (Isa 43,2) and "he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa 53,9). "By his knowledge shall" the "righteous Servant justify for many" (Isa 53,11).

The verses Isa 42,6; 49,6 and 55,5 report that (P2) other nations will accept and confess the Messiah. In Isa 42,6 it is mentioned that the Lord will give his Servant for "a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations." Here, the expression *light* comes from the Hebrew word אור ('ôr) and actually means *luminary* in every sense, including *lightning* and *happiness*. However, *luminary* (greek: κορυφή) in the context of humans has the original meaning of *leader*, because the *luminary* is considered to be able to perform better than others. The Hebrew word גוי גוי (gôy gôy) that is translated here with "nations" means originally a "foreign nation" which were considered as and often referred to as being "the heathens". This word-by-word-analysis shows that the expression *light of the nations* involves that the heathens will accept and confess Jesus Christ as their religious head. Apart from that verse, in Isa 49,6 it is also written that the Lord will give his Servant "for a light to the nations, to be the salvations to the end of the earth". Moreover, in Isa 55,5 it is written: "Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know; a nation that did not know you shall run to you [...]." In Isa 51,4 this message is highlighted again: "Listen to Me (the Lord), My people; and

give ear to Me, O My nation; for a law shall go out from Me, and I will make My judgment to rest for a light of peoples."

The next prophecy which shall be considered here, can be expressed as following: (P3) The Israelites will not believe the Messiah and will take exception to him and his doctrine. This prophecy can be concluded when considering Isa 8,14; 42,20; 53,1-3 as well as Psalms 118,22 a bit closer. In Isa 8,14 it is written that the Messiah will be "a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel". Furthermore, in Isa 42,20a it is prophesied that the people indeed "see things, but do not pay attention." The second sentence of verse 20 reveals that the people will not understand what is going to happen, even though their "ears are open" (Isa 42,20b). In Isa 53,1-3 it is prophesied again that the people will not believe him (Isa 53,1). Apart from that, the Messiah will not have "an appearance that" the people "should desire Him" (Isa 53,2). On the one hand, the Hebrew expression מראה (mar'eh) can be related to the outer appearance. On the other hand, it can be related to an attitude of a person. An attitude in a religious context can in particular be someone's doctrine, too. The subsequent verse clearly underlines this message as "he is despised and rejected of men" (Isa 53,3). Considering Psalms 118,22 in association with Isa 8,14 may underline the statement above: "The stone which the builders refused has become the head of the corner." The Hebrew word בנה (bânâh) that is translated here with *builders* can also be translated with *obtained children*, as bânâh can be meant literally and figuratively. Furthermore, the expression מאס (mâ'as) literally means to *reject* or to *spurn a person*.³¹

Isa 53,9 and 53,12 prophesy that (P4) the Messiah will be considered as evildoer by the people which is uttered by "he put his grave with the wicked" (Isa 53,9) and "he was counted among the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for transgressors" (Isa 53,12).

Isa 53,7-8 exhibits a prophecy concerning (P5) the Messiah's death, as "he was oppressed, and he was afflicted" (Isa 53,7) and "he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken." (Isa 53,8).

The most important and to my mind most interesting prophecy is given by Isa 9,6 as well as Psalms 22,30 because (P6) he will be "called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa 9,6) and "all the fat ones on the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before him" (Psa 22,29). In other words, the Messiah will be worshipped as deity as he will be considered as "The mighty God", respectively, "Son of God", even though the Messiah will have the outer appearance as a human. In the next part this prophecy will be discussed more detailed.

³⁰ See Archer, G.L. and Chirichigno, G.C.: *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1983.

³¹ Hence, the conclusions given in 1.Peter 2,7-8 may be based on this context.

The next prophecy which shall be considered here can be expressed as following: (P7) The Messiah will constitute an “everlasting covenant” (Isa 55,3), often referred to as the *New Testament*. The Lord will preserve him and give him “for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth to cause them to inherit the wasted inheritances” (Isa 49,8). In accordance to Isa 49,2, The Lord has made the Messiah’s “mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he has hidden me, and made me a polished shaft.” Apart from new doctrine, one can draw the conclusion that there might be a certain connection between “mouth like a sharp sword” (Isa 49,2) and the “stone of stumbling” (Isa 8,14). Furthermore, in Isa 42,6 it is also mentioned that the Lord gives him “for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations”. In Isa 42,9 and 48,6 it is highlighted: “Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I (the Lord) declare; before they happen, I cause you to hear” (Isa 42,6) and “I (the Lord) have shown you new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them” (Isa 48,6).

Isa 59,9 and Psa 69,4 contain a prophecy concerning the Messiah’s unjust condemnation, because (P8) the Messiah will be condemned, even though “he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (Isa 53,9). The people will hate him “without any cause” (Psa 69,4), but anyway he “restored, what” he “did not take away” (Psa 69,4). Thereby, the Hebrew expression שָׂנֵא חֵנָם (śânê’ chinnâm) means literally *to hate (a person) without a cause*.

In Isa 42,3-4 and 50,4 is exhibited a further prophecy, as (P9) the Messiah will come in order to teach the people: “He shall bring out judgment to truth” (Isa 42,3) and the nations „shall wait for his law” (Isa 42,4). He was given by the Lord “the tongue of the learned, to know to help the weary with a word” (Isa 50,4). In contrast to former indoctrinators’ manner at this time the Messiah will preach in another way, as he will “not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street” (Isa 42,2).

The last prophecy, that shall be considered here, can be concluded from Isa 53,3 and Psa 22,6-7. (P10) People will not want to be associated with the Servant, and the people are “hiding their faces from him” (Isa 53,3) because he is “despised of the people” (Psa 22,6). Comparing the prophecies $P(i)$, $i = 1, \dots, 10$ with the corresponding historical facts $F(i)$, it can be asserted that all these prophecies are supported by the data.

DISCUSSION

In order to figure out an adequate estimate concerning the prophecies being fulfilled by Jesus Christ, accurate assumptions has to be made. Concerning the first prophecy it could be asked: One man in how many were known to be wise and righteous at this time? Basically, the upper-class like the Pharisees as well as philosophers had this kind of reputation only. Thus the estimate used here shall be 10^{-1} (one in ten) which can be seen as conservative figure. With respect to the second prophecy the following might be questioned: One man in how many who was known to be wise and righteous, came up with a doctrine that was ac-

cepted by the heathens? Taking into account that the Jewish religion was already dissociated at this time, the probability that especially other nations would accept a Jewish doctrine was quite low. Hence, 10^{-4} might be a conservative figure. Given the first two prophecies, the probability that the Jewish people, especially the religious leadership, took exception to Jesus Christ and his doctrine might be higher. In order to remain conservative, the probability may be 0.9 (=90%). However, the probability that someone who was known as being wise and righteous, was ranked among to the evildoers might be very little. Let’s assume that the corresponding likelihood is one in 1000 ($=10^{-3}$). The likelihood of the fifth prophecy is a bit more complicated: One man in how many being known as wise and righteous, being ranked among evildoers and died by crucifixion? Let’s assume that the probability is 10^{-4} .

Considering the sixth prophecy, it can assumed, that the probability might be very little. It was not usual to worship to humans. The heathens usually worshipped to “elements of the creation” (see Gal 4,3) like the sun-god. Even though the emperor cult came up in the end of the first century, worshipping the emperor was related to the living emperor at the recent time, only. Apart from that it might be questionable, if one actually may speak from “worshipping”, as the people were forced. The Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians worshipped the crucified Christ instead. Thus, using an estimate of one in one million (10^{-6}) may still be a rather conservative figure. Concerning the seventh prophecy one may assert a higher probability because from time to time a new doctrine appeared. Let’s assume a likelihood of 0.9. The last three prophecies should receive a higher probability, thus one may allocate a probability of 2/3 for each. In line with Stoner, the multiplication principle gives a likelihood value equal to $2.4 \cdot 10^{-19}$. Even if the assumed growth rate is actually a too conservative estimate, the total number of people who have lived since the time of these prophecies shall be assumed to be $8.8 \cdot 10^{10}$ which is also in line with Stoner. Hence, accounting for the total number of humans, one may get a overall probability of $2.7 \cdot 10^{-10}$. Therefore, the first outcome is the same as for Stoner: The law of probability cannot help to explain the prophecies’ fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

In contrast to Stoner who estimated even a probability equal to 10^{-17} , Stoner’s approach has the drawback that the implied assumption has to be taken that the reports of the New Testament stand on solid grounds. This drawback could be accounted for, in this work, as only ancient Non-Christian sources are used. Furthermore, the prophecies used here, are others than those used by Stoner, but exhibit strong evidence in the data. Though, a drawback in this study may be that the probability estimates that are used here are rather determined heuristically.

Consequently, there may be further items to discuss: First, how adequate are the assumed probabilities?

Second, is it possible to figure out even other prophecies that can be supported by ancient Non-Christian data?

CONCLUSION

The probability as calculated in the previous part is principally an upper bound because the probabilities used are rather conservative. In other words, even if one accounts for the total number of people who have lived since the time of these prophecies, the likelihood that someone fulfilled all those prophecies simply by chance is zero. Though, Jesus from Nazareth fulfilled them like shown by analyzing the well appreciated data. As a consequence, the hypothesis that Jesus from Nazareth is the Christ cannot be rejected on any reasonable level of significance. This is the outcome when considering ancient Non-Christian sources only.

However, other well accepted researchers argue that reports of The New Testament are reliable as they most often conform to the corresponding ancient historical sources.³² Considering the indication, that the early Christian had been considered as being “superstitious”³³ involves implicitly a hint to Jesus’ resurrection.³⁴ Aside from that, Jesus was charged of “practicing sorcery”³⁵. This exhibits strong evidence to what is reported in the gospels, namely that Jesus performed miracles.³⁶ Apart from the controversial Virgin birth of Jesus, the other records that are often referred to eye-whiteness’ reports are true, the overall likelihood of someone fulfilling all those prophecies including the “additional prophecies” by chance becomes even more implausible.³⁷

Apart from the ancient Non-Christian sources, there are so called Gnostic sources in addition as well as Apocrypha that are not apart from The New Testament. Even if they are not considered here, it may be worth mentioning that

they exhibit additional evidence to the historical life of Jesus Christ.³⁸

An interesting point may be furthermore that some of the evidence concerning Jesus’ life was ascertained in the 20. Century: For instance, the Isaiah Dead Sea Scrolls were found as recently as 1947. The so called Nazareth Decree (AD 41-54) declaring that grave robbing was punishable by death was found in 1878. In accordance to Habermas, the Nazareth Decree could be reaction both to the Christian teaching concerning Jesus’ resurrection and the Jewish contention that the body was stolen.³⁹ In 1961 a stone that exhibits an inscription regarding Pontus Pilate was found in Caesarea. Even if many documents had probably been destroyed when the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) took place, in the last years trustworthiness of The New Testament increased dramatically.

Though, the primary concern of this work was a critical evaluation of the likelihood that someone would fulfill those prophecies which Jesus from Nazareth obviously fulfilled. Hopefully it may help people to focus on the main issues of what is the actual meaning of Christianity in accordance to the theologian Nürnberger:

*Belief, reversion, repentance, original sin,
Kingdom of God, body of Christ,
classless society, it must not give poor people.⁴⁰*



Dipl.-Handelslehrer Klaus Grobys,
Jahrgang 1978, studierte nach Abschluss einer Banklehre die Fächer Ökonometrie und VWL an den Universitäten zu Kiel und Stockholm. Nach Arbeit als Assistent beim Finanzmarktforschungsunternehmen Financial Inquiry AB in Stockholm/Schweden ist er seit 2009 Lehrer an der Staatliche Medienschule Hamburg-Wandsbek.

Publikationen:

„Motivationspsychologische Determinanten der Finanzkrise: Ein nutzentheoretisches Motivationsmodell“, 2009, ISBN: 9 783839 130377.

„Volatility Analysis and Asset Pricing of Stock Portfolios: An Empirical Approach in Applied Financial Econometrics“, 2009, ISBN: 9 783837 090499.

„Portfoliomanagement: Index-Tracking Strategies“, 2009, ISBN: 9 783839 107317.

Auszeichnungen:

Auszeichnung der IHK zu Kiel als „Prüfungsbester im Ausbildungsberuf Bankkaufmann“

Prüfungsbester im Studiengang „Diplom-Handelslehrer“ an der Universität zu Kiel im WS 2008/09

³² See Jaros, K.: *Das Neue Testament und seine Autoren*, Böhlau, 2008, or Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008, for instance.

³³ See Tacitus’ reference in the previous part *EVIDENCE FROM HISTORICAL ANCIENT NON-CHRISTIAN DATA*, for instance.

³⁴ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

³⁵ See *Sanhedrin 43a* in the part previous *EVIDENCE FROM HISTORICAL ANCIENT NON-CHRISTIAN DATA*.

³⁶ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

³⁷ Some theories mention, that the writers of The New Testament used Greek translations of The Old Testament in order to reinterpret The Old Testament with respect to Jesus Christ. These translations are supposed to be translated by Non-Jews. Consequently, reading an imprecise translation can result in reinterpretations like exhibited in Mat 1,18-25 and Luk 1,26-38. Clearly, the evangelists drew their own conclusions concerning things, which they have not seen with their own eyes. Hence, the gospels may contain reports of eye-witnesses as well as the evangelist’s own conclusions.

³⁸ See Habermas, G.R.: *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 2008.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See Nürnberger, C.: *Das Christentum*, Rowohlt Berlin, 2008.