



Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?

By Robert M. Price

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"This book should be mandatory reading for all scholars concerned with Christian origins ... nothing of comparable importance has been written for at least a decade." - Freethinker

For more than a century scholars have been examining the Gospels and other traditions about the life of Jesus to determine their historical accuracy. Although the results of these scholarly efforts are sometimes controversial, the consensus among researchers today is that the four Evangelists' accounts cannot be taken at face value. In fact, a team of more than 100 scholars called the Jesus Seminar has come to the conclusion that on average only about 18 percent of the four Gospels is historically accurate.

An active member of the Jesus Seminar, Dr. Robert M. Price presents the fruits of this important historical research in this fascinating discussion of early Christianity. As the title suggests, Price is none too optimistic about the reliability of the Gospel tradition as a source of accurate historical information about the life of Jesus. Indeed, he feels that his colleagues in the Jesus Seminar are much too optimistic in their estimate of authentic material in the Gospels. After an introduction to the historical-critical method for nonspecialists and a critique of the methods used by the Jesus Seminar, Price systematically discusses the narrative and teaching materials in the Gospel, clearly presenting what is known and not known about all of the major episodes of Jesus' life. He also examines the parables for authenticity as well as Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God, repentance, prayer, possessions and poverty, the Atonement, and many other features of the Gospels.

Written for the general reading public in a lively and accessible style, Dr. Price's highly informative discussion will be of interest to anyone who has wondered about the origins of Christianity.

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Editorial Review

Review

"...for all scholars concerned with Christian origins...nothing of comparable importance has been written for at least a decade." -- *Freethinker, April 2004*

"This informative and gripping books shows us how the Gospel stories were put together in order to satisfy religious craving." -- *Ulster Humanist, April-May 2004*

From the Inside Flap

In **THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING SON OF MAN**, Robert M. Price, a noted biblical scholar and a member of the Jesus Seminar, investigates the historical accuracy of Jesus as written in the New Testament stories. Beginning with the assumption that Jesus indeed walked the earth, Price discovers that the Bible provides no paint with which to draw a historically accurate portrait of such an important religious figure. Price juxtaposes Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John's accounts of Jesus' life, revealing both well-known and not-so-obvious contradictions in the Gospels.

In his introduction, Price defines and defends higher criticism of the Bible, a tool he uses to reconcile history with Scripture. Next, Price presents the sources the Gospel writers used to compose their works, as well as the territory already charted by biblical scholarship. Price's investigation follows a traditional life-of-Jesus outline, starting with Jesus' birth--why is it celebrated on December 25? Was it really a virgin birth?

In chapter 4, Price analyzes Baptist and other Christian beliefs about Jesus and John the Baptist, proposing that the latter's role may not be historical. Price wrestles with the controversial question of miracles, setting the groundwork for judging the authenticity of these stories. Many miracle accounts, Price shows, have parallels in other Jewish and Hellenistic traditions, and each miracle story has a particular structure, which fits a general pattern. Does this mean that historians cannot judge any miracle stories as occurring historically?

After scrutinizing stories of Jesus as a man of the people, Price delves into the descriptions of the twelve disciples, analyzing each one, especially Simon Peter. In this thorough examination, Price draws parallels with other religious traditions. The next two chapters take this comparison a step further in a brief review of Buddhism. Finally, Price surveys the details of the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, concluding that similarities in Christian and other religious traditions must mean a common origin--one with no room for a historical Jesus.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING SON OF MAN belongs in the tradition of David Friedrich Strauss and Rudolf Bultmann, scrutinizing the Gospels concisely and in astonishing detail. Price takes a consistent, thorough-going critical look at the gospel tradition, discarding faith's mandates and delivering good reasons for every skeptical judgment of the Gospels' historical accuracy in depicting Jesus.

A prequel to Price's **DECONSTRUCTING JESUS**, **THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING SON OF MAN** explains advanced scholarship on the historical Jesus in terms--and with references to popular culture--that any reader can understand.

About the Author

Robert M. Price, Ph.D. (Selma, NC), professor of scriptural studies at the Johnnie Coleman Theological

Seminary, is the editor (with Jeffery Jay Lowder) of The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave and the Journal of Higher Criticism. He is also the author of Top Secret: The Truth Behind Today's Pop Mysticisms; The Paperback Apocalypse: How the Christian Church Was Left Behind; The Reason-Driven Life: What Am I Here on Earth For?; The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man; and Deconstructing Jesus; among other works.

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