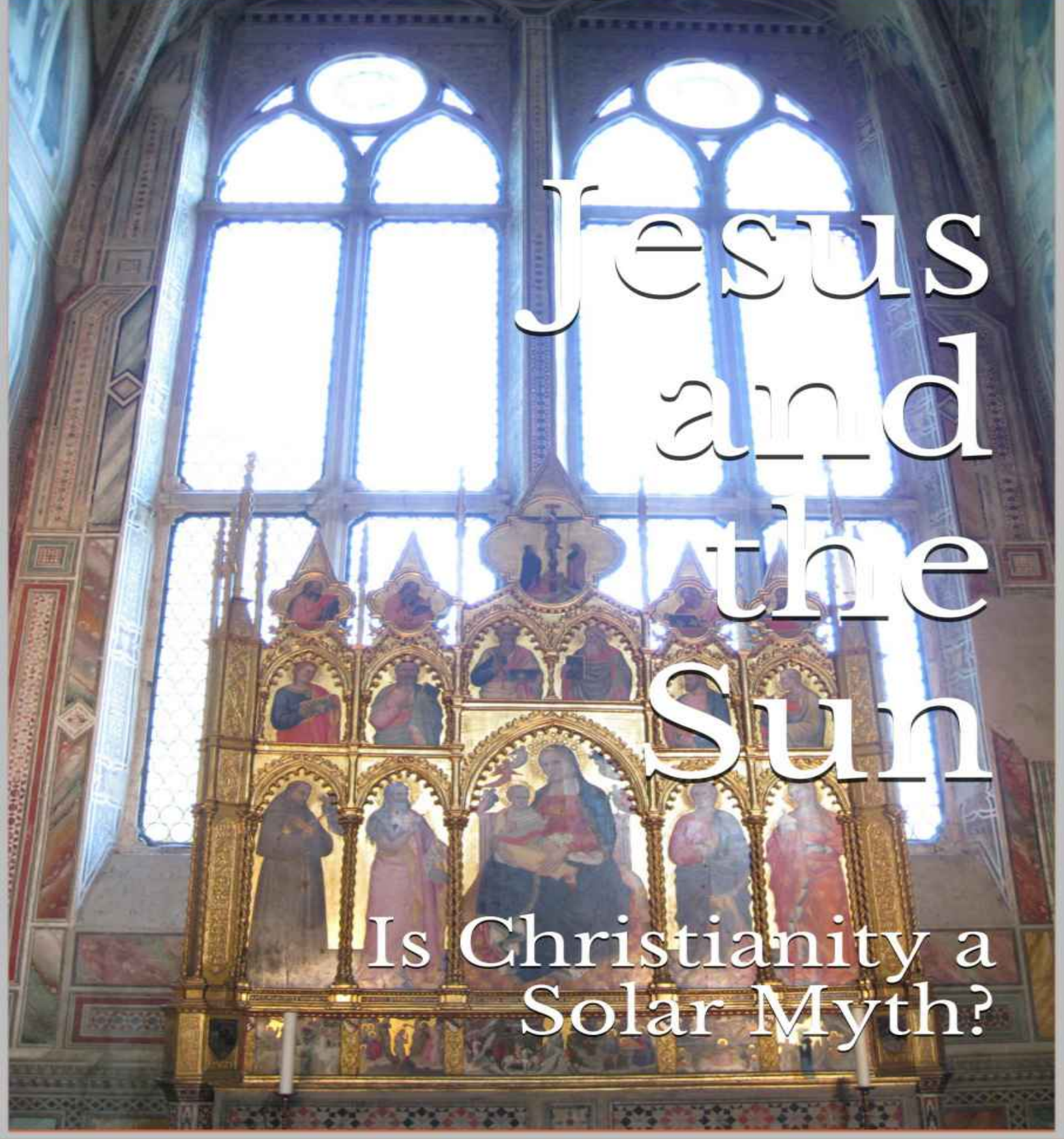


Albert
McIlhenny



Jesus
and
the
Sun

Is Christianity a
Solar Myth?

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**Book 6 in the Series: *A Christian
Response to Jesus Mythicism***

Albert McIlhenny

Jesus and the Sun: Is Christianity a Solar Myth?

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Series Introduction

This e-book is one in a series titled *A Christian Response to Jesus Mythicism* written to answer the claims that Jesus was not a historical person who lived in first century Galilee and Judea. Such a belief, called Jesus mythicism (often shortened to just “mythicisim”), takes various forms that range from the superficially plausible to the completely insane. This e-book series tackles the mythicist position in all its flavors and exposes the bogus nature of its presuppositions, evidence, theories, and presentations.

Jesus mythicism is not a viewpoint with any substantial support within the scholarly community.^[1] In fact, scholarly support is almost nonexistent. However, mythicism has a growing presence in anti-Christian books and websites and is rapidly becoming the default position on the historical Jesus in the “New Atheist” movement. It may be difficult to imagine why such a fringe position could gain a significant foothold with self-proclaimed “skeptics,” these are often anti-Christian polemicists whose skepticism applies only to Christian claims. Anti-Christian claims are taken at face value. Such a methodology is seriously flawed but the internet has become a boon for many bad ideas and conspiracy theories and mythicism fits perfectly the profile of an internet driven phenomenon.

However, Christians who use the internet as a tool for evangelism are now routinely faced claims most scholars do not consider worthy of serious consideration. Even Christian apologists paid little attention to the growing popularity of Jesus mythicism. Thus, with few exceptions, Christian scholars and apologists interacted little with Jesus mythicists.

The net result was that scholarly discussions of Jesus mythicism rarely exceeded a few dismissive sentences. This was no less the case among Christians scholars who often thought that engaging mythicists, as N. T. Wright once quipped, would be like asking “a professional astronomer to

debate with the authors of a book claiming the moon was made of green cheese.” [2]

With scholars both Christian and secular ignoring Jesus mythicism, the task of answering them fell to Christian apologists. Yet even here there was little in the way of a concerted effort to address such claims. [3] This is understandable as there were more serious challenges in need of answers (e.g., Jesus Seminar, Bart Ehrman). Even among the less than scholarly anti-Christian claims, the furor over the Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* garnered most of the attention from apologists.

The last time Jesus mythicism had any degree of support was in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Thus, most of the books addressing mythicism were written a century or more ago. However, since the arguments presented then differ in some details from those circulating on the internet today, many of the points they make, while effective for their time, do not address current concerns. As mythicism is currently a moving target, even the more recent responses may need to be updated. More recently, the scholarly responses to Jesus mythicism have not come from Christians but rather skeptics whose versions of Jesus may have existed but served no purpose. [4]

The desire to ignore nonsensical claims is understandable but, when left unanswered, crank accusations can gain traction in today's popular culture. A polished presentation can gain even the most ridiculous ideas about Jesus support in Main Street, America. This accumulated clutter adds obstacles to overcome for those fulfilling the Biblical mandate to be prepared to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you. [5]

My experience with Jesus mythicism began in the mid-1990s when an acquaintance challenged me to examine the evidence that Jesus never existed. He was a fan of the conspiracy theorist Jordan Maxwell and he supplied me with books and media presentations Maxwell and other Jesus mythicists had released on the topic. I reluctantly agreed, began investigating the topic, and soon discovered it was based upon nineteenth century pseudoscholars whose ideas were rooted in earlier esoteric

mysticism. In other words, it was all occult nonsense from a bygone era. With these claims effectively refuted, I returned the material and soon lost contact with the budding conspiracy theorist.

Over the next decade, I occasionally heard of authors supporting Jesus mythicism such as George A. Wells, Tom Harpur, and the duo of Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, but paid little attention to them. Flash forward a few more years and I began hearing of a film titled *Zeitgeist* some were claiming “proved” Jesus was a pagan solar metaphor. I was asked on multiple occasions if I knew anything about it, replied I did not, but added that it might be related to some bogus claims I had encountered earlier. As I continued to hear more about the film, my curiosity was piqued and I began searching for some information online. I discovered an online transcript, took a quick look at the references, and confirmed they were largely the same pseudoscholars from the nineteenth century that served as Maxwell's inspiration along with some newer sources dependent upon them. Assured it was all too silly to be taken seriously, I predicted it would have a short shelf life and then be forgotten except perhaps for a small cult following.

I could not have been more wrong. Former Christians were showing up on Christian internet forums repeating the same claims and citing *Zeitgeist* as a major factor in their apostasy. Making matters worse, the film was just the tip of the iceberg as a torrent of other mythicist theories began circulating. Some repeated outdated scholarship while others were created within the fertile imaginations of deluded conspiracy theorists. All of them have, to varying degrees, gained a measure of popular support.

Before responding, however, I first needed to *see* the film that had brought Jesus mythicism to millions. I set time aside to view what was being hailed supporters as the ultimate exposé of Christian origins and viewed a mess that not only repeated the same flavor of nonsense I had earlier dismissed, but raised the level absurdity to a new height. Yet, through it all, I became convinced of one thing very quickly: Peter Joseph, the film's creator, had encountered much of the same material I had examined years earlier ... only he believed it! Although then unaware of the details, my conclusion was later confirmed when I heard a 2007 interview of Peter Joseph on a conspiracy theorist radio program hosted by Jeff Rense. In that interview, recorded shortly after *Zeitgeist* had gone viral,

Joseph confirmed that he had studied Maxwell's work for years, credited him as the main source for much of the film (particularly Parts 1 and 3), and called Maxwell its “lifeblood.” Although Jesus mythicism had been supported in various books and videos prior to *Zeitgeist*, it was Joseph’s film that gave it a mass audience.

The challenge of the film (and Jesus mythicism in general) is that the church has done a terrible job of grounding its members in Scripture and church history. Christians who are informed about their faith would see through the silliness of the film immediately. Especially vulnerable are many young Christians who have been raised on a spiritual diet of what has been described as “moralistic therapeutic deism.”^[6] Thus, many Christians are easy pickings for even the most absurd brand of nonsense peddled by mythicists. Even if they would be open to reconsider their position, it is far easier to educate Christians in the faith when the church has their attention than after they leave. In fact, it is something we should have been doing all along.

To make the point clearer, place yourself in the position of a faithful believer who had never been exposed to mythicist ideas or any major criticism of Christianity in general. One day, you are challenged with claims that Jesus never existed and Christianity is a fraud. You are told all you believe about Jesus is wrong: virgin birth, magi, baptism in the Jordan, twelve disciples, crucifixion, death, bodily resurrection, and ascension – all lies! There wasn't even a Jesus! Jesus was nothing but an astrological metaphor for the sun, his disciples were the twelve signs of the zodiac, and events recorded in the Gospels corresponded to the solar cycle. Nefarious characters – potentates and priests of every kind – invented Jesus to control the masses. They used Jesus as a means of keeping power just as the pagan priests and rulers they replaced had used Horus and Mithras. In reality, Jesus was nothing more than a new and updated version of Egypt’s Horus – right down to the nativity story written on the walls of Luxor Temple!

Perhaps you heard this from a coworker over the water cooler, or maybe your child had their faith shaken by hearing it from a friend at school. The film *Zeitgeist* was mentioned and you decided to see it for yourself. By the time the film's exposition on Christianity is finished, your entire world has been turned upside down. You want to dismiss the whole thing but you

can't give a good reason – you never heard anything like this before! What if there is something to it? Why didn't someone tell you? Your doubts linger and you wonder ... what if it all really is a lie? At this point, you probably have not realized that all you viewed was a slick presentation that made many sensationalistic claims. No evidence was ever provided for any of it.

And *Zeitgeist* is only the beginning. Other mythicist theories are also on the internet vying for the attention of the gullible. Is Jesus the sun? Or is he the god of a Roman mystery cult? Perhaps he is a mushroom? What if he is a space alien? What if he is a sublunar ethereal deity? What if he is really Julius Caesar or perhaps some other Caesar? What if he is really a Jewish revolutionary? How about a black African revolutionary? Maybe he is a Jewish mythical fulfillment of Messianic hopes? How about if Jesus is really Pharaoh Tutankhamun? Better yet, maybe he is all of the above! Anything is possible in the brave new world of the internet! Claims are made without evidence and evidence is routinely fabricated or misrepresented.

Putting aside the crudest forms of Jesus mythicism, there are some mythicists who present their work in a scholarly fashion and can be convincing to those unfamiliar with the evidence. Even some of the less reasonable proponents can adopt a scholarly veneer with voluminous footnotes that seem imposing but are ultimately worthless. The net result is that uninformed Christians increasingly face a cottage industry dedicated to spreading the Jesus mythicist thesis. Since you rarely find mythicism getting much play from scholars, the debate is usually between apologists for Christianity and atheism. ^[7]

The series as currently planned will consist of over 100 e-books (some extensive, others more like tracts or pamphlets) divided into six categories: Foundational Books, Critiques of Jesus Mythicist Evidence, Critiques of Jesus Mythicist Theories, Critiques of Jesus Mythicist Presentations, Miscellaneous Topic, and Historic Responses to Jesus Mythicist Ideas. The Foundational Books will include books that will give any background information necessary for those Christians unfamiliar with the topic. The Critiques of Jesus Mythicist Evidence will include books that explain how Jesus mythicists misrepresent the available evidence. The Critiques of Jesus Mythicist Theories will analyze and refute specific themes used to

support mythicist claims. The Critiques of Jesus Mythicist Presentations will include books that debunk various books and videos produced by mythicists or present their ideas in a sympathetic light. The Miscellaneous Topics will deal in concerns tangential to Jesus mythicist ideas. Finally, the Historic Responses to Jesus Mythicist Ideas will reissue out of copyright books and articles from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries that counter mythicist arguments within their pages – although not all deal with mythicism alone. With the exception of this last category, all the books in the series are original. I have included the historic books under the idea that we should be able to learn something from those who dealt with similar issues in the past. In particular, such books should counter claims that mythicist ideas have never been properly addressed. While the historic books are available elsewhere, I will edit them to conform with the setting used throughout the series, included comments to explain some background information that the author may have assumed for his day, and update some archaic spelling, print style, and other issues that the reader may find a hindrance.

While each of the books may be read independently, those who have little exposure to the topic may benefit by reading the foundational books (particularly *A Quick Survey of Jesus Mythicism* and *Meet the Mythicists* in order to become familiar with the names and ideas of mythicist proponents. In order to allow independent reading of each book in the series, some material will appear in more than one book. However, I believe this is necessary so that readers at different levels or with specific interests may concentrate where their concerns are best addressed.

While I certainly welcome any Jesus mythicists reconsidering their position after reading one or more of these books, they are not my target audience. Rather, I hope to equip Christians, particularly pastors and apologists, who need to address these claims but have not studied the issues in any detail. In particular, I hope this may aid youth pastors as young Christians are the most likely to face such claims. Finally, I pray this series may both reassure Christians and remove obstacles for those drawn to the Gospel message. But in all things, may the glory be to God alone.

Introduction

The release of the 2007 conspiracy theorist documentary *Zeitgeist* brought the claim that Jesus was a pagan sun god, long the sole province of various breeds of cranks and crackpots, back into the popular culture. Its slick presentation and matter-of-fact reciting of ridiculous claims grabbed the imagination of a new generation of anti-Christian polemicists. Soon, its pronouncements on Christianity's history were repeated on thousands of websites.

There was no evidence for any of it but that mattered little to the film's supporters as their anti-Christian ideology rendered them uninterested in verifying their claims. After all, if it made Christianity look bad, then it *must* be true. They simply recited their mantras over and over as though the sheer repetition of the claims would add to their veracity.

While contemporary scholars consider such “Jesus is a pagan sun god” claims to be absurd, this was not always the case. Esoteric ideas popular during the Renaissance influenced later religious scholarship^[8] and the initial forms of the solar myth hypothesis coalesced in France during the period leading up to the French Revolution. Charles Francois Dupuis constructed the theory called “astrotheology” by its current supporters, but it was Count Volney who popularized it in his anti-religious propaganda work *The Ruins* and made it a subject of conversation among the elite on two continents.

While the ideas gained favor with at least one U.S. founding father^[9] and was a topic of discussion for two others^[10], it also naturally found its critics. Although some critiques were apologetically motivated, perhaps the most damaging came from a satirical essay by Jean-Baptiste Peres. Using lines of argumentation similar to that employed by Dupuis, he managed to “prove” Napoleon Bonaparte was a pagan solar deity who never existed. Soon afterward, Dupuis' theories were relegated to the dustbin of failed historical ideas.

When support for Dupuis' ideas faded among scholars, a new and far more sophisticated version of the solar myth was devised by philologist Max Müller who developed the idea that mythology was a “disease of language” caused when more sophisticated forms of linguistic expression developed in Indo-European languages. In the meantime, Dupuis' thesis, while rejected by scholars, was picked up by less than scholarly authors whose crank ideas won a popular audience. ^[11] This two tiered status for different forms of the solar myth continued through the early twentieth century with some popular authors blending elements of both Dupuis' and Müller's contradictory theses as though they were interchangeable. There were even variants on these themes offered in the form of a Jungian version of the solar myth and a briefly considered idea of a solar Joshua cult serving as the basis for Christianity.

By a few decades into the twentieth century, the whole idea of a solar myth as the origin of religion was rejected by scholars and ignored by the public save for occultists, some Afrocentrists, the crankiest corners of atheism, and the strange world of conspiracy theorists. It was through the last group that the solar myth theory would find a new audience.

As conspiracy theorist ideas began seeping into the popular culture as part of a general “counterculture” movement, the topic of religion became part of the growing conspiracy theorist subculture. The internet served to fan the flames and, by the end of the twentieth century, a new group of authors supported the solar myth ideas. This group, led by such Jesus mythicists as Jordan Maxwell, D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”), and Tom Harpur, were primarily influenced by the crank authors from over a century ago.

This new generation of Jesus mythicists soon built a wider audience and anti-Christian websites began circulating their material (often lifted verbatim from their books without giving them credit). Others entered the fray and a whole cottage industry developed around proving something every scholar believed was crackpot nonsense.

The silliness reached critical mass with the release of *Zeitgeist* and now thousands of websites promote various forms of Jesus mythicism with the solar myth version among the most popular. Scholars still do not take any of it seriously – for good reason – but the nonsense poses a challenge to

Christians in the pews seeking to defend their faith. Most Christians have not researched the issue beyond the content on apologetics websites. These, unfortunately, can vary greatly in quality and some are every bit as misguided in their view of history as those by mythicists.

This book will break down in detail why the solar myth idea is simply untenable. Some of this material was briefly discussed in the first book in the series, but now I will cover it in far more detail. My main focus will be the astrotheological version of Jesus mythicism initially formulated by Dupuis and recently promoted in *Zeitgeist* and other recent books and films. However, the other versions of the solar myth will be discussed in the final chapter as they sometimes arise in such discussions. By the end of the book, the reader will have a good idea exactly why scholars give no credence to the solar myth as a theory of Christian origins.

Chapter 1 – Sun of God?

It all comes down to the sun. This is the message of some prominent Jesus mythicists when discussing the deities of ancient religions and, they claim, Christianity. It is certainly the message given in the first part of *Zeitgeist*. Every story of every major deity is merely a metaphorical representation of the sun and that goes for Jesus too. But how convincing is this claim of the cultural pervasiveness of solar mythology?

1.1 – The Sun in Ancient Cultures

While the sun was deified in many cultures, this did not mean, as the film *Zeitgeist* suggests, that solar deities were uniformly considered “creator gods.” In some cultures the sun god was not even the most important god: Zeus ruled over either god the Greeks associated with the sun (e.g., Helios, Apollo). In Egypt, different gods were linked to various aspects of the sun's power and were not equivalent to sun gods in the same sense as, for example, Helios.

Confusion on this point reflects the West's reliance upon Hellenistic authors as the lens through which to view the entire ancient world. From the Renaissance onward, scholars had uncritically accepted the opinions of authors from Greece and Rome who did not always accurately depict the foreign cultures they described in their works. Even after the Egyptian hieroglyphs and Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets were deciphered, it took decades to break free of prior prejudices and allow ancient cultures outside Greece and Rome to speak for themselves. This was accomplished in recent decades but earlier views continue to be defended by contemporary pseudoscholars.

Certainly one sees this arise in how Jesus mythicists – particularly those who support astrotheology – approach the idea of “solar religion”. Philosophical movements that used the sun as a symbol of the divine were an extremely powerful influence during the Hellenistic period and this led educated pagans to see the gods as manifestations of the sun's divine force. The stories of these gods were then often reconfigured or reinterpreted as solar mythologies but these later constructions were certainly not the original form or intent of the cult. Rather, it was a later adaptation of existing beliefs to match the developing cultural consensus of a philosophical monotheism.

Antiquity was not monolithic and religions often reflected cultural differences. In the case of Egypt, whose time as a power was millennia rather than centuries, it might be better to speak of a series of related but not identical cultures as they absorbed influences both from external contact and internal developments. In particular, the emergence of Hellenism as a homogenizing influence in late antiquity must not cloud our views of what

preceded it. Late antiquity saw a coalescing of diverse cultures around a Greco-Roman base. The uniformity of beliefs in the Hellenistic period cannot be assumed in earlier eras where that base was not present. Thus any attempt at a “one size fits all” diffusionist theory of religion has the burden of proof upon itself.

1.2 – 10,000 BC

One example of how seemingly innocuous assumptions can legitimize inaccuracies occurs at the beginning of the film *Zeitgeist* when it claims that as far back as 10,000 BC, history was abundant with carvings and writings showing admiration and respect for the sun. It should be noted that in some presentations of astrotheology, the period from 15,000-10,000 BC takes on a special significance. While not discussed in most current elaborations of the theory, it does play a role in some and so is worth exploring further.

While ancient man certainly looked with wonder upon that giant ball of fire in the sky, claims of writings from 10,000 BC concerning the sun (or writings from 10,000 BC concerning anything at all) would come as a surprise to archaeologists. The earliest deciphered writings come from about six millennia later. Some symbols have been found from an earlier period but these have not been deciphered and scholars are divided on their exact significance. Opinions vary from a form of “protowriting” to pictographs but the exact meaning has been lost to the sands of time. If Peter Joseph, the creator of *Zeitgeist*, is aware of any such writings from 10,000 BC, perhaps he could inform us where these ancient scripts are to be found so we too may share the experience.

The significance of the 10,000 BC date lies in its importance for many pseudoscholars who believe an ancient global civilization collapsed in the millennia before this period and is remembered in legends such as that of Atlantis. Corrupted versions of the beliefs of this global civilization, it is argued, led to the development of later religious systems. This idea was popularized by some occultists and, in particular, by the readings of occult prophet Edgar Cayce. Cayce, who died in 1945 but still has a following in occult circles to this day, claimed the structures at Giza in Egypt were built by survivors of Atlantis in 10,500 BC.

This link between such wild speculations on lost civilizations and the current crop of Jesus mythicists is further illustrated by D. M. Murdock's arguments for an ancient advanced global civilization without racism, sexism, and other social ills that followed a religion based upon nature. ^[12] According to Murdock, corrupted remnants of this civilization's nature religion carried on with the forces of nature personified as gods in order to

enslave the masses. She then rushed headlong into the vast landscape of pseudoscholarship by drawing upon the confused musings of authors claiming evidence of “lost continents” and “ancient astronauts.” [\[13\]](#) She then suggested the Great Pyramid and Sphinx were not actually built by ancient Egyptians at all but by the survivors of this lost culture. Adding further to the spectacle, she also claimed the Great Pyramid was not really a tomb but rather a celestial computer! Needless to say, her views are far closer to those of Edgar Cayce than those of contemporary Egyptologists.

1.3 – Sun as Creator

A claim made in the film *Zeitgeist* and commonly repeated is that early civilizations personified the sun as the unseen creator or God and called it “God's Sun.” Here there are three dubious assertions at work: The first states the sun represented an unseen creator from the earliest days of antiquity; the second states the sun was referred to by ancient civilizations as “God's Sun.” The third infers a connection between the expressions “God's Sun” and “God's Son” (used for Jesus) as though the two words “sun” and “son” in modern English had some significance in the ancient world.

On the first assertion, there were some cultures, such as Egypt, that had creator gods represented by the sun but this was not a universal condition across all ancient cultures. In fact, Egyptian religion had its own unique cultural outlook and mixing and matching its mythology with pantheons in other nations is futile until the Hellenization of the ancient world led to a homogenization of its cultures.

Moreover, the Egyptians were among the most advanced of ancient cultures and their example cannot be easily projected onto others. One cannot jump from the example of Egypt or the philosophical systems of late antiquity and expect their theological expressions to be representative of earlier, more primitive societies.

The idea that ancient cultures referred to the sun as “God's Sun” lacks any supporting evidence. Like much of *Zeitgeist*, it was based upon the unsupported assertions of conspiracy theorist Jordan Maxwell. There is simply no evidence of any such formulation in ancient cultures.

As for the implied connection of “God's Sun” and “God's Son,” the existence of the homophones “sun” and “son” is an idiosyncrasy of modern English that is not present in any relevant ancient language. Thus the inference is not only false, but laughably so. In fact, the guffaws were so loud and embarrassing that Peter Joseph and D. M. Murdock, in the *Zeitgeist* source guide that replaced an earlier transcript on the film's website, claimed the whole thing was just a “play on words” that was not intended to be taken seriously. However, the evidence of their earlier output

says otherwise [\[14\]](#) and this appears to be yet another attempt to whitewash earlier blunders.

1.4 – Sun as Savior

A further connection made in *Zeitgeist* between the sun and Christianity is the claim that the ancients saw the sun as “savior.” This likely originated with Jordan Maxwell who forced the connection to Jesus as the “risen savior.”^[15] While the less said about Maxwell's strained attempts the better, the recent source guide cited second century author Pausanius referring to the "Savior Sun."

The Pausanius reference was to a form of the god Helios known as "Helios Soter." It was common for different versions of gods to be given titles, including "soter" (savior), in reference to events or attributes. Without knowing exactly who Helios had saved and from what, any connection to Christian usage is mere presumption. Such titles often conveyed a connection to military or natural events where a god was believed to have treated a city or people with favor. Thus the form of Helios mentioned by Pausanius might have been in reference to a role as protector of a city or some other "saving" attribute. There is no indication that it has anything to do with salvation in the Christian sense. In any case, this example of a form of Helios from late antiquity certainly had nothing to do with the sun saving anyone from their sins in 10,000 BC.

1.5 – Other Solar Silliness

In the film *Zeitgeist*, some rather strained connections between Jesus and the sun are made such as the following outburst:

... for Jesus is the Sun, the Sun of God, the Light of the World, the Risen Savior, who will "come again," as it does every morning, the Glory of God who defends against the works of darkness, as he is "born again" every morning, and can be seen "coming in the clouds," "up in Heaven," with his "Crown of Thorns," or, sun rays ...

as various passages of the New Testament are alluded to onscreen. Again the likely origin is Jordan Maxwell.^[16]

One merely has to read the passages to see through the nonsense. Even though the film earlier mentioned that "light" and "dark" were ubiquitous as representatives of good and evil, Joseph chose to forget the ubiquity of that concept and insist on a literal connection to day and night. Joseph also followed Maxwell in failing to notice that it is not Jesus but his followers who are "born again" in its New Testament usage.^[17] Similarly, the references to his "coming again" are employed in the context of a singular event within Jewish messianic beliefs and not cyclical daily events of the solar cycle.

Finally, one barely knows where to begin with the "crown of thorns" claim. The text^[18] actually has Jesus not coming in the clouds but being scourged by Roman soldiers. The source guide appeals to halos in iconography^[19] but this anachronism connects a first century textual description to images from the fourth century and later that have no connection to the passage.

1.6 – Conclusion

Many of the supposed parallels to sun worship were drawn from the very questionable work of Jordan Maxwell. Peter Joseph merely repeated the lessons of his master but later revised the story when it was clear much of it had little basis in reality.

The sun, however, was not the only player in Zeitgeist's celestial drama. While assigned the central role, there were also twelve supporting cast members in the signs of the zodiac – our next topic.

Chapter 2 – Dating the Zodiac

While the sun is at the center of the story in astrotheology, it is not the whole story. The central focus of the system is the sun's travel through the zodiac with different “ages” associated with the sun's location in the zodiac at the spring equinox as determined by the phenomenon known as the precession of the equinoxes. It is claimed that religions going back millennia were based upon this system. So how do these claims stack up against actual history? The answer is resoundingly negative.

2.1 – The Elephant in Astrotheology's Room

Until the last century, many scholars believed the zodiac had been in use for many millennia and stretched back far into prehistory. As with much dealing with esoteric subjects, this belief solidified during the Renaissance and was based upon the opinions of authors from the Hellenistic period. While no solid evidence existed for such an early date, this belief had been entrenched for many centuries and it would take archaeological evidence and the pioneering work of scholars who were willing to allow the evidence to speak for itself to reverse the consensus. Once this occurred, the belief in a prehistoric zodiac fell by the wayside.

The results of scholarship in the last century into the origins of the zodiac is very important to our study and must be made quite clear:

- There is no evidence the system of zodiacal astrology was in use prior to the first millennium BC when it developed in Babylon over a period of centuries. [\[20\]](#)
- There is no evidence there existed a knowledge of precession prior to the last few centuries BC when it was likely discovered by Hipparchus. [\[21\]](#)
- Thus, any claims that the sun's movements through the zodiac were the basis of ancient religion is completely anachronistic. For example, the cults of some pagan deities mentioned in *Zeitgeist* preceded the development of the zodiac by centuries if not millennia.

The results of this research presents the elephant in the room for any backers of astrotheology. Unless they can counter the current state of research on this topic, their belief system is completely anachronistic and cannot possibly provide a basis for ancient religion.

Moreover, the small amount of time between the development of the zodiac, the discovery of precession, and the first appearance of Christianity means there was no time to develop the elaborate ideas present in the astrotheological system. Thus, since that system was irrelevant to earlier pagan religions, there was no prior precedent using that system for

Christianity to mimic. This system, from start to finish, is completely demolished by the results of historical research.

2.2 – Dating the Zodiac

The current scholarly consensus on the history of the zodiac is one that was reached only since the early twentieth century. In the wake of Renaissance Hermetism and other esoteric movements it inspired, it was common to claim that the zodiac dated back far into prehistory – perhaps tens of thousands of years – with Egypt as its place of origin and Hermes Trismegistus as the one frequently credited with its development.

By the nineteenth century, much of this veneer of Renaissance mythology was wearing thin and the timetable began moving up with the point of origin now more accurately placed in Mesopotamia. It was then common for those in the Panbabylonian school to date a mature zodiacal system with twelve equal divisions to Babylon circa 6000 BC. ^[22] While this was still wildly inaccurate, it was a decided improvement over the earlier speculations both in its dating and its point of origin.

However, the less than scholarly voices from the nineteenth century still continued on the earlier path of Renaissance esoteric thought with such ill informed cranks as Gerald Massey and Albert Churchward regurgitating the esoteric speculations of a bygone age. This nonsense was, at least initially, uncritically accepted by the current crop of astrotheology supporters and presented in their own work as though it were a current scholarly consensus. ^[23] It was such unvarnished twaddle that inspired the rather naive young filmmaker Peter Joseph to create *Zeitgeist*.

The turning point came in the early decades of the twentieth century when Franz Xaver Kugler began his monumental study of cuneiform tablets and finally allowed the true history of the development of the zodiac (and Mesopotamian astronomy/astrology in general) to speak for itself. Kugler spent decades of painstaking research on his project and, while some resisted his findings, it soon became obvious the data supported his conclusions. Subsequent work by Otto Neugebauer and others firmly established that the zodiac was developed over centuries in the first millennium BC.

Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence that points to a relatively late date to the origins of the zodiac, the supporters of astrotheology routinely assert the nonsense of their nineteenth century sources and many are oblivious to the fact that their views are absurdly outdated. Even the few who have attempted to answer the challenge presented by the current scholarly consensus do so by *avoiding the evidence for that consensus* and attempting to focus on less than convincing sources elsewhere.

Thus, as we shall see later, those backing astrotheology cannot give a cogent defense for the core of their system. The cuneiform tablets are never addressed, the fact that there is absolutely no evidence the Egyptians used the zodiac until the Ptolemaic era is ignored, and yet they claim expertise even though their ignorance on the topic is almost total. One may assume that most, were they even to attempt reading the findings of scholars on the topic since the early twentieth century, would be incapable of understanding the highly technical details of the relevant research. [\[24\]](#)

2.3 – Development of the Zodiac

Turning to the details, the timetable for the gradual development of the zodiac in the first millennium BC is well established. Its roots are with Mesopotamian scribes who kept watch over the heavens. Initially, the Sumerians assigned names to the planets and some constellations, but their interest was primarily calendrical (e.g., related to yearly activities such as agriculture) rather than astrological (related to matters of divination).^[25] While some later astrological texts appear both in the Sumerian and Akkadian languages, these are late translations and expose the supposed ancient past of astrology as merely a pretense.^[26]

Astrology as we know it begins to develop in Babylon within a system based upon omens (e.g., comets, conjunctions, and other unusual occurrences) rather than a relational grid system such as the zodiac or the Egyptian use of decans.^[27] The important Babylonian compilation from this period is the collection of seventy cuneiform tablets known as *Enuma Anu Enlil*. These texts were inscribed around 700 BC but reference earlier omen literature that may trace back to the beginning of the second millennia BC.^[28] While some constellations of what later became the zodiac were named in this early period, there is no interest in the zodiac as an identifiable group.

The early foundations of the zodiacal system were set down in the *Mul Apin*, again inscribed in 700 BC, but which likely reached its final form around 1000 BC. It lists the constellations along three broad bands in the sky roughly parallel to the equator and described as three paths of the gods.

^[29] In one of the tablets it outlined seventeen (rather than twelve) constellations across the ecliptic but among these were some equivalent to constellations we would recognize as part of the commonly defined zodiac.

It is in the *Mul Apin* that we see the first interest in the ecliptic (and the constellations in it as an identifiable group), but the groupings are not the same. Significantly, the work also described a year of twelve months of thirty days each. Thus, the future move from seventeen to twelve

constellations along the ecliptic may have been motivated by a desire to use the constellations as markers for their calendar.

From this point the evidence shows a gradual development of the zodiacal system. A zodiac of twelve still unequal divisions appears around 700 BC and the seventh century BC sees a further impetus with the keeping of diaries of the night sky.^[30] Most scholars agree that by 500 BC, the equally divided twelve sign zodiac is in place. This is affirmed by noting that the first reference in a diary occurs in 464 BC and the casting of horoscopes follows this development.^[31]

Hence, with this outline, we can see that the idea of the zodiac's use tracing back tens of thousands of years is pure fantasy. Even at this late date, there is no hint that anyone knew of precession. Hence the claim, made in *Zeitgeist* and elsewhere, that ancient civilizations knew about precession and the "Great Year" is absolutely ludicrous.

The astrological system of the Babylonians was adopted and further developed by the Greeks and the conquests of Alexander the Great accelerated its spread to other cultures. The system was transformed by Greek cosmological ideas^[32] and later Seleucid rule in the Hellenistic period saw Babylonian astronomy and astrology enter its most creative period.^[33]

As for Egypt, it was once believed to be the birthplace of the zodiac and astrology (via Hermes Trismegistus^[34]), but historical research has rendered this view untenable. The Egyptians, while very interested in events in the night sky, did not possess as sophisticated a system of mathematics as the Babylonians and thus could not match the latter's theoretical tools for predicting stellar events.^[35] They did, however, devise their own system based upon the heliacal rising of stars every ten days (decans) during the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom.^[36] Egyptian use of the zodiac occurred during the Ptolemaic dynasty with the merger of decans and the Egyptian calendar into the system of Greco-Babylonian astrology.^[37]

This discussion provides a clear explanation as to why the practice of Jesus mythicists citing nineteenth century sources – even scholarly ones – cannot represent anything more than outdated opinions on this issue. The key research on the subject occurred in the early to mid twentieth century by Kugler, Neugebauer, et al, that established the current paradigm for understanding the development of astrology. Sources appearing prior to that work could not possibly have been aware of this research, could not address these later findings, and hence are irrelevant by contemporary standards.

2.4 – Precession

Another key factor involving the zodiac is the assertion of supposed “astrological ages.” Due to a wobble in the earth's axis, the tropical year (based upon the sun's perceived travel from equinox to equinox) is about twenty minutes shorter than the sidereal year (based upon the sun's perceived travel through the ecliptic). This causes the sun over time to rise in different constellations along the ecliptic at the same point in the solar year.

The overall effect is the sun's rising position on equinoxes and solstices will, over the centuries, move backwards through the zodiac. With the emphasis placed upon the spring equinox, the phenomenon is known as the “precession of the equinoxes” and astrotheology assigns “ages” for when the sun rises in each constellation upon the spring equinox. While there are some variations in the range of these ages, the most popular version assigns the period from 4300-2150 BC to the “Age of Taurus,” the period from 2150 BC-1 AD to the “Age of Aries,” the current period from 1 AD that will end in 2150 AD to the “Age of Pisces,” and with 2150 AD will begin the “Age of Aquarius.” The whole cycle through the twelve signs was allegedly known by ancient civilizations as the “Great Year.”

Different deities were, under this system, linked to the ages when the cult developed. For example, the Persian god Mithra was allegedly linked to the bull and hence the Age of Taurus. Jesus was supposedly linked to fish and hence the Age of Pisces.

So how does one respond to such claims? First of all, although precession itself is a fact, any supposed knowledge of precession many millennia ago has no historical basis. The precession of the equinoxes was discovered in the last few centuries BC – with most historians in agreement that it was first noted by Hipparchus. ^[38] In fact, the whole idea of precession through houses of the zodiac is nonsensical much before this period since the zodiac only came into use sometime around 500 BC.

While it is certainly possible to understand precession without the use of the zodiac (using decans or some other relational grid system), there is no firm evidence this ever occurred. Moreover, the theory presented in

astrotheology specifically uses ages linked to zodiacal signs. Hence, such a theory is inconsistent with the historical record.

Even the division of the sky used in such a theory is anachronistic. The “ages” in the film are based upon a division of the sky which is a modern convention. [\[39\]](#) For example, the second century AD astronomer and astrologer Ptolemy claims that Aries should be considered the first sign in the zodiacal year because the sun rises in it on the spring equinox. Of course, by the current reckoning, the sun would have already risen in Pisces during that period. The net result of this eight degree difference thus supplies further refutation of the astrotheology thesis.

Even the links of deities to various ages falls apart under scrutiny. The supposed link between the Persian Mithra and the bull falls apart as it was the Roman Mithras – not the Persian Mithra – who was linked to the bull and the latter first appeared around the same time as Christianity. This, of course, was far too late for any alleged Age of Taurus. In the same vein, the eight degree difference between modern and ancient understandings of the division of the sky meant Jesus would have arrived half a millennium too early for any “Age of Pisces”!

2.5 – The Zodiac and Mythological Twelves

A common attempt to read the zodiac back into mythology is to note occurrences of twelve in ancient mythology and interpret this in terms of the zodiac. While often inventive, such attempts fail at many levels.

First of all, even if we accept interpretations using constellations in the night sky, this does not imply any use of the zodiac. For many of these interpretations involve constellations that are not part of the zodiac. This is a common mistake by astrotheology supporters: they interpret the use of constellations from the zodiac as a use of the zodiac. In reality, some constellations of the zodiac were recognized long before the zodiac was defined as a distinct group. The ancient peoples could certainly have developed mythologies concerning these groupings as they appeared at particular times of the year without ever taking the twelve constellations along the ecliptic as a special case.

Some will then argue: What about the occurrences of twelve in such stories? While some may represent an unfolding year of twelve stages, it is one that uses the twelve months of the year rather than the twelve signs of the zodiac. The lunar cycle of phases was likely the first natural calendar to be noted by the ancients (it is much simpler than the solar cycle) and months were assigned for each lunar phase of which twelve occurred each solar year. They certainly noticed the different groups of constellations visible with each passing month and associated them with the passing of time. In fact, it is likely that the use of a twelve month calendar inspired the reconfiguration of the earliest grouping of constellations along the ecliptic into the twelve sign zodiac.

The twelve months of the year may have also inspired the division of day and night into twelve hours. Since the use of a twelve month calendar, unlike the zodiac itself, was universally recognized, such carryovers could occur independently in many places.

Thus, when one looks at the lists of twelves in mythology ^[40] often presented as evidence of a widespread zodiac, there is actually little reason to make such an association. Some may represent the twelve months of the year, others the twelve hours of the day or night, and still others just happen

to use the number twelve for unrelated reasons and are no more connected to some metaphorical purpose than a box of donuts or a carton of eggs.

For example, when one closely examines the list of mythological twelves given in the source guide for the film *Zeitgeist*, there are no clear indications that any of these are linked to the zodiac. A few examples should serve to illustrate the point. While the Epic of Gilgamesh is often claimed to represent the zodiac, this explanation fails since it antedates the Mesopotamian use of the zodiac and the astronomical metaphors describe constellations not part of the zodiac. While an astronomical explanation is likely, it is one related to the entire night sky over the year and not to the zodiac as a group.

It is absurd to claim the twelve moons of China represent the zodiac since the Chinese did not use the Greco-Babylonian system. The idea of the twelve moons comes from the story of Hsi-Ho which covers the birth of the ten suns and the twelve moons. The ten suns represent the ten days of the Chinese week in antiquity while the twelve moons do the same for the twelve months. In a similar fashion, the zodiac bears no relation to the twelve sectors of Tuat (or Duat), the Egyptian abode of the dead, as the Egyptians never used the zodiac until the Ptolemaic era. Instead, this relates to the twelve hours of the night as each sector is illuminated by the sun in its journey through the underworld for one hour.

Others in the list are simply misrepresented. For example, the cited source for the twelve devas of India clearly states that, although the number of devas is occasionally given as eight or twelve, the actual number is thirty-three. In a similar manner, the terrifying aspects of Shiva is usually presented as eight with the list of twelve appearing only occasionally. This points to another issue: any number used frequently in life will similarly appear frequently in mythology. Thus, we could point to numerous occasions of ones, twos, threes, fours, etc. with twelve being on the upper end of such numbers. When a number corresponds to a natural cycle (such as the twelve months), this will increase the likelihood of its appearance. Thus the frequent use of twelve is nothing remarkable and there is no reason to suspect it indicates a widespread use of the zodiac thousands of years ago.

2.6 – Dissenting Voices

The above discussion is sufficient evidence to conclude that the central core of the astrotheology hypothesis is complete hogwash. The recent glut of books (and videos) supporting a revival of this long discarded idea were rushed to release by authors who lacked any real knowledge of the subject and merely repeated the wild claims of pseudoscholars from over a century earlier. As one views more recent releases, it is clear that many are still oblivious to the fact that their prized theory was demolished long ago.

Those who have attempted to answer the obvious anachronisms in the astrotheological thesis have often seized upon a handful of sources whom they claim offer dissenting opinions. These generally fall into the following six categories:

- Woefully outdated and pseudoscholarly sources from over a century ago whose views were based upon earlier esoteric speculation and whose opinions are thus of no value. [\[41\]](#)
- Scholars whose views were published over a century ago, were unaware of the evidence that has since placed the development of zodiacal astrology at a much later date, and hence whose work is outdated and irrelevant.
- Scholars who lack expertise in the history of ancient science, have not studied the evidence used by experts to reach their conclusions, are primarily guided by their own idiosyncratic biases, and hence their opinions are poorly informed and of no real value.
- Scholars who have been mistakenly identified as supporting an earlier date for the zodiac or precession when their views are in line with the current scholarly consensus.
- Scholars who may have offered speculations on the topic without necessarily endorsing these as their conclusions.
- Artifacts that have been misinterpreted as pointing to an earlier use of the zodiac and knowledge of precession due to a lack of expertise on the nature of the specific object.

None of the sources falling into these categories present a serious challenge to the current consensus view.

In the first category we may place the usual nineteenth century sources commonly used among supporters of astrotheology. Charles Francois Dupuis, Count Volney, Gerald Massey, Albert Churchward, and others placed the origins of the zodiac many millennia into the past. There is no evidence for their assertions other than their need to have such an early date support their wild speculations.

In the second category, we may place Edward Walter Maunder. An astronomer at the turn of the twentieth century who often used his skill in the service of his Christian faith, Maunder was neither a historian nor an Assyriologist, made assumptions common at the time but are now obsolete, and rendered his opinion just as Franz Xaver Kugler began his monumental studies of cuneiform tablets that superseded all earlier work on the topic. Thus, Maunder's opinion on the dating of the zodiac is thoroughly outdated and irrelevant to contemporary discussions.

In the third category, we can place Joseph Campbell^[42], and the duo of Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend.^[43] All have voiced opinions that placed the knowledge of precession far into the past. All were based upon either erroneous judgments, dated scholarship, or the strange idiosyncrasies of the author(s) in question.

In the fourth category we have scholars such as David Ulansey^[44] who have been identified by some mythicists as supporting earlier dates for precession than the consensus. In reality, they do not but such information can give the opinion that there is a debate among key figures when none actually exists.

In the fifth category we have scholars such as Edwin C. Krupp^[45] who speculated upon the history of the zodiac and offered some arguments that had in the past been commonly cited as evidence for an early date for the knowledge of precession. However, he never firmly endorsed such a conclusion and, presumably after noting the evidence in the other direction, concluded such speculations were erroneous.

In the sixth category are references to artifacts such as the so-called “Karanovo Zodiac”^[46] that are actually not what they are purported to be

in the sources referenced. This is an example of an amateur reading into an artifact what he wished to find without considering far more reasonable explanations.

2.7 – Bulls and Rams and Fish! Oh My!

An offshoot of the astrotheological theory provided one of the silliest moments in *Zeitgeist*. As an argument for references to astrological ages in the Bible, strained links were made for each age to various Biblical passages. All this amounted to was cherry picking references to bulls, rams, fish, and water when convenient and ignoring them otherwise. It apparently never occurred to mythicists who support the film that stories from an agricultural society near the Mediterranean might have reason to mention such items.

Of course, Peter Joseph did not invent such silliness on his own. Similar arguments had earlier appeared in the videos and writings of his hero Jordan Maxwell and these were every bit as unreliable as anything else Maxwell has said. Rather than allowing the Biblical texts to speak for themselves in their proper context, isolated items were selected to fit predetermined outcomes. The results were often unintentionally hilarious as the “astrotheological interpretation” only proved that the mythicists knowledge of the texts ranged from the superficial to the nonexistent.

This certainly was the case when *Zeitgeist* argued occurrences of the term “age” in the Bible referred to astrological ages. However, the texts cited in the film were either pointing to historical periods of the past (“bygone ages”) or to future Jewish Messianic hopes. There was nothing within the contexts of these cited passages that hinted at any reference to astrological ages. Moreover, the references given in the film were often incomplete or meaningless. For example, references to I Corinthians 3:18 and 10:11 were given as “Corinthians 3” and “Corinthians 10,” Ephesians 1:21 and 2:7 as “Ephesians 1” and “Ephesians 21,” Hebrews 6:5 and 9:9 as “Hebrews 6” and “Hebrews 9,” and Revelation 15:3 as “Revelations 15.” Any single error of this sort might be a minor slip, but the cumulative effect of so many was a sure sign of ignorance in the subject.

When passages were cited that supposedly referred to particular astrological ages, the spectacle only got worse. In the story of Moses, *Zeitgeist* claimed Biblical scholars are wrong when they teach Moses broke the tablets containing the Ten Commandments in anger over the Israelites' idolatry. Instead, it was asserted that Moses, representing the “Age of

Aries” while the golden calf represented the outgoing “Age of Taurus,” was angry the Israelites were worshiping God under the wrong astrological age. In addition, the shofar (ram's horn) supposedly signified the Age of Aries.

Jesus was associated with the “Age of Pisces” and the discussion focused upon fish. Jesus' initial choice of two fishermen in the Gospel of Mark as disciples supposedly alluded to Pisces as did the fish symbol commonly used by Christians. In the original version of the film, there were also references to Jesus as “the great fisherman” and the pope's mitre as symbolic of a fish head and hence Pisces.

Even the coming “Age of Aquarius” was said to be foreshadowed in Luke 22:10. Joseph stated the Apostles asked Jesus where the last Passover would be and he instructed them to meet a man bearing a pitcher of water and follow him into the house he entered. Here the “Passover” was interpreted as passing over to the next astrological age, the man bearing the pitcher of water as the water bearer Aquarius and the house as the corresponding astrological house where the spring equinox next occurs in the precessional cycle.

All of this was straight from Jordan Maxwell's material and easily fooled those chasing sensationalistic claims concerning Biblical texts without ever bothering to read them. Given the demonstrated inability to give even the chapter and verse citations correctly, any confusion over the context of the passages was not surprising.

It was especially galling to endure having genuine Old Testament scholars lectured on the meaning of Moses breaking the tablets in the midst of this crackpot exegesis. Mythicists supporting such idiocy apparently are unaware that the reason scholars believe the Israelites' sin was idolatry is because this is exactly what the texts claim. [\[47\]](#)

Nor did other arguments concerning Moses warrant any serious reinterpretation. The discovery of precession came long after this period as did the development of the zodiac itself. As for the shofar, the reason ram's horns were used by the Israelites is the same reason many cultures used them: they make great horns.

Moreover, *Zeitgeist* used certain mentions of rams, fish, etc. when it suited them but ignored others where the symbolism contradicted their

views. For example, why did God choose to provide Abraham a ram to sacrifice when this pre-Mosaic period called for a bull? And what of the instructions for Aaron to sacrifice bulls and goats: Was God being nostalgic for prior ages of Taurus and Capricorn? Would not the crossing of the waters of the Red Sea indicate Aquarius? The entire construct focused upon what matched a preconceived pattern and ignored everything else. Bulls, rams, fish, and water are mentioned throughout the Bible because of the culture. No secret astrological meaning is needed as these items would arise in any description of the ancient world.

Some have even pointed to sculptures depicting Moses with horns as evidence of the “Age of Aries.” They seem unaware of art history on this point as it has long been known that this was derived from the mistaken translation by Jerome in the Vulgate as Moses' face being horned rather than shining.

Jesus' supposed association with Pisces was similarly forced into the New Testament documents. First of all, Jesus did not choose two fisherman at the onset of his ministry in Mark but four: the two pairs of brothers Simon and Andrew, sons of Jonah, and James and John, sons of Zebedee. ^[48] Nor was the association of Christ with fish the most obvious one. For example, he is called both the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God so would that not point to Aries? He is baptized with water so would that not signify Aquarius? He is referred to as the Lion of Judah so would that not point to Leo? Nowhere was Jesus ever called a fish nor was he, as the original version of the film claimed, called the “great fisherman.” As for the pope's mitre, the design evolved over centuries and signifies the flames of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and not a fish's head.

However, the greatest failure of all was the ridiculous attempt to link the “water bearer” of Luke 22:10 to the “Age of Aquarius.” Read in its proper context, it was not a reference to a coming astrological age but to the preparation for the Passover meal to be celebrated that evening – an event commonly referred to as the Last Supper. ^[49]

Such complete ineptness when handling the text of the Bible is not surprising as it mirrors the poor handling of evidence in general that is indicative of Jesus mythicists as a group. Unable to support their viewpoint

with actual evidence, they must resort to distortions to give the illusion of evidence when none actually exists.

2.8 – Cross of the Zodiac

At multiple places in the film, *Zeitgeist* puts forward a symbol it calls the cross of the Zodiac as “one of the oldest conceptual symbols in history.” It is a representation of the circular form of the zodiac with perpendicular lines connecting the solstices and equinoxes that meet in the center to form a cross. There is at least an implicit connection to the cross of Christ inferred and the overall form is asserted to be the basis of the Celtic Cross.

There is, in fact, an ancient symbol having a cross embedded within a circle that may have represented the sun. However, this symbol is not associated with the zodiac and precedes it by many centuries if not millennia. This is not particularly shocking: the division of a circle into quadrants by two perpendicular lines is a fairly basic symbol and we might expect it to arise in various cultures for their own purposes. This does not infer, however, that they had crucifixion – a much later development – in mind.

The Celtic Cross was likely an intentional blending of this earlier symbol with the Latin Cross of Western Christianity by extending the lines of the cross outside the circle. This symbol is a hybrid invented to serve the Church as a Christian symbol by aligning the new religion with older symbolism. Such hybrid symbolism was common in medieval iconography as Christianity spread through the formerly pagan world and indicated a carrying over of familiar motifs in the Church's expansion.

As for the “cross of the zodiac,” the symbol shown is common in contemporary astrological literature but it is a later construction. While there were circular zodiacs in the ancient world, these did not include the perpendicular lines to form the cross. Such artifacts are not referred to as a “cross of the zodiac” but as a “zodiac wheel.” These crossless examples are best known through artifacts from the Hellenistic period such as that found at Denderah in Egypt.

The sheer absurdity of this supposed cross of the zodiac being “one of the oldest conceptual symbols in history” is illustrated by noting that the example presented in the film is not from antiquity but has its entries written in modern English. It is moments like these that makes debunking *Zeitgeist* seem like shooting fish in a barrel.

2.9 – The Zodiac and Biblical Twelves

Another supposed connection to the zodiac is the use of the number twelve in the Bible. In *Zeitgeist*, the supposed connections are made through the following list of such occurrences:

- 12 Tribes of Israel
- 12 Sons of Jacob
- 12 Great Patriarchs
- 12 Old Testament Prophets
- 12 Kings of Israel
- 12 Princes of Israel

Surely, it is argued, the existence of so many uses of the number twelve *must* be significant.

Actually, it is only significant once you realize there were twelve tribes of Israel. Almost every use of the number twelve relates to the twelve tribes. Thus, what appears to be many uses of twelve reduces almost entirely to a single use of twelve. [\[50\]](#) Thus it becomes no more significantly related to the zodiac than a dozen eggs or donuts.

2.10 – The Bible and the Stars

Biblical references to the heavens are sometimes used as an argument for a connection to astrology. Thus, it is argued, the Jews of the Old Testament period watched the heavens and were astrologers in the same vein as the Babylonians. Hence, they assert, the Biblical stories should be read as astrological metaphors. This is evidence, they claim, that astrology was used by Israel and the likely basis of the story of Jesus.

This line of reasoning is severely flawed as it makes no distinction between observations of the heavens and astrology. The Babylonians and other ancient societies had four functions for their observations: practical uses for the agricultural year, religious rites where heavenly bodies were representative of gods or other spirits, practical use of the heavens to determine the most fortuitous times for certain events, and the divination of future events.

For the Israelites and later the Christians, the first application was perfectly legitimate. There is absolutely no reason why Jews and Christians would not use the appearance of constellations as markers for events of their year once they were seen to correspond to the agricultural cycle. Certainly there is no threat in marking the passage of time with the calendrical use of the stars.

The second and fourth applications were strictly forbidden for God's people. The worship of heavenly bodies is idolatry and the use of the stars for divination presumes a fatal determinism that is in direct opposition to the sovereignty of God. It is the third application where astrology was often brought into practice by Christians as there was a belief that natural rhythms were in sync with the heavens and hence could be used in the practice of medicine. [\[51\]](#)

In any case, there is nothing in the Biblical texts to indicate little but passing references to concerns that would overlap with those of the astrologers. This is yet another case where things have been read into the text that cannot withstand even a casual amount of scrutiny.

2.11 – Conclusion

Astrotheology is rotten at its foundations. The zodiac could not have been the basis of early religions since it was not yet in use. Precession was discovered centuries after that and the “astrological ages” presume a modern division of the sky. As for the “Cross of the Zodiac,” it is a complete fabrication. The entire core of the system is now in tatters. Yet it is interesting to see in detail how those supporting it defend its wobbly foundations and this will be the next topic of discussion.

Chapter 3 – Gospels of the Zodiac

In attempting to identify Jesus as the sun, some Jesus mythicists have centered both the beginning and end of his life as told in the Nativity and Paschal narratives from the Gospels upon the date of the winter solstice. In this chapter, we shall examine the most common of these claims.

3.1 – Bookends

One of the more problematic aspects present in the astrotheological interpretation of Jesus is having the winter solstice serve as bookends for the narrative of his life as both his nativity and resurrection are fixed to the date of December 25. However, the New Testament texts do not explicitly identify any date with the birth of Jesus and the December 25 date seems an unlikely choice. As for the passion of Jesus, the New Testament does give a time period and it is definitely not the winter solstice. All four Gospels place the passion of Jesus around Passover which occurs in the early Spring.

Even worse for these eager mythicists, there is no indication that December 25 had any significance for Christians until centuries after the New Testament was written. If this were really the foundation of Christianity as they claim, its importance would be indicated among the earliest Christians. However, such an association simply does not exist.

It is not until the third century that the date has significance in some locations, the fourth century that the Church officially accepts it as the date to celebrate Jesus' birth, and even then it was not fully embraced for more than a century. Thus anyone claiming this relative latecomer to the Christian faith formed the basis of the New Testament accounts has ahead of them an enormous burden of proof.

3.2 – Virgins and Bread

Some Jesus mythicists identify both Mary and Bethlehem with the constellation Virgo. This is certainly the case in the film *Zeitgeist* when it makes the following claim:

The Virgin Mary is the constellation Virgo, also known as Virgo the Virgin. Virgo is also referred to as the “House of Bread,” and the representation of Virgo is a virgin holding a sheaf of wheat. This House of Bread and its symbol of wheat represent August and September, the time of harvest. In turn, Bethlehem, in fact, literally translates to “house of bread.” Bethlehem is thus a reference to the constellation Virgo, a place in the sky, not on Earth. [\[52\]](#)

The sequence of connections is thus from Mary to virgin to Virgo to harvest to wheat to bread to Bethlehem and then it is tied together in a neat package. It seems a bit implausible on face value but it gets even worse the closer you look.

The usual link between Mary and the constellation is to claim that Mary, like pagan goddesses associated with the constellation, was a virgin. However, many of the goddesses who have been associated with the constellation were not considered virginal. Moreover, while the English word “virgin” derives from the Latin “virgo,” the primary meaning of the Latin word is maiden.

Pagan goddesses aside, another frequently cited “evidence” of the Mary-Virgo connection is the constellation appearing on the horizon around the time of December 25. However, this again assumes that the December 25 date was connected to Christianity and this did not occur until centuries after the New Testament was written. Thus the entire argument is anachronistic.

The connection between Bethlehem and Virgo is, if possible, even more tenuous. The claim is that Virgo is linked to the harvesting of wheat in the fall and wheat is used to make bread. Thus this house of the zodiac becomes the “house of bread.” However, this theory fails to recognize that different parts of the world have different climates. The fall might be the harvest

season in Europe, but this was not the case in the ancient Near East. In that region of the world, the harvesting of grain occurred in the spring – not the fall – as can be seen merely by reading the Old Testament. The grain harvest began after the ripening of barley at Passover and ended with the harvesting of wheat around the time of Shavuot (Pentecost). Thus the connection is an amateurish attempt at “connect-the-dots” with little understanding of the region's history, culture, and climate.

3.3 – The Sun's Descent

One of the key points of the astrotheological system is its explanation of the December 25 celebration of Christmas. The theory assumes the birthday of Jesus on December 25 demonstrates he is a solar deity and his death, three days in the grave, and resurrection are metaphors for the sun reaching a minimum in the sky on December 22, remaining there until three days later when December 25 occurs, and beginning its ascent.

While not all of its supporters will agree on the details, we find a fairly representative example in *Zeitgeist* where the sequence is described as follows:

The shortening of the days and the expiration of the crops when approaching the winter solstice symbolized the process of death to the ancients. It was the death of the sun. And by December 22nd, the sun's demise was fully realized, for the sun, having moved south continually for six months, makes it to its lowest point in the sky. Here a curious thing occurs: the sun stops moving south, at least perceivably, for three days. And during this three-day pause, the sun resides in the vicinity of the Southern Cross, or Crux, constellation. And after this time on December 25th, the sun moves one degree, this time north, foreshadowing longer days, warmth, and Spring. And thus it was said: the sun died on the cross, was dead for three days, only to be resurrected or born again. This is why Jesus and numerous other sun gods share the crucifixion, three-day death, and resurrection concept. [\[53\]](#)

The above scenario, while inventive, is ridiculous once you begin applying any reasonable level of scrutiny.

First of all, winter heralding the expiration of crops is once more an event that would occur in Europe. In the Near East, it was the heat of the summer months that would more likely have been associated with death. Thus, once more, the supporters of astrotheology display their ignorance of the region under discussion.

Moreover, the sequence of events supposedly used as astronomical metaphors do not correlate at all to what Christians actually celebrate on December 25. The crucifixion, death, three days in the grave, and resurrection occur in the Paschal narratives of Easter celebrated in the Spring and not the Nativity narratives celebrated at Christmas. Thus, their astrological interpretation has described *the wrong holiday*. If their knowledge of Christianity fails to distinguish between Christmas and Easter, there is little hope for its accuracy elsewhere.

Next, while the birth of Jesus is celebrated on December 25, the New Testament gives no clear indication of Jesus' birthday and the December 25 date was not associated with him until long after the New Testament was written. Hence, any attempt to link astronomical events occurring on that day to the Nativity narratives is, once more, hopelessly anachronistic.

Yet, even putting such matters to the side, there are still more major problems with the astrotheological thesis. The basis of their proposed link – the sun reaching a low point on December 22 and remaining there until December 25 – was not fixed to those dates until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. Prior to that time, the dates would have changed every century under the Julian calendar and there could not have been any fixed tradition from pagan cults on those dates for the Christians to emulate.

This last point is important because the entire system was based upon the supposed connection of the December 25 date being exactly three days after the winter solstice. However, as mentioned earlier, while this may be true today under the Gregorian calendar, it certainly was not the case in antiquity. Moreover, there is no record of such a practice for fixing the birth of solar deities to three days after the winter solstice existing among the pagan religions of Rome.

Turning next to the association of the crucifixion with the Southern Cross constellation, this is quite laughable as the constellation was not recognized as a unique unit in antiquity and was actually given the name by Christian explorers in early modernity who used it as a guide when they traveled too far south to see Polaris. The name was derived from its resemblance to the Latin cross and hence was a product of Christianity and not a basis for it.

Others have attempted to link the crucifixion to the autumnal equinox when the equator and eclipse intersect. However, this too fails as it obviously occurs three months – not three days – prior to the December 25 date. Thus any link to the three day period following the solstice would immediately be lost in such an explanation. Of course, the whole thing is ridiculous anyway since, as already pointed out, the death and resurrection of Christ occurred in the spring (at the time of the Passover) and not in either the fall or winter months.

Finally, the term “born again” was never applied to Jesus after his resurrection. This attempt to link the phrase to a rebirth of the sun on December 25 overlooks that the term is never used that way in the New Testament. Worse yet, the term is applied not to Jesus but to his followers who place their faith in him as can be seen in the two places in the New Testament where “born again” occurs (John 3:1-21, I Peter 1:1-25). This supposed connection displays an astounding ignorance of the New Testament whose contents they are attempting to explain and exposes them as amateur cranks.

Hence, at every level, the use of December 25 as a fundamental basis for Christianity is wrongheaded. There is no historical evidence for claiming the origins of Christianity was rooted in that date or the winter solstice period in general and those constructing elaborate interpretive scenarios have built their edifice upon sand.

3.4 – The Three Kings

Another popular interpretation among astrotheology supporters is to link the “star in the east” and the magi to, respectively, Sirius and the three stars of Orion's belt. The interpretation is given as follows in the film *Zeitgeist*:

The star in the east is Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, which, on December 24th, aligns with the three brightest stars in Orion's Belt. These three bright stars in Orion's belt are called today what they were called in ancient times: The Three Kings. The Three Kings and the brightest star, Sirius, all point to the place of the sunrise on December 25th. This is why the Three Kings “follow” the star in the east, in order to locate the sunrise—the birth of the sun. [\[54\]](#)

As with the other claims, this one also quickly falls apart once any level of scrutiny is applied.

The Gospel of Matthew, where the narrative occurs, gives little or no indication of what the star might be and considerable disagreement exists on the topic by both secular and Christian commentators. There are interpretations ranging from the astronomical to the spiritual, but there is no evidence that Sirius, a well known object in the sky, would be a likely candidate. It is something simply assumed by supporters of the astrotheological hypothesis because their theory requires it. There actually is no real evidence of such a connection.

The foolhardiness of the connection is demonstrated by once again relying upon the December 25 date that would not be associated with Jesus until centuries after the Gospel of Matthew was written. Once more it must be pointed out that one cannot argue the foundations of Christianity included astronomical events on December 25 when that date does not appear as part of Christian celebrations until much later.

Although the December 25 connection renders all that follows in the quoted statement irrelevant, it is not the end of the non sequiturs. The remainder of the quoted excerpt is a string of statements based upon misconceptions and poor reasoning.

For example, it is claimed that Sirius aligns with the three stars of Orion's belt on the night of December 24. This gives the impression that something unique is happening on that date. However, Sirius is always in the same position relative to the stars in Orion's belt. If all these stars can be seen, they will always appear in an almost straight line relative to one another. Nothing magical happens on that night.

Furthermore, their supposed pointing to the place of the sunrise that night ignores the fact that these stars are on an angle relative to the horizon and so cut a swath across it as they move through the night sky. Hence, while at some point in the night they point to the sunrise, they point to many other points on the horizon as well. It should also be noted that they also point to the sunrise on many other nights. Thus once more, mythicists are making an event seem unique to that night when it actually is not that uncommon.

A graphic presented in *Zeitgeist* makes it appear as though the four stars were in a straight vertical line pointing to the sun as it rises on December 25, but this is a complete fiction. Not only, as mentioned, are the four stars on an angle, but they have already set in the western sky prior to the sunrise.

Turning next to the identification of the stars of Orion's belt as the “Three Kings,” there are a number of problems with this connection. The most obvious of these is that the Gospel of Matthew does not ever refer to the visitors as kings. The visitors are magi – often translated as “wise men” and, while these sages are obviously wealthy (given the nature of the gifts), they are not depicted as royal.

Nor is there any mention of their number. The idea of them as a trio comes from the three types of gifts listed (gold, frankincense, myrrh) but again the Gospel of Matthew never mentions any number. In fact, their description of the discovery of the star points to them being part of a group of magi and the gifts originating from the group as a whole and not any individual in particular. Thus the number of the magi is more a part of popular tradition than the Biblical text.

Furthermore, not only does their alleged connection fail textually, it even fails as a proper allegory. All five objects to be allegorized in the story (the sun, Sirius, and the three stars of Orion's belt) should have been “translated” in a relatively similar fashion. In other words, all five would be characters

in the story and the character representing Sirius would lead the others to Jesus who represents the sun. But in this supposed allegory, there is a mismatch with the sun and the stars of Orion's belt becoming characters and Sirius left as a star.

However, the largest failure in this interpretation is in the claim that the three stars of Orion's belt were called the Three Kings in antiquity. Much of their claim of Christian copying of pagan beliefs relies upon this point and its failure undermines the whole Orion's belt idea. Yet it is a fact that there is no record of anyone ever referring to those stars as the Three Kings in the ancient world. That description first appears in the star charts of Dutch explorers in the modern era and so it did not originate in antiquity. Thus, this point, along with the December 25 date, exposes the "Three Kings" connection as a complete fraud.

3.5 – Easter

Having failed to make a case for their theory on Christmas, mythicists often miss the obvious contradiction in their attempts to explain Easter. This, of course, does not keep them from trying but, given what has already been discussed, they are reduced to special pleading.

The contradiction alluded to above, and one they never address, is that their theory conflates Christmas and Easter. Their theory sets December 25 as the central date of the Christian faith but the narrative more closely resembles the Paschal narratives celebrated in spring than the Nativity narratives of Christmas. This leaves them flatfooted when trying to explain the celebration of Easter and has them relegate it to an afterthought. This leaves them with a completely anachronistic view of the relative importance of days in the Christian year. While Christmas is indeed the central celebration for Christians today, this is a relatively recent phenomenon that does not extend back prior to the modern era. It certainly was not the case in antiquity when the Paschal celebration in spring was the central focus of the Christian year.

The early Christians routinely celebrated the death and resurrection of Jesus in the spring centuries prior to anyone celebrating his birth on December 25. Thus the death and resurrection was never associated with the Winter solstice, and the whole basis of the astrotheological theory is proven to be utterly bankrupt. Moreover, this leaves them at a loss to even explain the Spring celebration as the events should have been part of the December 25 festivities.

The confusion can be seen in the film *Zeitgeist*, where something akin to a sleight-of-hand trick is used in the hope that the viewer will not recognize that they have thrown Easter into Christmas and are left with no explanation for what was the original Christian celebration:

However, they did not celebrate the resurrection of the sun until the spring equinox, or Easter. This is because at the spring equinox, the Sun officially overpowers the evil darkness, as daytime thereafter becomes longer in duration than the night, and the revitalizing conditions of spring emerge. [\[55\]](#)

Keep in mind this was shortly after they had spent considerable time explaining how ancient religions, including the early Christians, *did* celebrate the resurrection of the sun on December 25 and this was the reason for the festal date.

There are also those who link the celebration to paganism through the name “Easter” and claim it took over earlier celebrations to various such pagan goddesses as Ishtar and Eostre from which “Easter” was derived. However, left out of any such discussion is the fact that the name “Easter” is a latecomer to the feast that is used primarily in English speaking lands. The early Christians called it “Pascha” which derives from the Hebrew “Pesach” (Passover) and this is the name that was used in the Latin and Greek churches. Indeed, the name for the holiday in French, Italian, and Spanish all derived from Pascha and not some pagan goddess.

In England, it is likely that the name of an earlier pagan feast was transferred to the Christian holiday when the Anglo-Saxons adopted the Christian faith, but this applied to the vernacular usage and not the celebration (in Latin) by the Church. It certainly had no connection to the beliefs of the early Christians centuries earlier.

Jesus mythicists cannot explain how Jesus' death and resurrection were linked to the spring long before anyone had ever associated Jesus to the date of December 25. All they can do is skirt around the errors at their system's foundations and hope they are not noticed.

3.6 – Filling in the Blanks

Some Jesus mythicists have attempted to cloud the issue by claiming that the New Testament gives clues that the Gospel story is a walk through the zodiac with the story ending in the twelfth month and different parts of the narratives acting as markers to indicate the shift from one zodiacal sign to another. Thus the story must be understood as implicit within the context of the narratives and used to provide the proper timeframe.

This entire approach is highly problematic from the start. First of all, it has as a premise the use of “clues” to determine the actual time of year indicated, such as Jesus' death in December, even when the text explicitly states something else entirely. The clues are often deduced in a completely ad hoc fashion without any set pattern of discovery. The attitude is more of checking the next sign needed and then doing whatever it takes to produce the necessary marker.

The process usually begins with the winter solstice as the assumed starting point and the search commences for something to link with the sign of Capricorn, then Aquarius, then Pisces, and so forth. Since the signs of the zodiac are often associated with common elements of life in an agrarian society, some signs can find easy possible matches, but these turn out to be cherry picked items. For example, fish, lambs, water, etc. may arise in various places in the story of Jesus but they focus on the one that fits into the needed place and ignore all the others.

When the object associated with the sign is not available, they suddenly switch interpretive techniques and claim Jesus' behavior or the content of his teachings illustrate something associated with the sign or even the planet said to rule the sign. Not only are these traits often taken from modern astrology (which is quite different from its ancient counterpart), but the interpretation is often forced to reach a conclusion and ignores places where Jesus displays the opposite trait from the desired conclusion.

In the end, it becomes painfully obvious that the entire project is a vast display of circular reasoning where the conclusion is assumed and then attempts are made to conjure up some evidence to support it – no matter how dubious the reasoning or tenuous the connection. It still remains a fact that Christianity only became associated with the winter solstice centuries

after its founding, and their bizarre attempts to create such a connection in the Gospels is hopelessly anachronistic.

3.7 – Conclusion

The attempts to link the life of Jesus to astronomical events during the year and particularly at the winter solstice is not a position taken seriously by scholars. In this chapter, we have seen why this is so by examining the most commonly cited of these claims. While some related topics will be explored, it should be clear already that this theory has no factual basis upon which to stand.

Chapter 4 – Choosing December 25

We have already seen the major issues facing those who support the astrotheological interpretation of the Jesus story. In this chapter, we shall examine the likely reasons December 25 was chosen. As shall be seen, the truth is much different from the nonsense paraded in films like *Zeitgeist* and books by prominent Jesus mythicists supporting the astrotheological claims.

4.1 – Christ, Sol Invictus, and December 25

Although previous discussions have settled the matter on December 25, it is still interesting to note that the use of the winter solstice as the birthday of the sun was not nearly as widespread as astrotheology supporters claim and many others assume. Nor is the matter of how the Church came to use it as the birth of the sun altogether clear.

From the late nineteenth century until a few decades ago, it was commonly believed by scholars that the December 25 date to celebrate Jesus' birth originated to supplant the Roman celebration of the birth of Sol Invictus instituted by Aurelian in 274 AD.^[56] However, this position is no longer tenable in view of recent research into the origins of the Christian use of the date.

Before proceeding any further, it must be made very clear that none of the scholars mentioned in the discussion that follows believed that Christianity was rooted in pagan sun worship. The dispute is whether December 25 was chosen centuries after Christianity's founding in order to supplant celebrations of the birth of Sol Invictus. All sides agree the date was chosen long after the New Testament was written and has absolutely no bearing on the origins of Christianity. All that is at stake is whether the selection of December 25 was a case of later syncretism or had some other motivation.

The earlier consensus view was largely the result of the influential work of Hermann Usener. Although similar ideas had been published in earlier work, notably by Paul Ernst Jablonski, Usener's presentation convinced most of the scholarly community that the December 25 date had been selected to replace an already popular pagan festival of Sol Invictus. However, such an assumption needs to be demonstrated and not assumed merely because it seems plausible.

For his part, Usener offered two pieces of evidence that he believed indicated the Christians had deliberately and openly selected that date: a gloss to a manuscript of the Syrian Christian Jacob Bar Salibi and a fourth

century homily.^[57] As we shall see, neither presents the “smoking gun” of Christian usurpation that Usener believed he had found.

The first of these, the gloss to the text by Bar Salibi, claims the date of Jesus' birth was changed from the earlier celebration of January 6 and reads as follows:

The reason why the fathers transferred the celebration of the sixth of January to the twenty-fifth of December was this. It was a custom of the heathen to celebrate on the same twenty-fifth of December the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and festivals the Christians also took part. Accordingly when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnized on that day and the festival of the Epiphany on the sixth of January. Accordingly, along with this custom, the practice has prevailed of kindling fires until the sixth.

Thus the gloss indicates the birth of Jesus was shifted to December 25 to replace a pagan festival with a Christian one. The fourth century homily also speaks of the coinciding of the two birthdays (Sol Invictus and Jesus) on that date:

They also call this day the birthday of the unconquered Sun. Yet who is as unconquered as our Lord, who threw death down, and conquered it? The pagans call this day the birthday of the Sun; but he alone is the Sun of Righteousness of whom the prophet Malachi says: "There shall arise to you who fear his name the Sun of Righteousness, and there shall be healing underneath his wings."

In both cases, there is a clear indication the date had been used for the birthday of Sol Invictus but, lest we rush to judgment, it needs to be pointed out that Usener's evaluation of the evidence is not without its problems.

On the matter of the Bar Salibi gloss, it should be noted that Jacob Bar Salibi was a twelfth century Christian and so the gloss was from the twelfth century or later. Thus its historical value for judging events in the first half

millennium of the Church is dubious. Moreover, as Steven Hijmans has pointed out, the full gloss of the text indicates it was written by an Eastern Christian who favored the January 6 date and his purpose was polemical rather than historical. Finally, since the gloss is the earliest extant mention of the “replacement” theory and it cites no earlier source, the entire idea is itself called into question.

Turning to the fourth century homily, all it actually asserts is that the births of Jesus and Sol Invictus were both celebrated on the same date in the fourth century. The tone of the text clearly indicates the anonymous author truly believed Jesus was born on December 25. There certainly is no hint that the date had been moved to coincide with the Sol Invictus celebration and it could be interpreted to indicate the later was the usurper. Such a stance would be unusual were there not something more than an arbitrary political calculation at work in the choice of December 25.

Thus the evidence for the selection of December 25 to replace the existing feast of Sol Invictus is actually quite thin. This theory is further damaged by a fact brought out by research in the last century: the first celebration of Jesus' birth on December 25 at a local level predated the institution of the Sol Invictus festival.

4.2 – Choosing December 25

The major problem with the theory that fourth century Christians chose the date of December 25 without any precedent to supplant the Sol Invictus feast actually is quite false. Earlier celebrations of Jesus' birth on that date occurred in the third century in various locations in the Western Roman Empire such as Rome and Northern Africa. At this point, the date was one of many that were suggested, each with its own justification, but the reasons given for the selection of December 25 had nothing to do with the winter solstice. It certainly had nothing to do with Sol Invictus as that festival was a half century away.

Prior to the third century, there was little interest in the birthdate of Jesus. For close to half a century or more, they enjoyed a period of relative tolerance and strong growth that allowed them to turn from apologetics against Roman paganism to exploring theological issues. Among these were an interest in chronologies of the world that would, of course, need to include the Annunciation and birth of Jesus. It is at that point that a large number of dates were proposed, depending upon the assumptions of the chronologist, and one date for Jesus' birth was December 25. Yet, even in the latter cases, these chronologists did not base their arguments on the solstice but upon other events.

Nor did they mention any birthdays of sun gods occurring on the same day. The reason is quite simple: contrary to popular belief, the Romans did not use the date to celebrate the birthdays of sun gods in the pre-Christian period. The scholarly consensus for the earliest use of December 25 to celebrate the birth of a sun god was the feast of Sol Invictus that was instituted by the Roman emperor Aurelian in 274. ^[58] However, even this relatively late date has been challenged with recent scholarship by Hijmans claiming there is no evidence of the use of December 25 as a birth of a Roman sun god until 354. ^[59]

This does, however, leave the possibility that, while the initial use of the selected date was independent of any concern for the Winter Solstice and the feast of Sol Invictus, this fortunate coincidence made it the favored choice. Not only was the emperor Constantine once a follower of Sol

Invictus but the cult carried the aura of loyalty to Rome. For Christians to replace the celebration of Sol Invictus with that of Jesus would complete the transformation from a persecuted minority to one equated with being a “good Roman.”

This modified version of the “replacement” thesis, one that does acknowledge some Christians were using December 25 earlier than rival pagan celebrations but also claiming the selection of that date from among rival choices may have been steered by political factors, seems a genuine possibility and one that I have favored. By the time of Constantine, the December 25 date had gained favor in many key areas of the church and many important Church fathers by that time had come to view it as the genuine date. Thus it does not seem out of the realm of possibility that the fortuitous converging of factors may have led the Church to favor this date over its rivals.

All of this is, of course, predicated on there actually having been a celebration of Sol Invictus on December 25 prior to the fourth century and it is this very point that Hijmans contests. He claims there is no clear evidence of such a celebration until after the Christian feast was already established. While his claims have begun a reevaluation of the evidence, it is not clear whether scholars will reach a new consensus based upon it.

Far less controversial is the view that some Christians began using the date in the third century prior to the earliest possible institution of the feast of Sol Invictus. On this point, the work of Thomas Talley has been the most influential although, as with Usener, parts of his thesis had been suggested by earlier authors. It is to Talley's research that we shall next turn to trace the origins of the December 25 date for the birth of Jesus.

4.3 – More on Choosing December 25

While the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus on December 25 was universally adopted by the Church in the fourth century, the local use of the date developed about a century earlier. The impetus was not the winter solstice at all but the calculation of Pascha.^[60] Early Christians were less concerned with the date of Jesus' birth than his death and resurrection. The New Testament placed the the events of Jesus' passion at the time of Passover which occurred around the date of 14 Nisan in the Hebrew calendar but converting this to a date in the Roman calendar was no simple matter. Depending on assumptions used for the specific year, one could end up with any number of dates in early spring with some choices using the spring equinox date of March 25 for the death of Christ.

Talley has outlined how early Christians drew upon existing Jewish traditions linking the patriarchs to important dates of the Hebrew calendar. Christians often assumed Jesus' conception coincided with his death or resurrection at Pascha. If Jesus was conceived on March 25, then by adding the common nine months gives December 25 as his birthday. In the subsequent decades, this date would become a very popular choice among Western Christians.

Of course, December 25 was also the commonly held date for the winter solstice under the Julian calendar.^[61] However, when one reads Christian sources from that period, this does not figure into their reasoning at all. Instead, it was derived from calculations that the Passover on the year Jesus was crucified would have been on March 25 and hence they assumed he must have been conceived on that date. Adding nine months for the pregnancy, this would yield a birthdate of December 25. While the assumptions made for figuring the date are absurd by modern reasoning, this line of thinking was common at the time. Nor would the intersection with the winter solstice and some pagan festivities (whether these included the feast of Sol Invictus or not) have been a major concern. Given the Greco-Roman mindset, a coincidence of the solstice bringing new light to symbolize the birth of the Light of the World would likely have been considered as a divinely ordained cosmic symbolism. Certainly, there is no

indication among those supporting the date that it had been chosen to replace the date of Sol Invictus.

Whatever the motivation, however, two statements about the origins of the date in Christianity are quite clear:

1. Christians had used (at least locally) the date of December 25 prior to any use for Sol Invictus.
2. The use of the December 25 date first appeared long after Christianity began and the New Testament was written and so had no bearing on its origins.

Thus, the view that Christianity had first adopted the date from earlier pagan examples either in its founding or by later syncretism is not supported by the evidence. It may be, however, that the importance of the date from the vantage point of Hellenistic cosmology may have led Christians to favor this date over other possible choices.

4.4 – Eastern Christians and January 6

While December 25 was a popular choice among Western Christians for the Nativity date, those in the East favored January 6. Although not as commonly addressed in the material by leading astrotheology supporters, it is raised on occasion such as in the source guide for the film *Zeitgeist*.^[62] Their explanation quotes Hugo Rahner appealing to the work of Edouard Norden. While citing Rahner, the details of Norden's work, since shown to be faulty, are never given.

In order to understand the problems with Norden's thesis, we need to first understand what he claimed^[63] – something Joseph and Murdock failed to investigate. However, those armed with even a generalist's knowledge of ancient calendars will soon find some major problems.

Norden had theorized the date of the winter solstice was fixed at January 6 during the reign of Pharaoh Amenhetten I at the start of the Middle Kingdom^[64] but inaccuracies in the Egyptian calendar caused it to lose a day each 128 years. By the time Alexandria was founded, the solstice had shifted to December 25 and set again to give the Egyptians two days to celebrate the winter solstice. The conclusion drawn is these are merely two different dates for the winter solstice that were computed at different times.

The theory has intuitive appeal but Talley demonstrated Norden confused two ancient calendars and this rendered his thesis untenable. Norden assumed the Egyptian calendar lost one day each 128 years with respect to the solar year but this applied to the later Alexandrian calendar and not to the traditional Egyptian (Sothic) calendar used at the time of Amenhetten I. The traditional Egyptian calendar had lost about one day every four years with respect to the solar year. Thus Norden's calculations assumed a calendar that did not exist in 1996 BC and this alone effectively eliminates his theory.

Talley also found the most likely reason why January 6 was used in the East for the birth of Jesus: The quartodeciman tradition among the region's Christians attempted to preserve the link to 14 Nissan by using 14 Artemisios as the equivalent in the Asian recension of the Julian calendar.

This date was April 6 in the Roman Julian calendar and, under the traditions mentioned earlier, the conception of Jesus would fall there as well while Jesus would have been born nine months later on January 6.

Thus, December 25 gradually became associated with the birth of Jesus in the West while January 6 was more common in the East. There were also dissenting views that had Jesus' birthday in March, April, and other months of the calendar. While these two dates were by far the most prominent choices, their development was therefore not a conscious decision to attach the birth of Jesus to the winter solstice.

4.5 – Conclusion

Timing is everything. It is certain the earliest Christians did not observe the date of December 25, so the appeals to astronomical events occurring on that date to explain the New Testament accounts is completely wrongheaded. Thus the entire astrotheology hypothesis is rotted to the core.

Chapter 5 – Evidence and Critiques

In the previous chapters, I illustrated why the astrotheological system fails in its core beliefs that Christianity (and earlier pagan religions) were based upon the travels of the sun through the zodiac with each deity representing an age determined by the sun's rising position on the Spring Equinox. In this chapter, I will consider arguments that some prominent supporters of the astrotheological system have provided to bolster their claims and demonstrate these arguments cannot survive serious scrutiny.

5.1 – God's Sun

It was Jordan Maxwell who popularized the “God's Sun” nonsense later used in the film *Zeitgeist*. While most of his work is on video rather than in print, two essays written by Maxwell (“The Solar Cult” and “Astrotheology”^[65]) give a summary of his beliefs and will be the subject any discussion in this chapter.^[66]

Maxwell linked Jesus to the sun through the homophones “sun” and “sun” as if modern English had any bearing on languages in the first century. He even assumed this was the basis for Biblical passages as he restated clauses in John 14:9 and John 14:12 as “He who has seen the Sun has seen the Father” and “The Father is glorified in the Sun.” He also restated John 3:16 as “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Sun, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

While the belief that a coincidence of modern English homophones reflects ancient beliefs is clearly ridiculous, Maxwell reeled in many conspiracy theorists with this and other examples of his etymological nonsense. Also included were the idiocy that the word “horizon” is derived from “Horus-risen” (as in the Egyptian god Horus) and the word “sunset” is similarly derived from the Egyptian god Set. Back in the world of the sane, horizon derives from the Greek for boundary and “sunset” uses the English word “set” which means descend just as “rise” means ascend. Hence, “sunrise” and “sunset.”

These and other etymological absurdities are peppered throughout Maxwell's work and are popular with the tinfoil hat crowd who like to play connect the dots with imaginary lines. All of these claims were included in the original version of *Zeitgeist* to the amusement of everyone with an ounce of common sense. While the “horizon” and “sunset” nonsense was removed from later versions, the “God's Sun” theme was central to the film and so was reinterpreted by Peter Joseph and D. M. Murdock as only intended as a pun. However, Joseph's original reliance upon Maxwell and

the original inclusion of the other nonsensical claims refutes this defense.
[\[67\]](#)

Another author that has not figured out that homophones in English do not carry over to other languages is Malik H. Jabbar. In his four volume set *The Astrological Foundation of the Christ Myth* he gives his detailed version of the astrotheological theory and includes the son/sun connection:

When our ancestors spoke and wrote of the resurrection of the sun; they meant exactly that. It did not refer to a person, but to the solar sun. But, when the priesthood founded and established Christianity, they changed the sun to Son. The priesthood told the pagans that the Son was born on December 25, *just like their sun*. They told them that the Son had been dead in a grave for three days and then was resurrected (revived) and ascended to heaven (upward), *just like their sun*.
[\[68\]](#)

It is difficult to not to scream when reading the work of someone who cannot comprehend that the word for the solar orb and the word for a male child only sound alike in English – a language that did not exist when the New Testament was written. But such is the burden one must bear when reading Jesus mythicists.

5.2 – Zodiac and Precession Revisited

The dating for the use of the zodiac and knowledge of precession is an insurmountable problem for astrotheology supporters and few of them bother to address it. In fact, many do not seem aware of the problem at all and uncritically accept the beliefs of nineteenth century cranks.

For example, Jordan Maxwell often states that his claims can be checked in “all of the reference works” but he never specifies which works these might be and who are the authors. In reality, the only “references” one finds to support his claims are the usual collection of pseudoscholars from the nineteenth century that no one takes seriously. He certainly has not interacted with actual scholarship on the history of the zodiac I have summarized in previous chapters.

Similarly, Tom Harpur draws from the same dubious sources. His book *The Pagan Christ* was largely dependent upon a trio of cranks from the nineteenth century (Godfrey Higgins, Gerald Massey, and Alvin Boyd Kuhn) and he took an early use of the zodiac and an accompanying knowledge of precession or granted.

For example, Harpur followed the lead of his hero Kuhn and merely repeated the occultist's claims without a hint of discernment:

The Virgin Mother had held the divine child in her arms in zodiacs on temple ceilings for millennia before the Galilean baby saw the light. ^[69]

Of course, such a claim would place the dating of the zodiac long before the first millennium BC.

However, neither Kuhn nor Harpur ever bothered identifying any temple that had a zodiac on its ceiling millennia before Christ. The reason is obvious: no such ceiling exists. In fact, not only was the zodiac not used “millennia before Christ,” but it did not appear in Egypt until a few centuries before Christ.

Although Harpur (and presumably Kuhn) might have had Denderah in mind, such claims for Denderah's antiquity were disproved long ago – in fact long before Kuhn. For Harpur to repeat such utter nonsense without

supplying evidence illustrates just how out of touch he is with anything resembling sound scholarship on the issue.

Michael Tsarion, when discussing a date for the earliest use of the zodiac, begins by quoting the following from Gerald Massey:

The Egyptian Book of the Dead, which is traced back to 4,260 BC, years before the writing of the New Testament has its foundation in the lore of the heavens, and in poetical imagery follows the path of the Sun through the different signs of the zodiac. Many phrases, many headings of the chapters of the New Testament are similar to those in the Book of the Dead.
[\[70\]](#)

What Massey was talking about here is anyone's guess but it has no correspondence to reality.

The Egyptian Book of the Dead was used beginning in the New Kingdom around the sixteenth century BC and its use continued to around the first century BC. It was based in part on the older Coffin texts of the Middle Kingdom and the even older Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom but that would put it back to about 2400 AD. There is no evidence of it stretching back to 4260 BC. Furthermore, Egypt did not begin using the zodiac until the last few centuries BC.

As for the alleged correspondences between the chapter headings of the Egyptian Book of the Dead and the books of the New Testament, it is a rather bizarre claim to say the least – especially considering the books of the New Testament were not divided into chapters until well into the medieval period.

Tsarion also quotes Edward Carpenter for support:

...it becomes clear that the travels of the Sun through the belt of constellations which forms the Zodiac must have had, from earliest times, a profound influence on the generation of religious myths and legends...The origins of the Zodiac are obscure; we do not know with any certainty the reasons why the various names were given to its component sections, nor can we measure the exact antiquity of these names; but – presupposing the names of the signs as once given – it is not difficult to

imagine the growth of legends connected with the Sun's course among them.^[71]

Carpenter, too, is another of the long dismissed cranks that are often cited by those within the astrotheological stream of Jesus mythicists. Nowhere in Tsarion will one find any interaction with real scholars on the subject such as Kruger, Neugebauer, etc.

His take on precession is even stranger. He imagines the Egyptians knew not only of precession but its causes in the rotation of the earth's axis as it goes around the sun.^[72] Not only is there no evidence of any of this, but the entire zodiacal system is at its essence geocentric. Tsarion then goes even further by claiming that numbers linked to precession were used in the construction of the pyramids.^[73] This little bit of crank pyramidology, of course, is presented without anything resembling what one might consider evidence.

Derek Murphy's treatment assumes an early date for the use of the zodiac and the knowledge of precession. For example, Murphy refers to Babylonian and Sumerian zodiac wheels^[74] but there are no Sumerian zodiacs of any sort and all such Babylonian wheels arrive after the development of the zodiac around 500 BC. In a similar manner, he repeats the same errors concerning the knowledge of precession and the supposed “ages”^[75] without any consideration of all the obvious problems with such claims.

Murphy also assumes the use of the zodiac was long established in Egypt when it actually was not common until the Ptolemaic era. The universally established use of the zodiac and knowledge of precession is, of course, an axiom of astrotheology supporters and they are often shocked to find their foundational assumptions are contradicted by the archaeological evidence. Murphy is no exception and his claims have no more to support them than any others.

Many other supporters of astrotheology also assume the early dates provided by nineteenth century pseudoscholars without so much as a hint they are even aware of the current scholarly consensus. In this group we may place Malik Jabbar, David Deley, Craig Lyons, and Frank Newby.

Their complete lack of awareness of any controversy renders their opinions irrelevant.

By far the most comprehensive attempt at engaging the issue is by D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”). In her earliest effort (*The Christ Conspiracy*), Murdock did not seem aware that any controversy existed concerning her views on the zodiac and precession. She cited a representative collection of her outdated and crank sources (Dupuis, Massey, Volney, Churchward) to date the zodiac from 15,000 to 30,000 years ago and possibly longer. [76] The closest of these to the likely date were “only” twelve and a half millennia too early!

Murdock further demonstrated the insularity of her research by relaying long refuted claims that the zodiac at Denderah Temple was over 10,000 years old. [77] It actually dated back about two thousand years and even included inscriptions of events from that period. [78] Not surprisingly, this just happens to be when the temple was constructed. Moreover, it represented a conflation of the earlier Greco-Babylonian zodiac mixed with Egyptian ideas [79] and thus it postdated both.

As for precession, Murdock obviously followed the same dated and crank sources in her belief in an early knowledge of the phenomenon. For example, she states:

The knowledge of the precession goes back many thousands of years and is found around the globe from China to Mexico, reflecting that the so-called primitive ancients were in reality extraordinarily advanced. In addition, when the sun was in Taurus, beginning about 6,500 years ago, the bull motif sprang up in many parts of the world, including the Levant, where it symbolized Baal. [80]

Of course there is a bit of a problem in the above statement since there is absolutely no evidence anyone even used the zodiac 6500 years ago – much less were concerned with precession in some “Age of Taurus.” Murdock also ignores the fact that the reason certain deities, including Baal, were associated with the bull were their use as symbols of male fertility.

The earliest indication that Murdock had any sense of the issues with her ideas on the zodiac occurred in an exchange with Mike Licona. In her response to Licona's scathing review of *The Christ Conspiracy* (that included a mention of errors related to the zodiac)^[81], Murdock's response^[82] gave obvious evidence of her agitation at being taken to the woodshed such as in this retort:

While Licona himself uses "experts" so entrenched in the mainstream perspective that they are unable to do research into anything "new," such as the information I provide – and cite quite thoroughly – he nevertheless attacks *my* sources, calling them "non-experts," "non-scholarly," etc.

This comment was, of course, rather amusing as her arguments were not “new” but recycled pseudoscholarship from over a century ago.

Licona had contacted Noel Swerdlow, a recognized expert on ancient astronomy, and the latter's curt dismissal of Murdock was relayed in Licona's review. Murdock countered that the views of Licona and Swerdlow were “absolutely false and absurd” and stated that to deny Chaldean astronomers had a zodiac centuries to millennia prior to the Christian era was “beyond ridiculous.”

In reality, the only thing that was “beyond ridiculous” was that Noel Swerdlow's knowledge of ancient astronomy was being challenged by a conspiracy theorist who argued the pyramids were not really built by Egyptians. As for her retort on Chaldean astronomers, it is misleading as neither Licona nor Swerdlow denied the Chaldean astronomers had the zodiac “centuries” before the Christian era. It was the “millennia” end of the range they disputed and that is what Murdock's arguments required and where they failed.

The evidence Murdock offered was less than convincing. On the dating of the zodiac, she cited the following:

- *The Catholic Encyclopedia.*
- An unidentified edition of *Funk & Wagnall's Encyclopedia.*
- Edward Walter Maunder.
- The artifact she referred to as the *Karanovo Zodiac.*

On the knowledge of precession in the ancient world, she cited:

- Edward Walter Maunder.
- A reference in *Webster's Biographical Dictionary* to Kidinnu as the discoverer of precession.
- Comments by Edwin C. Krupp.

After supplying this “evidence,” she issued the curt dismissal “So much for Licona's experts,” but, as we shall see, these words had the distinct taste of crow.

First of all, the work of Edward Walter Maunder, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, occurred prior to the important work of Kluger, Neugebauer, et al, and so is completely outdated and irrelevant. The same can be said for the cited edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. While she was not specific in her citation of *Funk & Wagnall's*, such encyclopedias sometimes contain outdated information and this may be the case here. Certainly this encyclopedia is not of the same status as trained Assyriologists and historians of science on this matter.

The same may be said for the Webster's reference to Kiddinu as the discoverer of precession. As was mentioned in a footnote in an earlier chapter, that assertion was refuted by Neugebauer long ago, Yet even had that been the case, this would only have moved the date back a few centuries – far too late for Murdock's theory to hold water. As for the *Karanovo Zodiac*, it is nothing of the sort and attempts to force it to be a zodiac are little more than seeing animal shapes in clouds. [\[83\]](#)

Finally, there are the comments by Edwin C. Krupp. His relaying of speculations were never intended to be a decisive endorsement of early dates for the use of the zodiac and knowledge of precession but a presentation of differing viewpoints. It may be that Krupp had not yet reached any conclusion but he certainly did at a later date. When he was later contacted by Licona on the matter, Krupp rejected Murdock's claims and sided with Swerdlow and Licona. Thus even her favored source dismissed her claims.

From a statement in Murdock's initial response to Mike Licona, her book *Suns of God* was written prior to at least part of the exchange (although published after it began). In this effort, Murdock was now definitely aware

of problems with her viewpoint and attempted to address them. Naturally, some of these responses [\[84\]](#) overlapped the material she had cited in her dispute with Licona.

Her “evidence” for an early use of the zodiac included a parade of the usual irrelevant sources (Dupuis, Volney, Massey, Maunder) to which she added a new name, Thomas Maurice, whose work *was published in 1794!* She also once more raised Denderah and Karanovo. She also cited the Hellenistic Babylonian astrologer Berossus. The latter wrote during the Greek rule of the Seleucids that followed Alexander's conquests and his absurd chronologies reflect Greek romanticism more than history and contradict the Babylonians' own records.

As for an early knowledge of precession, in addition to Krupp, who, as noted earlier, dismissed her claims, she also cited *Hamlet's Mill*, a book by Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Deschend that ignored the evidence of the last century and attempted to resuscitate the long discredited ideas of Panbabylonianism. Needless to say, it adds nothing substantial to her case.

In her 2009 release *Christ in Egypt*, Murdock was primarily concerned with defending her claims for the astrotheological system as the basis for Egyptian religion. In this effort [\[85\]](#), she faced an uphill battle as the scholarly consensus is that the Egyptians never used the zodiac prior to the Ptolemaic era. If she cannot overcome this fact on the ground, her claims concerning the connection of the religion of Egypt to the zodiac collapses on this central point.

When she finally turned to a discussion of the zodiac, she admitted that Erik Hornung, one of the world's leading Egyptologists, verified Egypt did not use the zodiac prior to the Ptolemaic period, but insisted a closer examination of currently available data might allow for an earlier date. So what is this “currently available data”? Amazingly, she referenced her parade of irrelevant sources from *Suns of God* five years earlier!

Following the discussion further, Murdock rehashed her absurd claims regarding Denderah by suggesting that, while the ceiling itself was late, it represented a later restoration of a zodiac from 10,000 years earlier. She never bothered to ask why the Egyptians in the Roman era would be

concerned with such an undertaking and why they would care to decorate it with astronomical events occurring in their own time.

She attempted to bolster her claims by pointing out that the zodiac was dated at 10,000 years by some “amateur” estimates. Her cited “amateur” source was Jules Barthelemy Saint-Hillaire whom she contrasted with Elijah J. Burritt. The latter dismissed such an early date and Murdock claimed his opinion was likely motivated by "bibliolatry." However, when one examines the cited sources, it is amusing to find that Saint-Hillaire actually *agrees with Burritt in his rejection of the early date for Denderah!* [\[86\]](#)

Murdock also claimed historians deny the influence of Egypt upon later civilizations in Babylon. Of course, here she ignores the fact that the Babylonians come from an equally long tradition in Mesopotamia that stretches back to the Sumerians. Moreover, no one is stating that the Egyptians did not influence the Babylonians in some matters – just that the use of the zodiac is not one of them. Nor are they stating the Egyptians did not have their own system for tracking the night sky as they definitely used a system of decans from an earlier period than the zodiac developed. It is merely that the Egyptians did not employ the twelve sign zodiac until the Ptolemaic dynasty when the new Greek rulers combined the decan system of the Egyptians with the Greco-Babylonian zodiac into a hybrid system which became the basis of Western astrology.

Murdock then begins a parade of irrelevant sources who claimed an early Egyptian knowledge of the zodiac (Volney, Maunder, Massey) and added four new names to the list: Remi Raige, William Mure, E. Wallis Budge, and Orlando P. Schmidt. None of these added any substance to her claims.

Remi Raige was a philologist from the eighteenth century who died before the hieroglyphs were ever deciphered. Hence, he was not only over a century too early to interact with the evidence compiled by Kugler and other Assyriologists, but he was too early to read what the Egyptians had to say about themselves. His understanding of the land of the pharaohs is one framed by the misguided interpretations formed by early modern Western esoterica.

William Mure was a nineteenth century classical scholar who was similarly molded by past misconceptions and too early to interact with the

data from more recent discoveries. The end of E. Wallace Budge's career did intersect with Kugler's discoveries but Budge was known for clinging to outdated interpretations and his work judged irrelevant shortly after his death. He generally is avoided by most contemporary Egyptologists.

While Raige, Mure, and Budge were at least respected scholars in their day, the same could not be said of Orlando P. Schmidt as the closing words of the review of his book in *Nature* attests:

Before he writes another book of "startling discoveries" we hope he will read the current literature of the subject, and will remember that assertion is not evidence, and that theories and hypotheses are not proofs. [\[87\]](#)

One must at least give Murdock credit for her tireless quest in finding such obscure, albeit irrelevant, sources from over a century ago to support her views.

Murdock's final source was John Anthony West, an "alternative historian," whose dubious ideas on Egypt were derived from the neo-Hermetic nonsense of occultist R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz. The latter, a student of various occult philosophies that included Madame Blavatsky's Theosophy and Alexandre Saint-Yves' Synrarchy, sought to interpret ancient Egypt into conformity with his vision of an ideal synarchist society.

As with most crackpots, Schwaller de Lubicz never let little details such as factual data get in the way of his fantasies. He spent years studying Luxor Temple and, while his photographs of the structure are spectacular and quite useful to Egyptologists, his conclusions were more akin to the mystical silliness of pyramidology. [\[88\]](#) He is generally only considered seriously by fringe theorists who inhabit the nether region where occultism overlaps with conspiracy theories. [\[89\]](#)

Thus, despite her extensive attempts at compiling evidence for her views on the zodiac in Egypt, a lot of nothing still adds up to nothing. There is no evidence the Egyptians used the zodiac until after the conquests of Alexander the Great when Egypt's pharaohs were the descendants of Alexander's general Ptolemy.

The most recent effort in defending her views on the zodiac appear in the Source Guide for the first part of the film *Zeitgeist*. Although it is jointly credited to Murdock and Peter Joseph, there is little doubt it primarily represents Murdock's research. In this booklet, she once more addressed the dating for the use of the zodiac and the knowledge of precession.

On the age of the zodiac, the following statement was presented as the current estimate:

The antiquity of the idea of a zodiac is disputed, but it may have been formulated as early as 4,000 or more years ago. [\[90\]](#)

In this comment, it is interesting how her position has changed over the years since her initial work. The lower end of the date had shrunk from 15,000 to 4,000 years ago and this is now “disputed” when she previously dismissed claims contradicting her own as “absolutely false and absurd.”

In reality there has been no real dispute among scholars since the evidence of the evolution of the zodiac was first outlined by Kugler and others in the early to mid twentieth century. The zodiac began its development in Babylon during the first millennium BC, was adopted and further developed by the Greeks, and they brought it to Egypt and combined it with the Egyptian system of decans during the Ptolemaic era.

As for precession, the main discussion in the source guide once more cites *Hamlet's Mill* and her discussion from *Suns of God*. She also raises the Krupp citation even though he had already dismissed her claims. Elsewhere in the booklet, there was also a secondary discussion of precession in relation to Mithraism that cited Mithraic scholar David Ulansey:

As we have seen, the knowledge of the precession evidently dates back centuries before being formally described in writing by Hipparchus in the second century BCE, and it appears that in Mithraism we possess a clear vestige of myths and traditions developed during the Age of Taurus as well as centuries afterward, in order to reflect the supposedly proper mythology for that time period. This point about Mithra's relationship to Taurus is demonstrated quite well by Ulansey in his book *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*. [\[91\]](#)

The only thing demonstrated by the above passage is that Murdock and Joseph did not understand Ulansey's thesis as he never wrote any such thing.

While Ulansey theorized a link between precession and Mithraism, he was quite clear it was the *Roman* and not the *Persian* form of Mithraism wherein this connection was made and this was based on the discovery of precession by Hipparchus a few centuries earlier.^[92] Thus, far from confirming her claims, Ulansey agreed with the existing scholarly consensus.

Thus while Murdock has claimed the early dates for the use of the zodiac and precession she assumes were supported by evidence, she has not presented any substantial reason to overthrow the existing consensus by scholars that the zodiac was first developed in the first millennia BC and precession was discovered in the second century BC. This, of course, entails that her theory that ancient cultures used the astrotheological system described in her books of the film *Zeitgeist* is without merit and the idea that this was the basis of Christianity has no factual basis.

Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit also attempted to address the issue as they contacted Edwin Krupp^[93] for his views and no doubt hoped his message to Mike Licona on Acharya S' views did not accurately reflect his position. However, Krupp's response was even clearer than the one he relayed in the Murdock/Licona exchange:

Although it seems possible some cultures reacted without archaic memory to the seasonal displacement of stars over centuries, there is no persuasive evidence to confirm a conscious and systematic understanding of precession before Hipparchus. In fact, the evidence suggests Hipparchus really did make and quantify this remarkable discovery, and there is direct evidence his discovery had an impact on the intellectual framework of religion soon after.

Faced with this response from a reputable scholar, one would think the issue was settled. However, Irvin and Rutajit instead chose to label Krupp as a “qualified dissenting opinion” while presenting the long discredited pseudoscholarship of *Hamlet's Mill* as the established position. Needless to say, such a judgment has an air of desperation.

Another response came from David Fideler in his discussion of the knowledge of precession and, by implication, the use of the zodiac. He began his analysis ^[94] with David Ulansey's research that linked Mithraism to the discovery of precession. He acknowledged Ulansey believed Hipparchus discovered precession but countered some astronomers suggested its effects were known earlier. Fideler then suggested various images associated with gods represented the sign of the zodiac for the appropriate age. ^[95]

While Fideler at least acknowledged that no solid evidence of an early knowledge of precession existed, his appeals to circumstantial evidence concerning iconography proved to be faulty. The astronomer he cited was Edwin C. Krupp, but Krupp had raised the question posed by others but did not endorse that position. As we have already seen, he actually rejected that view.

One of the arguments Fideler employed was an alleged connection between bull and ram imagery during “ages” associated with Taurus and Aries. However, Fideler's example for the bull (Mithras) only occurred in Roman Mithraism millennia after any supposed “Age of Taurus.” Moreover, some of his prominent examples relied upon images from Egypt when the zodiac was not used in Egypt until the Ptolemaic era. Finally, as pointed out earlier, the division of ages used is a modern and not an ancient convention.

Bill Darlison has also attempted to address the issue. In *The Gospel & The Zodiac*, Darlison's “evidence” ^[96] consisted of citations from astrologer Alice Howell's use of nonsense from the world of pyramidology and Joseph Campbell's excursion into numerological fantasy land. ^[97] Needless to say, neither could be considered a match for the meticulous work of Assyriologists and Egyptologists for over a century.

Darlison also argued for further evidence of precession in the Bible in his claim that, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:29), the usual translation of Moses' face being radiant is not faithful to the Hebrew. Instead, he insisted, the Hebrew stated Moses' face was horned – a

reference to Aries. He also used Michelangelo sculpting Moses with horns as evidence of esoteric knowledge by the artist.

This claim is an example of what happens when Jesus mythicists attempt to exegete a Biblical text to conform to their presuppositions and lack any real expertise in the original language. The Hebrew word *karan* is from a primitive root meaning to push out or gore and can assume different meanings relating to something jutting outward. Such meanings can range from shining light to having horns with the context being the determining factor. Similarly, the related noun form often means horns but in Habakkuk 3:4 refers to rays of sunlight.

In the case of Moses, it clearly meant “shine” since it is not Moses' face that is mentioned in the Hebrew but rather the *skin of his face*. Interpreting it as “horned” would make it less the age of the ram than the porcupine. As for Michelangelo, the reason he used the image of horns is not because of some proto-Freemasonry but rather an artistic tradition picturing Moses as horned based upon Jerome translating the key passage *cornuta esset facies* (face was horned) in the Vulgate.

Darlison also suggested the Hebrew *Pesach* (Passover), which literally means to hop or skip or pass over, might be related to a verb meaning “to hobble” and thus allude to the wobble of the earth's axis. [\[98\]](#) Whatever the relationship of the two words, this idea is absurd since the zodiacal system is *geocentric*. They would not have reacted to a wobble in the axis since they believed the earth was stationary. Thus all of Darlison's attempts also fail.

More recently, Safari Gray has also defended a combination of the zodiac together with knowledge of precession much earlier than the evidence permits when she writes:

Though the Greek astronomer Hipparchus ... was the first to record the Precession, it is likely he was not the first to observe it ... [\[99\]](#)

Since it is quite certain he was the first to observe it, one would expect some decisive scholarly evidence to the contrary. However, the best she could come up with is Alice Howell in a book published by an arm of the

Theosophical Society – hardly a scholarly source – particularly given Howell's aforementioned sympathies for pyramidology.

Gray, like Murdock, also points to Mithraism for implied evidence of an early knowledge of precession. [\[100\]](#) Here she makes a common error by not differentiating the Roman Mithras and the Persian Mithra. The astrological foundations of the Mithraic cult she uses applies only for the Roman mystery cult which began approximately the same time as Christianity.

The second error she makes is that she failed to understand that the division of the sky under the ancient reckoning differs from that used today by about eight degrees. In fact, the division she relies upon (which would place the beginning of an “Age of Pisces” around 1 AD) is a convention developed by the International Astronomical Union in the twentieth century. Under the system used at the time (Babylonian System B), the changing of eras would be around half a millennium later. In fact, David Ulansey, a Mithraic scholar she cites as evidence, was well aware of this and quite clearly believed the Mithraic mystery cult was from roughly the same period as Christianity and he explicitly credited its development to the discovery of precession by Hipparchus.

Such misunderstandings have major implications as she attempts to give an astrotheological spin to Christianity. With such errors at this juncture, her later treatment of the New Testament is built upon little more than sand.

The net result is that the supporters of astrotheology have failed to counter the evidence that their system fails at its most basic level. Although this alone is enough to render the astrotheological system irrelevant, it is worth c Although one could argue this alone destroys astrotheology, it is worth continuing since some use other parts of the system within their own theories.

5.3 – Year of the Zodiac

One of the major problem that occurs within most presentations of an astrotheological system is centering both the birth and death of Jesus on the date of December 25. Not only does the New Testament never mention the winter solstice period for Jesus' birth, but the Jesus' death is explicitly set in the Spring. Moreover, the date of December 25 is not associated with Christianity until long after the New Testament was written. This combination of factors renders the entire system untenable. Yet some have attempted to not only argue the point but to link events in the life of Jesus to the sun passing through signs of the zodiac.

Consider, for example, D. M. Murdock's response that millions of Christians have celebrated December 25 and believed it to be Jesus' birthday. While this is certainly true, this belief and practice arrives on the scene long after the writing of the New Testament and hence has nothing to do with Christianity. Her further excursions on the same theme can only be the subject of ridicule.^[101] Her attempt as linking the December 25 date to an ancient text titled *De Pascha Computus*^[102] only proved she had never read it as it placed the birth of Jesus in March.^[103]

Equally absurd is Murdock's attempt to defend the “three kings” as the stars in Orion's belt. A clear sign of Murdock's desperation can be seen in her attempts at justifying an ancient use of the term “three kings” or “three magi” for the stars. Her first attempt appeared in *Christ in Egypt*^[104] and then later in tandem with Peter Joseph in the *Zeitgeist* source guide.^[105] However, neither provided evidence of the term being used in antiquity for the stars in Orion's belt. Instead, she cited sources that referred to modern occurrences and her absurd claims of it being used “all over the world” actually point to its use by European Christians and the Christian descendants of Europeans elsewhere.^[106] Thus, her efforts are quite laughable failures.

Murdock also attempted to justify the use of the winter solstice for the three days in the grave but somehow thought this related to Jesus dying when the sun reaches the intersection of the ecliptic and the equator at the autumnal equinox. Thus we have the confused idea that Jesus' death in autumn was signified by his burial in winter despite all four gospels placing both events in the spring. One also wonders how his being dead three days in December relates to his dying some time in September. All of this, of course, only illustrates the absurd logical knots that Jesus mythicists must meander through in their thinking in order to keep their poorly reasoned ideas afloat. The best they can hope for is that their followers are incapable of independent thought. Fortunately for Murdock and her allies, this is not much of a stretch.

Murdock also defended another interpretation of the crucifixion in the form promoted by Jordan Maxwell and the film *Zeitgeist* that tried to link it to the Southern Cross constellation. Here the major problem is that no one called that constellation a cross until the modern era. As usual, such anachronism never stop Murdock as she constructed one of the most circular arguments ever written:

It is likewise claimed that the Southern Cross was not delineated as a separate constellation until centuries after it was purportedly incorporated into mythology in this manner, because it is not overtly described until that time.

In view of all the astrotheological information that clearly was passed along within religion and mythology, we could suggest that this motif itself is evidence of the constellation's significance in ancient times, even if it was not called the "Southern Cross." Certainly, when all things are weighed, and we discover mythology and astrotheology throughout the rest of the gospel story—as well as the knowledge that the cross itself is a solar symbol dating back thousands of years—we are wise to consider that this striking motif is yet another of the same type. [\[107\]](#)

Thus her argument for being permitted to use the Southern Cross as evidence of astrotheology is that astrotheology is true and this is evidence that the Southern Cross would be recognized as such. In other words,

circular reasoning works because circular reasoning works because and so forth.

The fact is that the stars of the Southern Cross were never linked to a cross until the modern era and there would have been no particular reasoning for the ancients to have done so. There is, for example, no central star at the intersection point of the cross shape to differentiate it from a square or diamond or, as believed by some natives of Australia, the head of an emu. This is merely a very desperate attempt to salvage an embarrassing claim.

Turning to Easter, Murdock cited J. L. Heilbron as evidence of Easter having a strictly astronomical and not historical origin:

That the date for "Easter" is in reality based on astronomy, rather than an actual crucifixion of the Lord of the universe, is demonstrated by the centuries-long battle within Christendom as to when precisely this spring holiday should be celebrated. As stated by professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley, Dr. John L. Heilbron, in *The Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories*: "The old theologians decreed that Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox—that spring day on which the hours of daylight and darkness are equal."^[108]

However, when one read Dr. Heilbron's book, it actually says nothing of the sort and gives a further example of Murdock's habitual misuse of academic sources.^[109]

As for the remainder of the solar year, Murdock's cherry-picking in *The Christ Conspiracy* is an exercise in convoluted reasoning as she combines dubious etymologies, butchered legends, and the zodiacal equivalent of a game of charades.

Murdock begins her attempt at linking the birth of Jesus to the winter solstice by linking his birth to the nearest zodiacal signs:

According to legend, Jesus was born in a stable between a horse and a goat, symbols of Sagittarius and Capricorn.^[110]

First of all, the legend to which Murdock alludes developed long after the writing of the New Testament. Secondly, Sagittarius is not depicted as a horse but a centaur (a half man, half horse mythical creature). Finally, and most amusingly, Murdock could not even get the legend correct as it has Jesus born between an ox and a mule.

On the other end, the obvious spring death of Jesus is turned into one at the winter solstice by claiming:

In Sagittarius, Jesus was wounded in the side by the Centaur, or centurion. [\[111\]](#)

and followed it with this claim:

He was crucified at the winter solstice between the "two thieves" of Sagittarius and Capricorn, who sapped his strength. [\[112\]](#)

Here again, silliness rules the day. First of all, the word “centaur” is derived from the Greek *Kentauros* – a tribe from Thessaly known for their ability at riding horseback – while “centurion” is derived from the Latin word for hundred. Thus, centaur and centurion are not at all etymologically connected. The transformation of Sagittarius and Capricorn into the two thieves is achieved by a mystery known only to Murdock.

A further example of her poorly conceived links to signs of the zodiac can be seen in her claim that Jesus told the parables of sowing and tilling of the fields in Taurus the bull. The sowing of fields is generally not done by bulls, who are difficult to manage, but by oxen (castrated male cattle). She then finishes up her effort by citing for support a source of the most absurd variety: a spiritualist from the nineteenth century who claimed to have received a message from the grave by the Roman historian Livy. [\[113\]](#) Needless to say, such a citation could hardly be considered a scholarly one.

While Murdock's contributions are strange enough, she is not the only mythicist attempting to shore up the bogus claims from *Zeitgeist* and similar material. Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit attempted to tie in the “Three Kings” connection with Sirius and the stars in Orion's belt:

Only one night of the year do [Sirius and the stars of Orion's belt] swing fully down and point directly at the earth in

alignment with the sunrise while appearing on the horizon just after twilight. [\[114\]](#)

Even if this were true, it would not add much to their case as the modern Gregorian calendar differs from the Julian calendar then in use. However, the statement is quite false and so we need not even consider it further.

However, it is not true. The stars never swing down vertically and point to the place of the sunrise. They are on an angle and point to many places on the horizon (including the point of the sunrise) over an extended period of time (including the night of December 24). This is just a desperate attempt to make that date seem somehow “special” when in fact it is nothing unusual at all. The fact that they are unaware that the current and ancient calendars would not have this supposed unique occurrence on the same date only adds to the fail.

There are also other attempts to line up the signs of the zodiac with the Gospel narratives. Derek Murphy begins his outline of the year with the assumption that winter was dreaded and summer was a blessing:

Summer is Good. Winter is Bad. Every year, the sun gets weaker and weaker. The seasons change, the crops die, the ground freezes. Then, the sun comes back and saves life as we know it. [\[115\]](#)

This, of course, once again assumes the weather patterns of Western Europe and America. In the ancient Near East, it was the height of the summer when the land died in the face of searing heat and the lack of rain. This is why the harvest was in spring and early summer rather than in the fall. Thus his entire theory is based on an obvious error.

It gets little better after this less than auspicious start. The outline is primarily attempts to play connect-the-dots by arbitrarily assigning the signs of the zodiac to various passages in the Gospel of Matthew. As with other authors discussed, he merely assumes the birth of Jesus took place on December 25 (in Capricorn) and uses this to launch to the next sign of Aquarius which he ties to the baptism by John the Baptist.

His claimed link to John is every bit as anachronistic as that to December 25:

This constellation is shown as a solitary figure with long hair, living in the wilderness of winter, pouring water from a vase. Jesus begins his ministry with his baptism at the hands of John, who is often portrayed standing in a river with long hair, pouring water out of a vase. [\[116\]](#)

Apparently he failed to realize the depictions of which he speaks are centuries after the New Testament was written. The actual texts speak only of John immersing Jesus and others in the waters of the Jordan river – no vase or other vessel is involved. Later depictions merely reflect the baptismal practices of their day.

Murphy, again like the others, displays a less than informed view of the culture and climate of the region. He mentions as a link to Gemini the disciples picking ears of corn from the stalks and claims it proves it to be early summer and the fall harvest had not begun. Of course, if it had been summer, the grain harvest in Israel would already be over as grain was harvested in Israel during the spring.

His explanation for the winter solstice as the point of Jesus' death is that the sky went dark when Jesus died and winter is the darkest time of year. Of course, the text clearly points not only to this darkness as something extraordinary, but clearly states that Jesus' death occurred at Passover – a feast occurring in Spring. Yet despite the text clearly noting the time of year was that of the Passover feast and the Last Supper taking place the night of Jesus' arrest was a Passover meal, Murphy ignores this and insists it is winter based on little more than the necessity of it being so to keep his pet theory afloat. Thus he strains credulity with all manner of nonsensical claims.

Besides the “hours of darkness” already discussed, Murphy also erroneously stated that early Christians were confused by rival claims of Jesus' resurrection being celebrated on the winter solstice and spring:

But why, if Matthew shows his death in winter, do Christians celebrate Easter during the spring? Actually, many early Christians were also confused by this issue. [\[117\]](#)

In reality, the only confusion on this issue exists in the mind of Derek Murphy and others accepting such nonsense as historical research.

As already pointed out, Matthew certainly does not even suggest the death occurred in winter. Throughout the passion narrative, it is quite clear that it occurred during the Passover feast that happens in early spring. Nor is there any record of any early Christians believing the death of Jesus occurred any other time than spring. The text is far too clear to leave even a scintilla of doubt in anyone's mind on that point.

Murphy based his claim on a statement by Irenaeus concerning the beliefs of some Gnostics in the late second century. He disputed their claim that Jesus' teaching ministry (not his earthly life) from his baptism to his crucifixion had lasted exactly one year. However, at no point does he ever mention the winter solstice as the end points for this yearly cycle and there is no reason to believe this was even a remote possibility. The quote Murphy uses from Irenaeus is the following:

They endeavor, for instance, to demonstrate that passion which, they say, happened in the case of the twelfth Aeon, from this fact, that the passion of the Savior was brought about by the twelfth apostle, and happened in the twelfth month. For they

hold that He preached only for one year after His baptism. [\[118\]](#)

As one can see, there is no clear indication that the death of Jesus had occurred in December. Murphy's confusion is over the term “the twelfth month,” but this refers to the twelfth month of Jesus' ministry – not the twelfth month of the calendar year. In fact, the context makes quite clear that his opponents also believed Jesus' death was in the spring and they were likely basing it upon the signs of the zodiac (which were usually begun with Aries) and not the calendar year:

Now, that these three occasions of the Passover are not included within one year, every person whatever must acknowledge. And that the special month in which the Passover was celebrated, and in which also the Lord suffered, was not the twelfth, but the first, those men who boast that they know all things, if they know not this, may learn it from Moses. Their explanation, therefore, both of the year and of the twelfth month has been proved false, and they ought to reject either their explanation or the Gospel; otherwise [this unanswerable question forces itself

upon them], How is it possible that the Lord preached for one year only? [\[119\]](#)

Thus it is clear the Gnostic assertions were based upon the months ordered by the signs of the zodiac and not the calendar year.

David Deley also has his theory of the “year of the zodiac.” As with most of those who portray Jesus as the sun traveling through the zodiac, Deley must somehow fix the birth and death of Jesus to the date of December 25 or the winter solstice. Given that none of the Gospels mention any such connection, there is always some creativity necessary to try to fit that square peg into that round hole.

Deley's first problem is that the traditional date of December 25 for the birth of Jesus was added long after the New Testament was written and had no significance for the early Christians. He ignores this quite glaring fact and merely assumes the reader will accept the date without issue. However, this problem is small in comparison to that faced by anyone attempting to fix Jesus' death to December 25. After all, the texts themselves explicitly place his death in the Spring and Christians have celebrated his death and resurrection in the Spring from the start. In fact, one of the earliest disputes among churches was in fixing this spring date for the Church due to the Roman and Jewish calendars being incongruous.

Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence against it, Deley attempts to plunge ahead and his “evidence” is to treat Pontius Pilate as some metaphor for Sagittarius. As he explains on his website:

"Pontius", ποντιος {pon'-tee-os} (Strong's Greek #4194), is literally "of the sea", a reference to the sea of stars above. (It's also of Latin origin, betraying it's late addition to the text.). "Pilate", πειλατος {pil-at'-os} (Strong's Greek #4091), is literally "armed with a spear." Sagittarius, the archer, is armed with a bow and arrow, which serves the same purpose as a spear. The theme is hunting. We're all done harvesting, so let's go hunting. [\[120\]](#)

The above passage is so utterly absurd that one might think Deley was a critic of Jesus mythicism writing a satire. Unfortunately, it seems he is actually serious.

Although pointing out the flaws in his argument is something like shooting fish in a barrel, let us do the obvious for completeness' sake. First of all, Deley seems to suggest that Pilate was mythical and his name derived to indicate Sagittarius – a completely ridiculous claim. Not only is Pilate mentioned in the writings of Philo, Josephus, and Tacitus, but there is an inscription in limestone found in Caesarea Maritima that contains Pilate's dedication of a construction project to the Emperor Tiberius and places him as the Roman governor in the period. In other words, this was a real Roman.

Equally ridiculous is his claim that the Latin name betrays its late origins. Apparently Deley was unaware that the Romans ruled Judea and that their names were Latin. Thus, since Pontius Pilate was a Roman prefect, it is no surprise that his name was also Latin. The fact that Greek was the lingua franca at the time does not mitigate the fact that Roman names were Latin.

As for the “harvesting being over and we go hunting” idea, this displays an ignorance of the climate of the region (the harvesting of grain in ancient Israel began in Spring and not fall. Equating a bow and arrow with a spear only adds to the failure.

Yet, as absurd as his exposition on Pilate had been, Deley may have topped it with his discussion of Herod:

Jesus is handed over to Herod (Luke 23:7-11) This makes it somewhat difficult for us to place these events in a historical context, because Herod died in 4 BC, yet here we apparently have him alive again, at a time supposedly around A.D. 27. Christian apologists deal with this by claiming this is a *different* Herod, not the same Herod who tried to kill Jesus when Jesus was born. Christian apologists go even further to claim the Herod mentioned in Acts 23 is a *third* Herod. Well, why not? After all, the Bible doesn't explicitly say these are all the *same* Herod. [\[121\]](#)

Deley then makes his allegorical case:

So the Bible does not explicitly say this is a *different* Herod, though it would be the norm for any writer to mention such a thing if it really were a different person who happens to have the same name. After all the Bible does distinguish between

John the Baptist and John the brother of James and son of Zebedee, so there's no confusion between which John it is referring to. Yet for Herod the Bible makes no distinction, leading us to believe it is the same Herod mentioned earlier.

This of course leaves us desperate when trying to force this story into a historical context. However, there is no problem when we interpret the story as an allegory, with Jesus a personification of the sun and Herod a personification of the darkness and cold of night time and the dark and cold seasons of Autumn and Winter. As an allegory Herod figuratively "dies" every morning with the rising of the sun (Jesus), and regains power every evening with the setting of the sun. Herod also loses power when the bright warm seasons of Spring and Summer commence. Herod regains power in the dark and cold seasons of Autumn and Winter. [\[122\]](#)

At this point one must suggest that Deley consider cracking open a book by an actual scholar on the period rather than the collection of cranks he uses as his sources.

Anyone possessing even a basic level of understanding about first century Israel is left with their jaw gaping by Deley's combination of arrogance and ignorance. Not only were there the three Herods he mentioned, but others as well who were all members of the same royal family: the Herodian dynasty. Of these Herods, there are actually four mentioned in the New Testament: Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa I, and Herod Agrippa II. The first Herod, mentioned in the Nativity narratives, is Herod the Great who ruled during the reign of Augustus. The second Herod, mentioned in the passion narratives and in Acts 4:27, is Herod Antipas who ruled at the time Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor. The third Herod, mentioned in Acts 12-13, is Herod Agrippa I. The fourth Herod, mentioned in Acts 25-26 as King Agrippa, is Herod Agrippa II. All of these men are well documented historical figures who left inscriptions and coinage and there is no doubt as to which of the Herods is being referred to in which passages. Amusingly, the Herod mentioned in Acts 23 is a reference to a palace and not to a then living king. Herod the Great had built numerous palaces throughout the region – including one at

Caesarea Maritima. This palace was later used as the headquarters of Roman governors.

Deley's demonstrable ignorance of basic historical facts is a clear indication that he has no real business discussing the historicity of those mentioned in the New Testament. His assertion that the various Herods leaves those giving an historical interpretation “desperate” reveals just how out of touch with reality he has become in creating this bizarre scenario. The claim that Herod is an allegory for the darkness thus looks all the sillier.

Without the December 25 date, of course, his system is left without an anchor. Even with it, much of the rest is interpreted in terms of the weather and agricultural patterns of Europe and not the ancient Near East. As with many who use this thesis, Deley is unaware that the harvest time for grain in Israel occurred in the spring and the early summer. Such elementary mistakes throughout his work exposes it as without any factual basis.

As with all supporters of the astrotheological thesis, Malik Jabbar relies upon a series of anachronistic arguments. Along with ignoring the fact that the New Testament was written long before Christians adopted December 25 as the date of Christ's birth, he centers much upon a fixed three day solar minimum from December 22-25. The problem, already explained multiple times, is that the three day solar minimum was not fixed to those dates until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in the sixteenth century AD. Moreover, Jabbar believes this system began in ancient Egypt millennia before Christ. All of this is based upon outdated and unreliable authors from over a century ago. In a similar vein, he claims an association between the stars in Orion's belt and the term “the three kings”^[123] but fails to inform the reader that such associations begin over a millennium *after* the New Testament was written.

Jabbar does attempt to flesh things out in ways that other similarly motivated authors do not. For example, he tries to tie events in the Gospels to the passing of the sun past particular stars or constellations. However, in so doing, he often plays connect the dots between cited passages and astrological symbolism. Furthermore, he must assume the December 25 date as a fixed marker to begin his analysis. This all too familiar error is not

the only anachronism present as he also pays little attention to the origins of the stellar references he uses.

For example, Jabbar interprets the familiar Nativity narrative of the shepherds and their flocks as a metaphorical representation of the two stars Erria (the shepherd) and Alfirk (the flock).^[124] However, the two names Erria and Alfirk are derived from Arabic and were assigned by Muslim astronomers/astrologers over a millennium after the New Testament was written.

In forcing the Gospel narratives into an astrological framework, Jabbar has to play fast and loose with time and place and facts on the ground. He begins with the narratives of the Nativity and the Passion as his markers and links both to the winter solstice. This, of course, ignores the fact that nothing in the texts links either event to the winter solstice, the winter solstice was not used by Christians until long after the New Testament was written, and the Passion narratives explicitly link its occurrence to the Spring celebration of Passover.

For Jabbar, as with most Jesus mythicists, such explicit facts can be ignored in favor of his own speculations concerning esoteric meanings whose only support is his presuppositions. Thus, since his interpretive system requires Jesus to die on the winter solstice, the clear statement in each of the four Gospels that Jesus died in the spring is ignored in favor of a conclusion that supports his system but has no evidence. It is all the more absurd when you realize that he is claiming this is what the Gospel writers were trying to tell us.

There also is frequently an overlap between the current year's sun and the next year's sun. Since the whole thing is assumed without any evidence, it is all rather cherry picked to fit his presupposed scenario. He simply finds matches in the text where he can and ignored those places (such as Jesus dying in the spring) that prove his interpretation is erroneous.

Jabbar begins by stating that “humanity has since time immemorial looked upon December 25 as the birth of the Sun (Son) of God.”^[125] Not only does he rely upon the absurdity of the sun/son connection, but the claim of the ubiquitous use of December 25 as the birth of the sun is demonstrably false. For example, there is no evidence the birth of any sun

god of the Roman Empire were ever celebrated on that date prior to the institution of the cult of Sol Invictus in the third century AD.

Jabbar also relies upon the three day solar minimum as part of his theory:

So for primitive man, the inception of winter, Dec. 22, was the worst day of every year for him. This day, Dec. 22 was the start of winter and marked the beginning of the worst stage of his yearly struggle for survival. This day, Dec. 22, is referred to by astronomers as the Winter Solstice.

On Dec. 22 of each year, the Sun reached its Winter Solstice, the lowest point of the trajectory (angle of rays) of the entire year. After Dec. 22 (the turning point), the Sun again rises northward, which is a sign that summer shall come again!

So each year, early society awaited the approach of December 22, with foreboding. December 22, the day of the Winter Solstice ... was a day of reckoning for them. Because it seemed to them ... that on this day ... the sun entered its grave..... It lasts for days, three days to be exact. For three days, after the sun reaches its solstice, it appears to stand still. This period of pause, between the Sun's descent and ascent, wrought paralyzing dread and fear into the hearts and minds of our ancestors.

Over time, they established rituals and traditions concerning this period (December 22 to December 25). They passed the word through oral tradition, and eventually, after their societies established writing, wrote it down, concerning their Sun God: the sun shall lay in a grave (point of solstice) for 3 days. But after 3 days the sun shall rise, be resurrected ... and ascend toward heaven. [\[126\]](#)

Here again the same blunders appear as with other authors.

For starters, Jabbar is completely dependent upon having the solar minimum fixed between the days December 22-25. However, as has been pointed out already, this was not the case until the Gregorian calendar was introduced in the sixteenth century AD – a little late for the New Testament authors to consider. Then, of course, there is the little matter of the date of

December 25 not being part of Christianity until long after the writing of the New Testament. Finally, the whole thing is debunked by merely noting that all four Gospels have Jesus dying around the Passover which occurs in the spring.

Turning to the crucifixion, Jabbar claims that Capricorn, Golgotha, and Calvary all share a definition as “place of the skulls.”^[127] While this is true of Golgotha (from the Aramaic *gulgulta* or Hebrew *gulgoleth* meaning *skulls*), it is not the case for Capricorn which comes from the Latin *Capricornus* and derived from *caper* (goat) and *cornu* (horn) and hence means “goat horned.” The same is true for the Greek name of the same constellation: Aigokheros.

Jabbar also sums up his understanding of the passion narrative in the Gospel of Matthew:

The Biblical narrative in Matthew actually is defining the route of the sun (Jesus) to its destination Capricorn where it/he is destined to be crucified at the winter solstice, then lay in the grave three days (of solstice) and then be resurrected on the third day of December 25.^[128]

He also claims:

So the message is crystal clear, Jesus (Sun) being crucified at the Place of the Skulls (Golgotha = Capricornus) is when the Sun (Christ) meets it's death at the winter solstice in December, *in the sign of Capricorn (Golgotha)*.^[129]

All of that is quite remarkable considering what the text of Matthew actually makes crystal clear is that Jesus was crucified at the Passover celebration occurring in the spring and not during the Winter Solstice.

Jabbar also confuses the issue further by equating Jesus' crucifixion with the autumnal intersection of the ecliptic and the equator. Hence we have the crucifixion happen twice (fall and winter) with neither at the time when the text actually states it occurred (spring). Of course, when you are mining the text for esoteric meanings and conspiracy theories you are apt to miss something like an explicit factual data.

Jabbar attempts to get around the problem but only creates new ones. His idea is that Jesus dies and rises again *twice*:

The first death is at the autumnal equinox when the sun falls below the celestial equator...The resurrection is three signs later when the sun rises in Capricorn. The second death is when the sun enters the grave on the winter solstice on December 22, or is crucified at this time. The second resurrection is three signs later at the vernal equinox when the sun rises above the celestial equator. [\[130\]](#)

The utter confusion (and desperation) in such an explanation should be quite apparent.

First of all, nothing in the New Testament even hints at two deaths and resurrections. Furthermore, he places the two deaths in fall and winter when the text clearly places the death of Jesus in spring. Even worse for his system is that his explanation contradicts the system he is trying to defend as it associates the death occurring on December 22 with the resurrection at the spring equinox and thus negates the “three days” association to December 24. All in all, it is a hot mess at every possible level.

The most unique effort at a zodiac-gospel connection is that of Bill Darlison. First of all, his walk through the zodiac is the central focus of his book rather than an extra to link two occurrences of the winter solstice. Secondly, he does not moor his system upon the winter solstice at all. Thirdly, he anticipates some possible objections and attempts to answer them. His efforts, however, as we shall see, are not persuasive and his theory has severe problems that illustrates what happens when you allow your imagination to get the better of you.

In *The Gospel and the Zodiac*, Darlison argued the Gospel of Mark outlined a walk through the twelve signs of the zodiac with different verses serving as markers for the twelve constellations of the zodiac in succession beginning with Aries. Despite his novel approach, the book suffers from many of the same problems as the others: his claims are either anachronistic or circular.

For example, in some cases, Darlison links Jesus to the necessary astrological sign by a connection to the object associated with the sign (e.g.,

water with Aquarius) but on others he links Jesus' behavior to the alleged attributes associated with the astrological sign. In the former case, he ignores a linked object when it appears in an inconvenient location and in the latter his judgments are highly subjective. Thus all that really occurs is his checking the next sign needed and then searching for a match. There is no consistency in the application of standards. Furthermore, in some cases, it is not clear whether the attributes he associates with signs are results from ancient or more recent astrology. In the latter case, such attributes would be irrelevant.

One obvious problem, discussed when we considered precession, is that the ancients had a different reckoning of the sky than that used at the present. Under the current system, Jesus would have been born at close to the beginning of the period when the sun rises in Pisces at the spring equinox. Darlison ties his ending of the year in Pisces to the whole idea of a “Piscean age.”^[131] However, under the ancient system, which differed by eight degrees, Jesus would have been over half a millennium too early for any supposed “Age of Pisces.”

This can further be illustrated by noting something Darlison writes at the beginning of his exposition. In defense of his beginning with Aries, he quotes Ptolemy as follows:

Although there is no natural beginning of the zodiac, since it is a circle, they assume that the sign which begins with the vernal equinox, that of Aries, is the starting point of them all.^[132]

Note that this would mean that, when Ptolemy was writing, the sun was rising in Aries on the spring equinox and hence, within the system of astrotheology, it would still be the “Age of Aries.” But Ptolemy wrote over a century after the life of Jesus and hence there could not have been any passage from the ages of Aries to that of Pisces. Hence, he begins with a statement equivalent to it still being the “Age of Aries” but ends with it already the “Age of Pisces.” This confusion is caused by using an ancient source at one point and a modern reckoning at the other. Thus his whole system is confused from its inception.

5.4 – Conclusion

Attempts to conform the Gospels to an astrological hayride necessitate ignoring context and imposing a structure alien to their nature. Since both the zodiac and the New Testament were produced within an agricultural society, it is not surprising each mentions rams, bulls, scales, water, and fish. One may subjectively play connect-the-dots by focusing on certain elements and ignoring what doesn't fit but it proves nothing and convinces only those who wish it were true.

Chapter 6 – Other Solar Myth Theories

Although astrotheology was the first popular theory linking the origin of religion to the sun, it was not the only one. When astrotheology fell by the wayside, a new theory appeared that was popularized by Max Müller and it held sway for most of the nineteenth century and gave rise to offshoot theories. The amazing thing is that, while this and the theories to follow were often quite imaginative, they had little in the way of supporting evidence apart from the erudition of Müller and his influence both within academia and with the public.

6.1 – Max Müller

Friedrich Max Müller, a nineteenth century philologist and orientalist, was one of the foremost figures in the early studies of comparative religion. Not only was he influential in the academic community but his ideas also hit a chord with a popular audience and he published numerous books that had wide appeal even as his ideas were losing favor among scholars. In a sense, he had in the late nineteenth century a similar role to that of Joseph Campbell a century later as both men hit a chord with the public by popularizing ideas that were already outdated.

Müller was born in Dessau, Germany and attended the University of Leipzig where he studied philology. Although trained in Germany, he spent most of his professional life in England where he became the foremost authority on ancient languages in his day. In particular, his study of the literature from India was groundbreaking and his status among Orientalists was unchallenged.

Müller expanded his study of Indian literature into a general theory of Indo-European languages that he contrasted with the patterns of thought present in Semitic languages. When disreputable authors later seized upon his comments to support their own ideologies, Müller was appalled and was quick to point out that Aryan origins trace further back among dark skinned Hindus than fair skinned Norwegians. Even so, some of Müller's comments could in retrospect be construed as biased towards European culture as he was still a man of his time and its sense of the inevitability of European dominance. Recently, some Indian nationalists have viewed Müller's contributions negatively and see him as still representing a view of cultural imperialism even if not as hard edged as others of his day.

While Müller's contributions to linguistics and Orientalism were monumental and worthy of a study on their own, our concern will be with his work in comparative religion. In particular, his hypothesis that religion evolved from a “disease of language” from earlier ways of speaking of natural events that became the basis of the philological solar myth hypothesis.

6.2 – Philological Aryan Solar Myth

After astrotheology was discredited in the nineteenth century, Max Müller developed another theory to root the origins of religion in solar mythology. But unlike Dupuis' theory of intentional metaphors, this new hypothesis saw an accidental artifact of linguistic development. In place of intentionally created metaphorical stories, Müller and his followers saw statements about nature become statements about gods due to the loss of the earlier meanings understood by their ancestors.

Müller's starting point was his belief that as civilized a people as the Greeks could not have created the degrading stories of their gods. ^[133] He then focused upon early Indo-European (or “Aryan”) peoples and languages and theorized that primitive Indo-European languages had a limited linguistic repertoire and expressed abstract concepts by using concrete terms metaphorically. For example, abstract ideas about the sun's yearly cycle were personified into concrete statements with the use of an anthropomorphized being as a solar metaphor. The same occurred with other forces of nature. As the languages later developed the capacity to handle abstract concepts directly, these metaphorical meanings from what Müller called the “mythopoetic era” were lost, and the terms serving as solar and other metaphors were transformed into statements about literal beings called “gods.”

The philological theorists reigned supreme for decades with Müller as the most renowned. Using his status as one of the premier scholars of the period and certainly the foremost Western expert on Sanskrit in his day, Müller tied together some astrotheological and philological ideas by theorizing the myths were a “disease of language” caused by the original meaning rooted in nature being lost as former metaphors were now taken as literal statements about powerful beings.

As inventive as this theory might be, it is every bit as rooted in the errors of early modern esoteric thought as astrotheology. ^[134] The idea of religions rooted in the lost wisdom of an ancient civilization observing nature recalls similar statements by Jean-Sylvain Bailly and Dupuis. The idea of a metaphorical language also recalls similar mistaken classifications

of the Egyptian language. The key difference between this solar myth hypothesis and astrotheology is Müller did not claim myths were allegories of the sun's movement but rooted in the change from a metaphorical to a literal use of language.

The ideas of Müller and other philological theorists did not last much past the turn of the twentieth century. Their constructions were shown to be completely artificial as each began with the same premise and came to their own preconceived conclusions. Some concluded “solar myth” but others arrived at different solutions. Moreover, their ideas could not withstand the critiques coming from the emerging field of anthropology that demonstrated the theory did not reflect the facts on the ground. In particular, Müller had an extended and quite rancorous debate with Andrew Lang in which Lang was judged to be the victor.

Both the obsolescence of Müller's work and the differences between his ideas and astrotheology are often overlooked by the latter theory's supporters. In particular, Müller never believed so absurd an idea as Jesus was a sun god. Thus, while his ideas are long outdated, Müller should not be placed within the same category as cranks like Godfrey Higgins and Kersey Graves.

6.3 – Religious Development in Müller

While Müller agreed with astrotheology supporters that the sun and other forces of nature were the original basis of religion, he never stated that is where religion remained and certainly did not believe Jesus was a solar metaphor.

While Müller believed solar considerations formed the initial core of religion, he did not believe religion remained stagnant at that core. He held the history of religion went through three stages ^[135] beginning with the physical stage of worshiping natural phenomena, moving to the anthropological stage of worshiping ancestors, and then moving to the psychological stage where man attempts to merge his perceptions of the infinite in nature and in man. ^[136] All religions were, Müller argued, heading for a culmination point in a religion of pure philosophical truth. Christianity thus was not a solar religion at all but one further along the spectrum.

Some also point to Müller blurring differences between religions as an indication that he saw Christianity as derived from earlier pagan examples. However, while Müller did attempt to bridge the gap that existed in the public's mind between Christianity and other religions past and present, it was not by making Christianity appear more pagan but rather making other religions appear more Christian. Under his view, it was not that Christianity was connected to earlier religions by being the same as them so much as representing a descendant that had evolved further along in his stage theory of religious development. In fact, Müller's ideas were very much in keeping with theories that had emerged in that century concerning the evolution of history (Hegel), earth (Lyell), and species (Darwin). He was indeed a man of his time.

6.4 – Misuse of Müller

Supporters of elements of astrotheology have frequently cited Müller as an ally, but he would have completely rejected their ideas as far fetched. In fact, Müller was himself a Christian albeit one of a rather liberal variety. Those searching for his arguing Jesus was a pagan sun god do so in vain. Yet, this has not stopped the pseudoscholarly from citing his corpus as a scholarly source supporting the idea that the ancients based their religions upon solar mythology.

Of course, no one doubts that solar mythology was the basis of some ancient cults. The question is whether it was so pervasive that just about every major Aryan deity was in some manner a solar myth and, more importantly, whether Jesus was such a deity. On the first point they would find some support in Müller, but it is on these points that his theories are seen as terribly outdated. On the second and more important point, Müller would have rejected it outright.

However, during and after the reign of Muller's views, there were others who wished to take them in new directions. These spinoffs of Muller's thesis distinguished the origins of Aryan religion not in the realm of philology but biology. That is, they believed the spark of the Aryan cultures was to be found in the blood rather than the words. Such theories based in biological differences between the races rather than linguistic ones would make extensive use of Müller's work and reputation. This would lead to a new offshoot of the Aryan solar myth idea.

6.5 – From Language to Blood

In the work of Max Müller, the data of sun worship could be mined from the expressions of the primitive Indo-European or Aryan tongue. In this sense, these leftover expressions were relics of the Aryan past brought forth in language among all native speakers. Thus it was a theory based in the cultural rather than racial artifacts: any native speaker would display such traits no matter what their racial makeup might be.

However, there were other voices who applied Müller's work to support theories of an idealized racial past. Seizing upon Müller's distinction between Aryan and Semitic modes of thought, they attributed these not to social differences formed by language but to biological differences formed by race. Within their theories, relics of the Aryan past were to be found in Aryan blood rather than Aryan language. Moreover, they believed this past could be revived. These authors were obviously far more concerned with defending an ideology than describing history.

Such ideas were foundational in forming a view of history and culture that pitted a traditional Aryan spirit to in opposition to Semitic influences – sometimes but not always including Christianity. Some considered Christianity (and Jesus) a strictly Semitic influence while others thought Christianity was corrupted, Jesus was at least partially Aryan, and Christianity needed to be reformed along pro-Aryan lines. Their beliefs about Jesus were ridiculous, but this movement was based not in history but racial fantasies.

It should also be noted that, while the supporters of the Aryan blood theories often glorified their pagan past, this did not always translate into a desire to revive solar worship in the present. Rather, it related more to justifying their earlier paganism by casting it in terms of the worship of the divine through nature than a primitive religion based upon crass deities controlling natural forces.

6.6 – Biological Aryan Solar Myth

The biological version of the Aryan solar myth could be said to be the strange offspring of Müller's philological theories, Darwin's biological theories, and German Romanticism. It is certain that none of these movements would want to claim this strange hybrid but all contributed to its formation. After all, it is possible for children to inherit the least attractive traits of their parents.

The entire Aryan/Semitic split would come from Müller's ideas. While he based these changes in philology, the change to biology is just the opposite pole in the “nature vs. nurture” argument that has always been the argued point in discussions of inherited traits. Müller took the “nurture” end and others placed it in the biological end.

It was common in German Romanticism to recast Europe's pagan past in positive terms after many centuries of condemnation during the Christian era. For example, Goethe felt quite natural in comparing the worship of Christ to that of the sun:

What is genuine except everything excellent which stands in harmony with purest nature and reason, even today serving for our highest development! And what is counterfeit except everything absurd, dumb, everything which bears no fruit, at least no fruit of value! If the genuineness of a biblical document is to be decided by the question whether everything it tells us is true, then in a few points the genuineness of even the Gospels could be doubted And yet I consider the Gospels, all four, to be genuine; for there works within them the reflection of a majesty which proceeded from the person of Christ. It is of such a divinity as any the deity has ever assumed upon earth. If I am asked whether it accords with my nature to give him reverent worship, then I say – completely! I bow before Him as the divine manifestation of the highest morality. If I am asked whether it is in my nature to reverence the sun, I again say – certainly! For he is likewise a manifestation of the highest

Being. I adore in him the light and the productive power of God; by which we all live, move, and have our being. [\[137\]](#)

While Goethe is certainly not equating Christ with the sun, he clearly viewed both as manifesting the divine: Christ with his moral teaching and the sun with the divine power in nature. Thus, from his viewpoint, both Christianity and paganism were celebrations of the divine within the physical cosmos. Such thinking may have had little to do with any orthodox understanding of Christianity, but it revived interest in a line of esoteric Christianity that had been present since the Renaissance. [\[138\]](#)

In the wake of Darwin's evolutionary ideas, the difference in Aryan and Semitic thinking promoted by Müller was given a biological basis among some continental evolutionary theorists. For example, Ernst Haeckel [\[139\]](#), the major figure in introducing Darwin's theories to German audiences, attributed Jesus' moral teaching to his being fathered by a soldier of Aryan descent by combining a medieval Jewish polemic against Jesus (*Sefer Toledot Yeshu*) with an analysis of national traits to come up with the following nonsense:

The statement of the apocryphal gospels, that the Roman officer, Pandera, was the true father of Christ, seems all the more credible when we make a careful anthropological study of the personality of Christ. He is generally regarded as purely Jewish. Yet the characteristics which distinguish his high and noble personality, and which give a distinct impress to his religion, are certainly not Semitical; they are rather features of the higher Arian race, and especially of its noblest branch, the Hellenes. Now, the name of Christ's real father, "Pandera," points unequivocally to a Greek origin; in one manuscript, in fact, it is written "Pandora." Pandora was, according to the Greek mythology, the first woman, born of the earth by Vulcan and adorned with every charm by the gods, who was espoused by Epimetheus, and sent by Zeus to men with the dread "Pandora - box," containing every evil, in punishment for the stealing of divine fire from heaven by Prometheus. [\[140\]](#)

While it is hard to imagine such idiocy being taken seriously, such speculations were very common at the time.

Hackel, himself a monist, also voiced his admiration for sun worship as the supreme form of theism:

The different forms which monotheism has assumed in the course of its polyphyletic development may be distributed in two groups—those of *naturalistic* and *anthropistic* monotheism. Naturalistic monotheism finds the embodiment of the deity in some lofty and dominating natural phenomenon. The sun, the deity of light and warmth, on whose influence all organic life insensibly and directly depends, was taken to be such a phenomenon many thousand years ago. Sun worship (solarism, or heliotheism) seems to the modern scientist to be the best of all forms of theism, and the one which may be most easily reconciled with modern monism. For modern astrophysics and geogeny have taught us that the earth is a fragment detached from the sun, and that it will eventually return to the bosom of its parent. Modern physiology teaches us that the first source of organic life on the earth is the formation of protoplasm, and that this synthesis of simple inorganic substances, water, carbonic acid, and ammonia, only takes place under the influence of sunlight. On the primary evolution of the plasmodomous plants followed, secondarily, that of the plasmophagous animals, which directly or indirectly depend on them for nourishment; and the origin of the human race itself is only a later stage in the development of the animal kingdom. Indeed, the whole of our bodily and mental life depends, in the last resort, like all other organic life, on the light and heat rays of the sun. Hence in the light of pure reason, sun-worship, as a form of naturalistic monotheism, seems to have a much better foundation than the anthropistic worship of Christians and of other monotheists who conceive their god in human form. As a matter of fact, the sun-worshippers attained, thousands of years ago, a higher intellectual and moral standard than most of the other theists. When I was in Bombay, in 1881, I watched with the greatest sympathy the elevating rites of the pious Parsees, who, standing

on the sea-shore, or kneeling on their prayer-rugs, offered their devotion to the sun at its rise and setting. [\[141\]](#)

It is likely that Haeckel's admiration for sun worship was related to its association, through the work of Müller, to the Aryan race. On the other hand, the “anthropistic monotheism” he criticizes would have been associated with Semitic people:

The humanization of God, or the idea that the "Supreme Being" feels, thinks, and acts like man (though in a higher degree), has played a most important part, as *anthropomorphic monotheism*, in the history of civilization. The most prominent in this respect are the three great religions of the Mediterranean peoples —the old Mosaic religion, the intermediate Christian religion, and the younger Mohammedanism. These three great Mediterranean religions, all three arising on the east coast of the most interesting of all seas, and originating in an imaginative enthusiast of the Semitic race, are intimately connected, not only by this external circumstance of an analogous origin, but by many common features of their internal contents. [\[142\]](#)

Haeckel's belief in the superiority of the Aryan over Semitic religion reflects a view, generally accepted in Europe at the time, of the Aryans' superiority over other races. Thus Haeckel could not associate those “high and noble traits” he saw in Jesus as Semitic in origin.

Although some took these ideas to their limit and supported a return to a form of Teutonic and Norse paganism, support for neopaganism was not as widespread as some have argued. Such claims have largely been popularized by some Christian apologists who sought to answer claims of Nazi-Christian collaboration by painting the Nazi movement as essentially neopagan. While some leading Nazis were pagan, others subscribed to a movement called “Positive Christianity” that had by that point been “Aryanized,” and others were hostile or indifferent towards religion. [\[143\]](#)

These neopagan and pro-Aryan elements were more the result of pseudo-scientific ideas that sought to justify the European dominance of much of the world. The result was the creation of a glorious past linked to the Christian status quo while the latter's Semitic origins were downplayed or

ignored. However, while it would be wrong to conclude that all supporters of the pro-Aryan movement were proto-Nazis primed to unleash the Holocaust, their ideas certainly provided part of the cultural background that made Nazism possible.

6.7 – Jungian Aryan Solar Myth

It was within this context that the psychoanalyst Carl Jung reached his conclusions about myth and religion. He began developing his own psychoanalytic theories and departed from Freudian orthodoxy by hypothesizing the existence of suppressed thoughts and emotions that were not part of the individual unconscious memory but rather in the historic memory of a people or their “collective unconscious” memory.

It is within the collective unconscious of the Aryan people that Jung believed the residue of solar mythology could be found and used as a tool in psychoanalysis. He believed the source of the solar and other nature mythologies was not to be found in any “disease of language” speaking of nature but within their unconscious sexual fantasies. His primary criticism of Christianity was its creation of an environment of suppressed sexual desires:

In the past two thousand years Christianity has done its work and has erected barriers of repression, which protect us from the sight of our own "sinfulness." The elementary emotions of the libido have come to be unknown to us, for they are carried on in the unconscious; therefore, the belief which combats them has become hollow and empty. Let whoever does not believe that a mask covers our religion, obtain an impression for himself from the appearance of our modern churches, from which style and art have long since fled. [\[144\]](#)

Here we see a pattern continuing within the solar myth theories: it is rooted in its times. The enlightenment's fascination with astronomy, the Victorian era's fascination with philology, and the early twentieth century's fascination with psychoanalysis fostered solar myth theories based in these topics.

Jung's solar myth hypothesis was largely dependent upon Müller's earlier ideas but with a psychological rather than a linguistic basis. Thus, when Müller's theory was discredited, Jung's own thesis fell with it. Jung's claims concerning the comparisons of pagan deities to Jesus also failed to withstand the passing of time. Jung believed Christianity was a hybrid

created from mixing Talmudic ideas within the framework of a Hellenistic mystery religion. His view of the gods of the mystery cults very much reflected nineteenth century ideas and would be considered ridiculously outdated today.

Some recent work, particularly that of Richard Noll [\[145\]](#), has severely criticized Jung and painted him as the self-appointed messiah of an almost religious cult posing as a psychoanalytical theory. The details of these charges are far removed from our concerns here but, despite presenting some interesting insights into Jung's often questionable behavior, I have found the overall thesis less than convincing. There is simply far too much speculation built upon very fragmentary evidence. However, I concede I have not examined all the sources thoroughly and remain open to either being persuaded or dismissing it outright.

Despite the obvious shortcomings of Jung's approach, he is not without support from some scholars in recent decades. Much of the support is derived from those enamored with Jung's psychological theories and some of their claims echo his material. Among those whom Jung influenced were Joseph Campbell, David Adams Leeming, and David John Tacey.

6.8 – Joshua Cult

All the talk of solar mythology set the stage for a new theory gaining some popularity in the late nineteenth century that had Jesus based upon Joshua. This theory had the Old Testament figure who shared a name in Hebrew and Aramaic with Jesus being the object of worship in cults of the Second Temple Era with these cults forming the basis for early Christianity. Joshua was allegedly based upon the Jason of Argonauts fame. All such cults were assumed to have roots in solar mythology.

The theory's early backers included Arthur Drews, William Benjamin Smith, and John M. Robertson and they made their case through various artificial word associations, crackpot etymologies, and much wild speculation. Their constructions of a first century Joshua cult from the evidence was rather imaginative but had little in the way of historical evidence.

Therein lay the problem with their theory: there is not one scintilla of evidence pointing to the existence of any such Joshua cult. This quite obvious failing was exposed shortly after the theory gained a foothold among some skeptics and the whole idea was dismissed by scholars shortly thereafter and rarely discussed again. A quick summary and refutation of the theory was given by historian Shirley Jackson Case:

Continuing the argument from likeness of names, a prototype of the Christian "Jesus" is found in Joshua. His name, like that of Jesus, signifies "deliverer" "savior"; his mother (according to an Arabic tradition!) was Miriam and the mother of Jesus was Mary (Miriam); he leads Israel out of distress in the wilderness into the promised land where milk and honey flow, that is, the land of the Milky Way and the moon, and Jesus also leads his followers into the heavenly kingdom; and all this is traceable to an ancient cult of the sun, the Greek legend of Jason forming the connecting link. Jason=Joshua=Jesus. Jesus with his twelve disciples passing through Galilee came to the Passover feast at Jerusalem; Joshua with his twelve helpers passed through the Jordan and offered the Paschal lamb on the other shore; Jason with his twelve companions went after the golden fleece of the

lamb; and all originally was the myth of the sun's wandering through the twelve signs of the Zodiac. Thus Joshua (Jesus) was an old Ephraimitish god of the sun and of fertility, worshiped among many Jewish sects as the hero-deliverer of ancient Israel and the future messianic savior. But when one asks for the evidences of a Joshua cult among the Jews, he finds no answer. Again, is there anywhere in Judaism an intimation that Joshua was ever the hero about whom messianic hopes were built? Here also evidence fails; and as for a resemblance between the Jesus of the gospels and this alleged cult-god, Joshua, it lies merely in the identity of name – a feature of no importance when one recalls the frequency of the name among the Jews.

[\[146\]](#)

If such a negative evaluation was standard fare among scholars prior to World War I, it stands to wonder what would revive this theory in the absence of any new evidence.

The answer is not the discovery of some new evidence to bolster the theory but the internet allowing access to long discredited and forgotten books. Those who support *Zeitgeist* and similar material now can do a quick Google book search and have large amounts of pseudoscholarship at their beck and call. Needless to say, you will not find the theory taken any more seriously among scholars than it was a century ago.

6.9 – Conclusion

Max Müller was a brilliant scholar who contributed much to the study of ancient languages – particularly that of Sanskrit. Unfortunately, his contributions in these areas have been overshadowed by his fanciful theory about the origins of religion. Thus, for some, he has become a symbol of sloppy scholarship. However, in retrospect, his theory was very much in keeping with the philosophical presuppositions of his age and should not reflect upon his able contributions elsewhere. Those who followed his lead and took it in different directions were generally on shakier ground to start and the passing of time has only reinforced that opinion.

Chapter 7 – Solar Christ Revisited

At the beginning of the 1990s, the solar Christ idea was relegated to the fringes: crackpot conspiracy theorists, extreme Afrocentrists, and the crankiest of atheists. It certainly was of no interest to historians and New Testament scholars. However, the internet and the growing popularity of conspiracy theories within the popular culture would give these discredited ideas a new life.

7.1 – Return of a Dead Theory

There seemed to be little reason for the “Jesus was a pagan solar deity” theories to be revived in the twenty-first century. After all, it was a relic of the eighteenth century, dismissed by the nineteenth century, and exiled to the world of conspiracy theorists and other cranks in the twentieth century. Its evidence was to be found primarily in the books of nineteenth century pseudoscholars and consisted of a combination of anachronistic arguments and outright fabrications. In other words, it was a dead end that few would have guessed would find a new audience.

The first thing to change that was the encroaching of the conspiracy theorist mindset into the popular culture. At a time when Oliver Stone and Dan Brown were thought by many to be documenting real history, even the nonsense of *Zeitgeist* was not that far out on a limb. Added to the mix was the wide availability of the internet. Suddenly, even the most ridiculous of ideas could find an audience among those with lots of axes to grind and little understanding of history. In addition, the Google Books platform made hundreds of crackpot books from the nineteenth century easily available for a new generation of cranks.

By 2007, there were popular books and videos backing the “Jesus as a pagan sun god” idea by Jordan Maxwell, D. M. Murdock, Tom Harpur, and others. However, the most popular exposition of the idea would be presented that year in a conspiracy theorist film by a young musician and filmmaker named Peter Joseph Merola.

7.2 – The *Zeitgeist* Phenomenon

There have been few videos to convince so many people of something so completely ridiculous as the film *Zeitgeist*. A three-part block of conspiracy theorist quackery, it surveyed various ideas covered in Jordan Maxwell's earlier material but offered it in a slick, visually appealing package. The result was a video that went viral and rapidly reached millions of views and made Peter Joseph Merola (who used the name Peter Joseph) the head of a movement. It really didn't matter that the whole thing was utter hogwash.

The film's popularity and ability to spread its ideas eventually got the attention of Christian apologists and forced them to take a crash course in ancient pagan religions. Much to their relief, the film's key claims were taken from the books of nineteenth century cranks and had no historical basis.

This has led to the strange attempts by those who have banked their reputations on this quackery to attempt rebuttals and sometimes garner new explanations. This includes attempting to redefine terms and citing scholars in support of views they never held. While they still complain about not being taken seriously by scholars, there is little reason, given their output, for scholars to do so. They simply have not provided any real evidence for their outrageous claims and must imagine there is some great conspiracy to suppress their work. At this point one can only laugh as not only do scholars not suppress their work, but, in most cases, they do not even know these authors exist.

This mindset found its most outrageous expression in *The Christ Conspiracy* by D. M. Murdock. While one should not expect rational thinking within its 400+ pages of unsubstantiated claims, historical inaccuracies, and angry rants against any and all things Christian, it reaches its apex of conspiracy theorist excess when Murdock suggests an explanation as to why academics do not embrace her views:

It is clear that scholars have known about the mythological nature of the Bible, yet they have gone to immense lengths to hide it, including using sophisticated language, like the priestly counterparts who have utilized the dead language Latin to go over the heads of the uneducated masses. It is possible that any

number of these scholars are also Masons or members of some such secret brotherhood who are under the blood oath. Or they may merely be products of their occupation, in that many universities and colleges are under the dominion of the fraternities and the grand master, the Pope, i.e., the Catholic Church. [\[147\]](#)

Although the above outburst should immediately recall the theme from *The Twilight Zone* from memory, the full tinfoil hat implications of the “pope as grandmaster” is further clarified when coupled with her earlier statement that “unbeknownst to the masses, the pope is the Grand Master-Mason of the Masonic branches of the world.” [\[148\]](#) Thus we must conclude that Murdock thought it possible a Christian bias in academia was being enforced by a Masonic cabal led by the pope. There is little she or any of her supporters can do to breathe any sanity into that little revelation.

7.3 – Children of *Zeitgeist*

The question remains: What next for the *Zeitgeist* supporters? While the belief in the “Jesus as a sun god” theme may have peaked, there is little doubt replacement theories will be found and others will continue to support this already discredited thesis. Thus, the need for Christians to be prepared to defend their faith from such accusations will not end.

One may recall the furor over *The Da Vinci Code* some years back. Anyone with even a modicum of knowledge concerning church history would have seen through such nonsense immediately. Yet, since most did not possess such a background in church history, it was touted as exposing the truth behind Christianity's past. Such claims came not just from oddballs but the press as well who had touted Dan Brown's supposed “research” in many favorable reviews.

How could they be so wrong? The fact is that most in the press who reviewed the book had three things in common: they disliked Christianity, they were largely ignorant of church history, and they considered themselves far better informed on the subject than their limited exposure would justify. Since Brown claimed some authority on the subject and he confirmed their own prejudices, they accepted his nonsense and ran with it.

What happened with the press in the case of *The Da Vinci Code* also occurred at a more grass roots level with *Zeitgeist*. Many who viewed the film had rejected Christianity or were well on their way to doing so and this confirmed their negative opinions. Thus, they just accepted what was clearly nonsense to any historian and never once bothered to check the sources.

In both cases, there will be a residue of support for the claims given in both of these conspiracy theories. Since both theories have been exposed as frauds, their support even on anti-Christian websites has fallen considerably. However, they will continue to have supporters and new theories will arise.

In the last year, Joseph Atwill received much more attention than deserved for his claim (outlined in his book *Caesar's Messiah*) that the Romans invented Christianity to pacify the Jewish population. While his

theory is laughable [\[149\]](#), this has not stopped the press from treating the latest conspiracy theorist claptrap on the origins of Christianity as though it might contain serious scholarship. In fact, Atwill has been repeatedly referred to by press outlets as a "Biblical scholar" despite his having no training in history, ancient languages, and New Testament studies.

This is about the level of scrutiny one can expect from the press when it comes to the nonsensical claims about Jesus. If it questions the orthodox interpretation of the Christian faith, it will get lots of attention; when it is refuted in the coming weeks and months, any of the responses will be ignored. It is thus increasingly important for those defending the Christian faith to get the truth out to the brethren in the pews.

7.4 – Conclusion

There is no doubt that the conspiracy theorist mindset has taken root with a significant sector of the popular culture. While the exact claims in *Zeitgeist* may be used less in the future, others will rise to attack the Christian faith from another direction. Sometimes the most absurd ideas are the hardest to defend against since they are unexpected. But, as with *Zeitgeist*, once you get to the root idea, the flaws appear quickly and the whole edifice crumbles.

Conclusion

The claim that Jesus was a solar deity were not invented by Peter Joseph or Acharya S or even Jordan Maxwell. Although this trio are responsible for the recent resurgence in this long discredited thesis, it was actually born in France in the years leading up to the Revolution. Going back further, it was rooted in a few centuries worth of esoteric thought leading back to the Renaissance. It stayed alive during the nineteenth century largely through popular books written by spiritualists and other occultists before being consigned to the dustbin of failed theories of comparative religion.

There it should have remained but one should never underestimate the power of a conspiracy theorist with some books, videos, and a website. Thus the idea took hold again in the popular culture and retains credibility with a segment of the public despite its being dismissed by scholars for its utter absurdity.

The anachronistic uses of the zodiac, knowledge of precession, and the date of December 25 all leave the theory dead in the water. This is simply a claim without any historical or logical basis. Thus the argument that Jesus was a pagan solar deity may be considered thoroughly refuted

Appendix 1 – *Zeitgeist*, Acharya S, and “God's Sun”

When Christian apologists began reacting to the film *Zeitgeist*, one of the first things they seized upon was the use of the term “God's Sun” to make a connection to Jesus as “God's Son.” The reason was obvious: the film drew upon the existence of the homophones “sun” and “son” for such a connection but this correspondence only existed in modern English – a language that did not exist in antiquity. This particular example quickly became “Exhibit A” for Christian apologists that Peter Joseph is far over his head when discussing the history of religion.

This was a point where the film's defenders simply could not possibly mount any defense for the claim itself – the absurdity of it was obvious, once explained, to even novices on the subject. Thus, rather than defend it, backers of the film began making excuses. The most common of these is that the whole thing was only used as a pun and was not meant to be taken seriously.

This is the defense supplied in the source guide for Part 1 of *Zeitgeist* by Peter Joseph and D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”)^[150] released after the embarrassing criticism and this remains by far the prevalent response by the film's supporters. However, when the earliest version of the film and its sources are examined, this evasion collapses on all fronts.

When *Zeitgeist* was first released, Peter Joseph credited the conspiracy theorist Jordan Maxwell as its primary inspiration. Maxwell is notorious for his laughable etymologies that attempt to make connections between pagan and Biblical terms using words in modern English.^[151] Some of these, including “God's Sun”^[152], made it to the original version of *Zeitgeist*. While most of this sort of nonsense could be scrubbed from later versions of the film, the “God's Sun” expression appeared at numerous key junctures and would have required a complete reworking. Thus, instead the film had

some minor tweaking (e.g., changing the explicit “it was called God's Sun” to the more ambiguous “God's Sun”) and the excuse mentioned above was issued.

It is also interesting to note that Joseph was not alone in such silliness. In the 1990s, Jordan Maxwell cast a large shadow until even most Jesus mythicists realized that his “research” was dubious at best. Murdock, in her early books, was far more dependent upon the material, such as that of Maxwell, circulating in conspiracy theorist circles. In fact, much of what appears in *The Christ Conspiracy* overlaps with Maxwell's videos from the same period. It appears that the “God's Sun” debacle was among them.

Note that while the recent source guide eschewed any connection between "God's Sun" and "God's Son":

Concerning the "son-sun" play on words – which is not a cognate but a mere happy coincidence in English ... [\[153\]](#)

her earlier comments expressed the opposite view:

Thus the English word “son” is not a false cognate with “sun,” and it is truthfully said that the “son of god” is the “sun of god.” [\[154\]](#)

Hence, while today she states that "son" and "sun" is not a cognate, she earlier stated the truthfulness of the cognate. So it appears Peter Joseph is not the only one who backpedaled on this issue.

In the older quote by Murdock, her source was someone named Jacob Bryant. Mr. Bryant was considered a fine scholar in his day, but his day was the latter half of the eighteenth century. Citing a contemporary of George Washington is questionable enough, but it gets stranger when you read Bryant's argument.

Bryant claimed Noah's son Ham was worshipped as, among others, the Greek Zeus and the Egyptian Amun. [\[155\]](#) Constructing etymologies that would make even Jordan Maxwell blush, he argued that Egyptian priests had the title “sonchin” or “son-cohen” or “priests of the sun.” [\[156\]](#) He derived this via a tradition of Pythagoras being a pupil of an Egyptian priest named Sonches. He then assumed what was clearly a proper name to be a

title, conjugated from it the form sonchin, assumed this was a compound of two words "son" and "chin," assumed "chin" had an etymological connection to the Hebrew "cohen" (priest), assumed the Egyptians were part of a pan-Aryan ruling culture spread throughout the ancient world, and then concluded "son" had an etymological connection to the English "sun" through this Aryan connection. Needless to say, this imaginative exercise carried little weight with anyone aside from Bryant and Murdock. That is, until she changed her mind and decided "sun" and "son" were not really cognate after all.

One can perhaps forgive Bryant for his wild etymological explorations at a time when such silliness was far more common than today. However, since someone writing before the Rosetta Stone was deciphered was not in any position to know what the Egyptians called anything, Murdock's odd willingness to use such obviously questionable material to support her thesis further undermines her credibility in conducting proper research.

Appendix 2 – Joseph Campbell and Precession

In the 1980's, Joseph Campbell, through his *The Power of Myth* television series with Bill Moyers, became a popular phenomenon who most casual observers would grant the term “expert in mythology.” He certainly did have some level of expertise, but not nearly that ascribed to him by his legions of fans. In academic circles, Campbell is better known by scholars as a great popularizer of mythology rather than the reigning expert he was considered by popular audiences.

It may come as a shock to many, but Campbell possessed no real training in the field of history at all. His expertise was in the field of literary criticism and he never was recognized as a major scholar among historians of religion. Mythology is one of those subjects that manages to be discussed in different fields, literary and historical, and those who view it from the literary standpoint are sometimes ignorant of the basic facts on the ground already established by historians – particularly when, as is the case with discussions of the development of astrology, the data requires a close examination of highly technical details relating to mathematical calculations. Instead, they tend to search for abstract similarities in the literary structure and hence constructions such as the “Hero Myth” tend to carry far more weight with literary critics than with historians. These tendencies also make them far more likely to develop idiosyncratic beliefs that would instantly be dismissed by those studying it from the vantage point of a historian.

This certainly came into play with Joseph Campbell's discussion of the zodiac and precession. [\[157\]](#) He believed the zodiac was known in the fourth millennium BC in Babylon where the “priestly watchers of the night skies at that time were the first in the world to recognize that there is a mathematical regularity in the celestial passage of the seven visible spheres ... along the gateway of the zodiac.” Of course, such a wild claim requires

some evidence, but, as we shall see, Campbell had very little understanding of what would be required to meet such standards.

Rather than supplying data that would indicate these “priestly watchers of the night sky” possessed the knowledge he assumed they possessed, he conjured up numerological gymnastics reminiscent of the calculations of pyramidologists. Traveling from India to Babylon to Israel and more, he found the magical number 432 everywhere. He then multiplied 432 by 60 and arrived at 25920 (the approximate length of the precessional cycle). He used this as evidence of the knowledge of precession which he asserted was known in Egypt and elsewhere by the third millennium BC. He also believed it significant that 25,920 can be manipulated as $2 + 5 + 9 + 2 + 0 = 18$ while Noah's age at the flood of 1656 likewise yields $1 + 6 + 5 + 6 = 18$. Both are multiples of 9 and 432 gives $4 + 3 + 2 = 9$.

All of this is, of course, along the same lines as the infamous “Bible Codes” or manipulations of the dimensions of the Great Pyramid where the only thing actually proven is the cleverness of the one promoting the magical formulas. When, for example, we consider the manipulation of the digits at the end of the previous paragraph, we can notice it is totally dependent upon the decimal numbering system that was not in use by any of the cultures he considered. This is the problem with numerological excursions such as these: After the fact, you can play with numbers to achieve any desired result. Evidence of this can be found by reading pyramidologists or the eschatological calculations of Harold Camping.

Campbell's key error was in using mythology as the determiner of Mesopotamian scientific knowledge. At no point did he ever consult the writings of those “watchers of the night skies” he praised. If he had, he would have found they did not use the zodiac until the first millennium BC and knowledge of precession was nowhere present. As with others who cling to the romantic notion of great knowledge stretching back many millennia, Campbell rejected the scholarly opinion on the issues without any real understanding of the evidence.

Appendix 3 – *Hamlet's Mill*

In 1969, Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend published their theory of a neolithic monomyth based upon the zodiac and precession in *Hamlet's Mill*. Ignoring a century's worth of research on the development of Sumerian and Babylonian thought culled from the cuneiform tablets, the authors attempted to resuscitate Panbabylonianism from the dustbin of history and conjured novel interpretations of anything in any mythology implying change as a metaphor for precession through the signs of the zodiac. Needless to say, academic reviewers found their presentation less than convincing.

Even worse, not only did Santillana and von Dechend reject a century's worth of research on the topic, but they did not even address it. In fact, they appeared ignorant of results that preceded their book by over half a century and instead they retrieved sources a century or more out of date from the long obsolete tomes from centuries past.

Relying upon such outdated source material negates the core of their thesis. Edmund Leach pointed out [\[158\]](#) that over half the book consisted of “complex arguments about Indo-European etymologies which would have seemed old-fashioned as early as 1870.” For example, they cite Adlabert Kuhn's claim that Prometheus is related to the Sanskrit “Pra Mantha”, elaborate upon the Prometheus story, and conclude his fall is related to an ancient understanding of the shifting of the pole star. Putting aside the issues with their reconstruction, we are left with an even greater problem: the etymological connection postulated by Kuhn was demonstrated to be impossible long ago.

As for their neolithic precession mythology, Leach splashes some very cold water on the theory:

Whether any such cosmic legend ever existed anywhere at all, all in one piece, seems, on the evidence of this book, to be extremely doubtful, but those who want to believe in such

improbabilities as flying saucers are never likely to be put off by mere lack of evidence.

The “flying saucer” remark anticipated the continued stubbornness of those supporting the theory and Leach drove the point home further:

The whole enterprise is rather like a demonstration that Francis Bacon wrote the plays of William Shakespeare. Provided you are certain of your answers before you start, the clues and acrostics can be found almost anywhere.

Obviously, Leach did not consider *Hamlet's Mill* to be a work of serious scholarship.

Leach was certainly not alone in his assessment. Jaan Puhvel concluded the book was “not a serious scholarly work on the problem of myth in the closing decades of the twentieth century”^[159] while Hilda Davidson declared it “amateurish in the worst sense, jumping to wild conclusions without any knowledge of the historical value of the sources or of previous work done.”^[160]

At this point one might wonder why professional scholars would ever release what appears to be drivel with their academic reputations hanging in the balance. Yet such things do happen when they enter areas where they are unfamiliar with the basic knowledge needed to do research in that area. The work of G. A. Wells in historical Jesus studies demonstrated how an eminent professor of German can make a fool of himself in areas where he does not understand the issues. Similarly, the fact that Barry Fell was an actual zoologist did not prevent him from becoming a notorious pseudoarchaeologist. In both cases, these were legitimate scholars who were carried away by romantic notions of the rightness of their cause combined with a lack of understanding of the relevant academic disciplines.

Giorgio de Santillana was always a bit of a maverick – part historian, part visionary philosopher – who often imposed his own biases upon the historical evidence. Although usually an excellent writer, his skill and zeal did not translate into reliable historical research and much of his output, such as *The Crimes of Gallileo*, has not aged well. In *Hamlet's Mill*, even the usual clarity of his writing was muted (probably by von Dechend) and the result was a confused mess of a book that went off on wild tangents and

seemed to attempt to confuse the reader into believing evidence had been presented for the book's thesis.

His collaboration with von Dechend does seem rather confusing. She was not, as some supporters of *Hamlet's Mill* claim, a mainstream figure among historians. In fact, without Giorgio de Santillana's imprimatur, it is not clear the book would have been published. While Santillana earlier had written on the subject and defended some similar conclusions, the data used in *Hamlet's Mill* are generally taken from notes by von Dechend.

When we look at the evidence presented, it is of a uniformly dismissable variety. Not only do they employ ridiculous etymologies and fanciful interpretations of ancient mythology, but they completely ignore any hard evidence provided by the very people (Mesopotamian astrologers) to whom they credit these neolithic discoveries. Following the lead of nineteenth century Panbabylonianism and even crackpot authors like Godfrey Higgins [\[161\]](#), they completely ignore the fact that we have hard evidence of what the ancient Mesopotamians knew and when they discovered it from their own records and it does not match the wild speculations of *Hamlet's Mill*.

Although *Hamlet's Mill* continues to find an audience predisposed to romantic ideas about the distant past, its arguments are based upon little but the wishful thinking of its authors. They frequently tied together claims based upon the most flimsy of evidence or they circularly assumed points because it was necessary to make their theory work. The authors were obviously unfamiliar with Babylonian astronomy/astrology and this doomed their project from its inception.

Appendix 4 – Acharya S, David Ulansey, and the “Age of Taurus”

One of many major problems facing the astrotheological theory favored by D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”) is that it is hard to argue that all of the religions of the ancients were based upon the zodiac and precession when the former was developed around 1000-500 B.C. and the latter was only discovered in the second century B.C. Given that cults based on Horus in Egypt and Mithra in Persia existed long before that time, this qualifies as a rather big fail.

Murdock has attempted to counter the evidence (although she never directly addresses it) by coming up with convoluted theories arguing for an earlier date. One of her pieces of evidence for an early knowledge of precession involves the Mithraic scholar David Ulansey. While Ulansey's theories are not universally accepted and there are notable opponents to some aspects of his theory, he is certainly a serious scholar on the subject. If, as Murdock claimed, he gave evidence of an early discovery of precession, then that evidence would need to be taken seriously.

Well, not surprisingly, such evidence is not provided by Ulansey and Murdock has completely misrepresented his argument. Although, in *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* he did claim a connection between Mithraism and precession, things were not quite what Murdock thought. Ulansey theorized a link between the characters of Mithraic iconography such as the slaying of the bull and the positions of constellations in the sky, but the iconographic elements he considered appear only in the *Roman cult of Mithras* and not the Persian cult of Mithra. In fact, from the outset, Ulansey made quite clear he was dealing solely with the Roman cult.

It is a common mistake of *Zeitgeist* defenders like Murdock to conflate the two cults but, apart from the name, they have few similarities. [\[162\]](#) In

fact, Ulansey linked Mithras less to the Persian god than to the Greek Perseus. Obviously, this could not be connected to some early knowledge of the precession of the equinoxes and Ulansey *explicitly states that Hipparchus discovered the phenomenon in the second century.* [\[163\]](#)

Another factor that Murdock overlooks is that the change from the sun rising in Taurus to Aries would not have been in the far distant past for the ancients. She bases her calculations upon a modern convention that does not correspond to ancient beliefs. As Ulansey has pointed out, there was an eight degree difference which meant that the change from Taurus to Aries was far more recent and the subsequent change to Pisces would not have occur until half a millennium later. [\[164\]](#)

Thus when Murdock cites Ulansey in support of an early discovery of precession in the following excerpt:

As we have seen, the knowledge of the precession evidently dates back centuries before being formally described in writing by Hipparchus in the second century BCE, and it appears that in Mithraism we possess a clear vestige of myths and traditions developed during the Age of Taurus as well as centuries afterward, in order to reflect the supposedly proper mythology for that time period. This point about Mithra's relationship to Taurus is demonstrated quite well by Ulansey in his book *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries.* [\[165\]](#)

it is clear that she either had not read or had not understood the book she was using as her scholarly witness.

For in reality, the theory Ulansey backed clearly places the discovery of precession in the second century B.C. by Hipparchus and that event was the impetus for the Roman cult of Mithraism. Earlier Persian cults in the far distant past play absolutely no role in Ulansey's theory. This is just one of many examples of Murdock "quotemining" real scholars in support of her ideas when they had nothing of the sort in mind.

Appendix 5 – Acharya S, Edwin C. Krupp, and the Precession of the Equinoxes

Among the sources used by D. M. Murdock to support an ancient use of the zodiac and a knowledge of precession is the astronomer Edwin C. Krupp. Yet how decisive are Krupp's opinions on this matter and what is his actual view?

First of all, there is no doubting Krupp's acumen as an astronomer nor of his interest in the history of the subject and his ability as a popularizer for it. However, despite such skills, he is not a historian and he might not yet have examined all the evidence for the consensus viewpoint when the cited book [\[166\]](#) was published. Even if he had, it might be that he chose to offer different opinions because he wanted to present differing views and had not examined the question thoroughly enough to reach his own conclusions on the matter.

When one reads the cited passages in context, it soon becomes apparent he was not siding with an early knowledge but offering arguments in both directions. The first of these is the following:

The earliest known direct reference to precession is that of the Greek astronomer Hipparchus (second century BC) who is credited with discovering it. Adjustment of Egyptian temple alignments, pointed out by Sir Norman Lockyear, may well indicate a much earlier sensitivity to this phenomenon, however. [\[167\]](#)

The problem with this particular citation is that it really says little about whether the Egyptians had any real knowledge of precession or were merely aware of an anomaly in the orientation of some temples. The Egyptians, whose temples were often oriented towards definite positions of

stellar phenomena when they were constructed, would have noticed when a temple was not properly aligned. This may have necessitated, by their belief system, to embark on adjustments to that temple.

Such adjustments do not, however indicate that the Egyptians knew anything about precession. Whether they knew an adjustment was needed does not imply they understood the regularity of such adjustments. Hence, Krupp states that the Egyptians may have had “sensitivity” to the phenomenon but he never said they understood it.

Another quote by Krupp that Murdock used goes somewhat further as Krupp states:

Circumstantial evidence implies that the awareness of the shifting equinoxes may be of considerable antiquity, for we find, in Egypt at least, a succession of cults whose iconography and interest focus on duality, the bull, and the ram at the appropriate periods for Gemini, Taurus, and Aries in the precessional cycle of the equinoxes. [\[168\]](#)

Of course, Murdock leaves out the very next observation where Krupp splashes some water of reality on the speculation:

Comprehensive knowledge of precession seems to be incompatible with the descriptive non-mathematical picture of astronomy that is the natural conclusion of Otto Neugebauer's and R. A. Parker's meticulous analyses of Egyptian astronomical texts. [\[169\]](#)

Thus we can see that Krupp was not yet voicing a strong opinion on the matter but presenting arguments on both sides. This open attitude may have been influenced by attention then given to *Hamlet's Mill* and he may have chosen to leave the matter open until the dust settled.

As for the argument he outlined above concerning facets of Egyptian iconography and interests, this argument fails as the Egyptians did not at that time use the zodiac and would not until the Ptolemaic era. Nor were they as concerned with the spring equinox to start their year as were other cultures since their agricultural cycle was uniquely tied to the flooding of the Nile. Thus, Krupp's argument is completely wrongheaded from the very start.

An argument might be made that the Egyptians knew of precession not as it related to the zodiac but to their own system of decans. Since all that is needed is a relational grid to fix a tropical year, any system – including that of decans – would suffice when combined with a sufficiently strong theoretical mathematical apparatus to make the proper calculations. It is here, however, where the relatively primitive mathematical tools (when compared to the more advanced techniques of the Babylonians and later the Greeks) proved insufficient to the task. While, as mentioned, the Egyptians may have known of some anomalous occurrences that caused them to reconfigure older temples, there is no indication they considered any theoretical possibilities for these anomalies and certainly there is no evidence they ever understood the phenomenon of precession.

This is further confirmed by the fact that the Greeks were still unaware of precession after they controlled Egypt and had access to its wisdom. It would also have been highly unusual for the great Egyptian astronomer and astrologer Ptolemy to credit this discovery to Hipparchus if it had been known by the Egyptians for millennia.

In a dispute with New Testament scholar and Christian apologist Mike Licona, Krupp was cited by Murdock to counter Licona's citation of Noel Swerdlow – one of the preeminent scholars on the history of science. In response, Licona then contacted Krupp and asked about his views on the age of the zodiac and the knowledge of precession. In his answer to this inquiry, Krupp made clear his current opinion on the matter:

Professor Swerdlow is well informed on the ancient history of astronomy and astrology, and his report to you reflects current scholarly opinion formulated by textual evidence. Although people have traditionally projected terrestrial concerns and priorities onto the sky in celestial myth, the detailed astrological mapping your opponent advocates is not supported by evidence and certainly cannot be tracked back two millennia or more as described. [\[170\]](#)

Thus even Murdock's chosen source sided with Licona and Swerdlow against her claims.

At a later date, Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit, also supporters of elements of the astrotheological thesis [\[171\]](#), contacted Krupp on his views – perhaps hoping the earlier opinion forwarded by Licona was not entirely accurate. Krupp was very straightforward in voicing his current views:

Although it seems possible some cultures reacted without archaic memory to the seasonal displacement of stars over centuries, there is no persuasive evidence to confirm a conscious and systematic understanding of precession before Hipparchus. In fact, the evidence suggests Hipparchus really did make and quantify this remarkable discovery, and there is direct evidence his discovery had an impact on the intellectual framework of religion soon after. [\[172\]](#)

Thus Krupp's final verdict on the subject is quite firm that precession was indeed discovered by Hipparchus although, as mentioned earlier, others may have reacted to the phenomena without understanding it.

Appendix 6 – The “Karanovo Zodiac”

One piece of evidence used by D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”) to argue for a much earlier date for the use of the zodiac is an artifact she called the “Karanovo Zodiac” – a misleading as scholars refer to it as the “Karanovo Seal.” A disk divided into quadrants and found in what is today Bulgaria, it was declared a zodiac by amateur researcher Richard D. Flavin in an article [\[173\]](#) originally published in a journal founded by actual zoologist but pseudoarchaeologist Barry Fell.

Scholars studying the Karanovo culture have not followed Flavin's lead for quite obvious reasons: the alleged connections are little more than the pictographic equivalents of seeing animal shapes in clouds. Simply put, the symbols do not a close resemblance to the constellations Flavin claims they depict.

Even worse, other artifacts have been found with similar symbols that have been linked to later cultures in the region such as the Vinca and Minoans. Furthermore, Flavin had to combine and divide the symbols to construct his supposed “zodiac” of three constellations in each of the four quadrants. The actual number of symbols in each quadrant were not uniformly three but ranged from two to five.

The majority view is that these were some early “proto-writing” using pictographic symbols. Other scholars have insisted they are from an ancient system of writing as yet undeciphered. While we may never know the exact significance of these symbols, the supposed correspondences to the zodiac are unconvincing.

Yet even if Karanovo or some other neolithic site produced a zodiac, it would not help Murdock's case. For there is no evidence Egypt, Babylon, Persia, or other cultures pertinent to our discussion ever used the zodiac prior to the first millennium BC. If the zodiac had been used at an earlier time elsewhere, this practice had no legs and the Babylonians developed it

anew. There simply is no evidence of a pervasive solar religion using the zodiac as supporters of astrotheology contend.

Appendix 7 – Luke 22:10 and the “Age of Aquarius”

One of the most ridiculous assertions in the film *Zeitgeist* is the attempt to link Luke 22:10 to the “Age of Aquarius” – a future era when the sun will rise in the sign of Aquarius on the Spring Equinox. This bit of crackpot exegesis is explained in the *Zeitgeist* Source Guide as follows:

At Luke 22:10 when Jesus is asked by his disciples where the last Passover will be, Jesus replied: “Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you bearing a pitcher of water... follow him into the house where he entereth in.” This scripture is by far one of the most revealing of all the astrological references. The man bearing a pitcher of water is Aquarius, the water-bearer, who is always pictured as a man pouring out a pitcher of water. He represents the age after Pisces, and when the Sun, “God’s Sun,” leaves the Age of Pisces, “Jesus,” it will go into the House of Aquarius, as Aquarius follows Pisces in the precession of the equinoxes. All Jesus is saying is that after the Age of Pisces will come the Age of Aquarius. [\[174\]](#)

It is difficult to imagine an exegesis of the verse more absurd than the above. It is only possible to read such a meaning into Luke 22:10 if you completely ignore the actual context of the passage.

Before detailing the absurdity of the explanation given in the film, let us first look at the passage in its proper context. We begin at Luke 22:7-9:

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.” They said to him, “Where will you have us prepare it?”

Thus the context says nothing about the disciples asking where the last Passover would be and to claim such a thing is either blatant dishonesty or

complete incompetence. The actual context is that the day of preparation for the Passover had arrived and Jesus instructed Peter and John to make preparations for the meal. The question these two disciples asked was not about the “last Passover” but the Passover occurring that evening – a meal that occurred two thousand years ago. Turning next to Luke 22:10-13, the narrative continues as follows:

He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.” And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

Note that *Zeitgeist* cuts the narrative off in mid-sentence after “Follow him into the house that he enters ...” and infers the reference is to a house of the zodiac (Aquarius) and this is the house of the water bearer. But when you examine the passage in context with the complete sentence, they are to follow the man with the jar of water and then go to the master of the house. In other words, the water bearer is not who Jesus wants them to meet. In fact, this supposed “Aquarius” is obviously nothing more than a house servant. Moreover, the passage ends with the meal prepared and later eaten. It is not about some future age, but a meal two millennia ago. In context, it actually was the preparation for the Last Supper.

The absurdity of the *Zeitgeist* interpretation is quite apparent to anyone who bothered reading the passage. Yet you find the film's supporters clinging to this crackpot exegesis despite all the evidence to the contrary. It becomes quite apparent that they do not care about what the passage actually states. They find a sentence or even just a clause with a word attached to an astrological sign (e.g., bull, ram, fish, water), declare it an astrological metaphor, and ignore the surrounding context. It never occurs to those performing this “New Age Midrash” that bulls, rams, fish, and water might just be mentioned in a narrative set in a Mediterranean agrarian society.

You will not find such bizarre exegetical adventures in the work of actual New Testament scholars. Only in the work of those who combine an open

hostility to Christianity with a lack of concern for verifying anti-Christian claims could such nonsense take root.

Appendix 8 – Twelve in the Bible

Supporters of astrotheology often argue that the apostles represent the zodiac. After all, they both have the number twelve. Of course, when you point out so do common collections of eggs and donuts, they then counter there are many occasions of twelve in the Bible and so there must be a connection to the zodiac. Of course, at this point we can note that many of these predate the use of the zodiac but this requires they actually know a bit of history – a trait Jesus mythicists often avoid.

Fortunately, one does not need to go that far into explaining history. It turns out we need only note that much of the appearances of twelve in the Bible are actually based upon a single use of twelve: the twelve sons of Jacob. The rest are simply derived from this single case. Thus the alleged mountain of twelves becomes something less than a molehill and nothing remarkable at all.

In *Zeitgeist*, there is a list of uses of twelve that is intended to convince us the use of the number is so overwhelming that there must be something to a connection to the signs of the zodiac. They give the list as follows:

- 12 Tribes of Israel
- 12 Sons of Jacob
- 12 Great Patriarchs
- 12 Old Testament Prophets
- 12 Kings of Israel
- 12 Princes of Israel

while the recent source guide provides the following expanded list of occurrences of twelve in the Old Testament:

- 12 Princes of Ishmael (Genesis 17:20).
- 12 Sons of Jacob (Genesis 35:22).
- 12 Tribes of Israel (Genesis 49:28).
- 12 Prophets and Kings of Israel.

- 12 Wells of Water (Exodus 15:27).
- 12 Pillars of the Lord (Exodus 24:4).
- 12 Stones of the Breastplate (Exodus 39:14).
- 12 Cakes of the Tabernacle (Leviticus 24:5).
- 12 Princes of Israel (Numbers 1:44).
- 12 Oxen of the Tabernacle (Numbers 7:3).
- 12 Chargers of Silver, Bowls of Silver, 12 Spoons of Gold (Numbers 7:84).
- 12 Bulls, Rams, Lambs, and Kids of the Offering (Numbers 7:87).
- 12 Rods of the Princes of Israel (Numbers 17:6).
- 12 Stones of Joshua (I Kings 18:31).
- 12 Cities (Joshua 18:24, 19:25, 21:7, 21:40).
- 12 Judges of Israel (Judges 3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 13).
- 12 Pieces of the Concubine (Judges 19:29).
- 12 Servants of David (II Samuel 2:15).
- 12 Officers of Solomon (I Kings 4:7).
- 12 Lions of Solomon (I Kings 10:20).
- 12 Pieces of Jeroboam's Garment (I Kings 11:30).
- 12 Stones of Elijah (I Kings 18:31).
- 12 Bronze Bulls of Solomon (Jeremiah 52:20).

and these for the New Testament:

- 12 Disciples/Apostles of Jesus (Matthew 10:1-2).
- 12 Baskets of Bread (Matthew 14:20).
- 12 Thrones in Heaven (Matthew 19:28).
- 12 Legions of Angels (Matthew 26:53).
- 12 Patriarchs of Israel (Acts 7:8).
- 12 Stars of the Woman's Crown (Revelation 12:1).
- 12 Gates, Angels, and Pearls of Holy Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12, 21)
- 12 Fruits of the Tree of Life (Revelation 22:2).

So how many unique uses of twelve actually occur?

Anyone familiar with the Old Testament can immediately see major problems with treating some of these as separate occurrences. For the Old Testament, many cases of twelve follow from the twelve sons of Jacob. In

the New Testament, many of the occurrences of twelve similarly are based upon the twelve Apostles. In fact, the reason Jesus chose twelve Apostles is itself obviously based upon the twelve sons of Jacob for just as the promise of a great nation was founded through the twelve sons of Jacob, so the New Covenant people were founded through the twelve Apostles of Jesus.

Considering first the Old Testament, first note that the twelve tribes of Israel are descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob and the leaders of each tribe are the patriarchs. Thus, much of this already reduces to a single occurrence of twelve. Thus we immediately have some reason to believe those making such claims do not possess anything more than a superficial understanding of the Biblical texts.

This assessment is confirmed when we turn to the matter of the twelve Kings and Prophets. It is interesting to note that, unlike other claims, this one was not given any citation in the source guide. There is a good reason for this: the claim of twelve Kings and Prophets is false.

On the matter of the prophets, there are far more than twelve prophets in the Old Testament. One presumes this was derived from erroneously identifying the prophets with the twelve minor prophets whose books appear at the end of the Old Testament. This, of course, leaves out Samuel, Elijah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel – men who obviously belong on any list of Old Testament prophets. This is an amateurish mistake made by someone who has no real competence in understanding the Old Testament.

Even worse is the claim of twelve Kings. This is complete nonsense as, after the last ruler of the united monarchy of Israel and Judah (ending with King Solomon), there were nineteen Kings of Israel and twenty Kings of Judah. Again there is apparently little familiarity with the Old Testament.

The twelve Princes of Israel is identified in the *Zeitgeist* source guide with a reference to Numbers 1:44. This title relied upon the KJV but it actually referred to the leaders of each of the twelve tribes. Of course, this again reduces to the fact that the tribes were the descendants of each of the sons of Jacob. The twelve Rods of the Princes of Israel obviously derives from the above explanation.

The twelve Pillars of the Lord, the twelve Stones of the Breastplate, the twelve Cakes of the Tabernacle, twelve Oxen of the Tabernacle, twelve chargers of silver, twelve bowls of silver, twelve spoons of gold, and the

twelve Bulls, Rams, Lambs, and Kids of the Offering were all one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. In fact, almost all had been described as such in the context of the cited verses! Thus all of these again reduced to the twelve sons of Jacob and had no relation to the zodiac.

Similarly, the context of the verse given for the twelve Stones of Joshua clearly states they were taken from the Jordan with one for each of the tribes of Israel. Similarly, the context of the verse cited for the twelve Stones of Elijah states he took one stone for each of the tribes of the Sons of Jacob. There were also cases where something was divided and sent to each of the twelve tribes (pieces of the concubine, pieces of Jeroboam's garment) and hence the use of twelve is again dependent upon the Sons of Jacob.

Obviously, by this point anything relating to the worship (including elements of Solomon's Temple) or administration of Israel is likely to include twelve as either directly given by or symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel who are the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. Thus there is no reason to believe any such usage has anything to do with the zodiac. This leaves only a handful of remaining “twelves” in the Old Testament and in a text of that size with that many things described in detail, it is not remarkable at all.

Turning to the New Testament, the twelve baskets were each carried by an Apostle and the twelve thrones are for the Apostles so they reduce to the same occurrence – that of the Apostles who are in turn based upon the twelve Sons of Jacob.

Finally, when dealing with the apocalyptic passages such as occur in the Book of Revelation, one must understand the symbolism of Jewish apocalyptic and its references to the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus the symbolism of references to the New Jerusalem will obviously include sets of twelve and should be expected.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly to keep a proper perspective, a collection of texts the size of the Bible will contain numerous references to numbers of objects that will naturally include repeated references to some of them. Thus we would expect many occurrences of “one” because of the references to God who is one. We would also expect many references to twelve in reference to the twelve tribes of Israel.

When we check the number of occurrences of different numbers, we would also expect the lower numbers to occur far more frequently than numbers above twenty. In other words, we find nothing unusual in the makeup of the Bible.

Consider the following breakdown of occurrences of numbers between one and twenty in the Bible (KJV): One – 1,695 occurrences; Two – 705 occurrences; Three – 436 occurrences; Four – 282 occurrences; Five – 270 occurrences; Six – 190 occurrences; Seven – 391 occurrences; Eight – 80 occurrences; Nine – 49 occurrences; Ten – 223 occurrences; Eleven – 24 occurrences; Twelve – 164 occurrences; Thirteen – 15 occurrences; Fourteen – 23 occurrences; Fifteen – 24 occurrences; Sixteen – 23 occurrences; Seventeen – 10 occurrences; Eighteen – 22 occurrences; Nineteen – 3 occurrences; Twenty – 262 occurrences.

There are a handful of numbers that stand out as more frequent. Lower numbers and multiples of ten fit into this category. Seven is important in the apocalyptic and some other books because it symbolized perfection in the ancient world. The twelve Sons of Jacob are an obvious reason for the large number of twelves but note that even other numbers occurred quite often without the benefit of such a boost. In other words, given a large enough textual base, references are likely to build.

As an example, take another famous large work: *Moby Dick*. In Herman Melville's classic story of Captain Ahab's battle with a whale, one can find references to twelve o'clock, twelve columns, twelve months, twelve inches, twelve feet, twelve sitting rooms, twelve weeks, twelve rods, twelve hours, and twelve years. [\[175\]](#) Do these occurrences indicate some deep astrotheological meaning or just that a text that long likely will contain some occurrences of the word “twelve”?

The attempts to link the Bible to astrology – a practice it explicitly condemns – via the number twelve ignores the fact that most of the occurrences are related to the twelve Tribes of Israel that are in turn descended from Jacob's twelve sons. It illustrates not only a confirmation bias but a total lack of competence in handling the Biblical texts.

Appendix 9 – Acharya S' “Amateur Witness” on Denderah

One of the dead horses Acharya S continually dredged up to argue for an early date for the zodiac was the zodiac found on the ceiling of Denderah Temple in Egypt. Some authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had argued for its great antiquity with some claiming it went back 10,000 or more years. Thus, when it was definitively demonstrated to be from the first century BC to first century AD, this put that idea firmly in the dustbin of failed hypotheses. Of course, since Murdock used the same outdated sources in her first book (*The Christ Conspiracy*), she was quite oblivious to something every Egyptologist had known for over a century.

By the time of Murdock's *Christ in Egypt* in 2009, her numerous errors concerning the zodiac had already come to light and she vainly attempted to shore up her failing ideas. One of these efforts concerned attempting to reopen the argument over the date of Denderah – an argument long settled against her scenario. She alluded to its depiction being as much as 10,000 years old by some “amateur” estimates. ^[176] Her source, Jules Barthelemy Saint-Hillaire, was an admitted amateur but he certainly did not support such a date as can be seen in the passage below:

The reader will remember the controversy occasioned by the famous Zodiac, discovered in this temple, and which at present occupies an obscure place in one of the lower halls of the Imperial Library in Paris. It was at first imagined that this Zodiac represented the aspect of the heavens five, six, or even ten thousand years ago. A multitude of inferences were drawn from this hypothesis, each more certain and weighty than the rest. The partisans of the *Origine des Cultes* triumphed, and this unexceptionable evidence fully confirmed their views. The

mistake was rendered ridiculous enough, when it was proved that this pretended Egyptian Zodiac, supposed to be anterior to the Deluge, was only a poor astronomical work of the first century of our era, attributable to some ignorant Greek or Roman artist. [\[177\]](#)

Thus Saint-Hillaire was only mentioning the initial speculation of others that turned out to be a mistake that was “rendered ridiculous.” The mention of the *Origine des Cultes* is a reference to the French edition of Dupuis' work.

It is interesting to note that in discussing his amateur status, Saint-Hillaire stated:

I do not pretend, as I have before said, to understand or interpret the hieroglyphics, nor have I made any new discovery; my acquaintance with these enigmas, sculptured on the walls of palaces and temples, is derived from the writings and researches of the younger Champollion, Wilkinson, De Rouge, Prisse, Lepsius, Mariette, and other Egyptian historiographers. The discoveries made by Champollion are not disputed, and I rely on the interpretations of the learned, whose labours I do not pretend to criticize. [\[178\]](#)

Perhaps rather than beating a long dead horse, Murdock should consider emulating this “amateur.”

In the same conversation, Murdock writes off the rejection of an early date for Denderah by Elijah J. Burritt, a contemporary of Saint-Hillaire, as motivated by "bibliolatry." [\[179\]](#) While the debate over the Denderah zodiac did initially split along skeptical vs. Christian lines [\[180\]](#), there is no longer doubt among scholars of any persuasion that it is about two thousand years old.

While Burritt was understandably gleeful that a challenge to the Bible had been overcome, Murdock ignored the reasons he outlined for his confident dismissal of an early date:

The discovery of Champollion has put this question forever at rest; and M. Latronne, a most learned antiquary, has very satisfactorily demonstrated that these Egyptian Zodiacs are merely the horoscopes of distinguished personages, or the precise situation of the heavenly bodies in the Zodiac at their nativity. The idea that such was their purpose and origin, first suggested itself to this gentleman on finding, in the box of a mummy, a similar Zodiac, with such inscriptions and characters as determined it to be the horoscope of the deceased person.

[\[181\]](#)

Thus both the “amateur” Saint-Hillaire and the “bibliolator” Burritt were in complete agreement and both of these nineteenth century authors were more current in their understanding of Denderah than Murdock.

Appendix 10 – Acharya S on Christmas

After numerous debunkings of Zeitgeist began circulating on the internet, D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”) mounted a defense of its claims in a video. While much of the video is strange, one segment was especially odd: a defense of the film's use of the December 25 date as a central focus.

Christian apologists had pointed out that this date had not entered Christianity until centuries after it began. Even conceding the date had pagan origins, this would only demonstrate later syncretism. It has nothing to do with the origins of Christianity and so it cannot be used to assert Jesus was really a copy of pagan solar deities.

Please note that there is no doubt that Zeitgeist focused on the date of December 25. They tied Jesus to other pagan gods through that date and they explained the date in terms of an astronomical phenomenon occurring at the winter solstice. Thus, without that date at the origins of Christianity, the film's case falls flat on its face. The only possible way of defending the film's use of the date would be to tie the date to Christianity's origins – something for which there is no evidence.

So how does Murdock respond to such criticism? Her response to the Christian apologists begins:

One strawman argument raised by debunkers concerns the December 25 birthdate of various gods which apologists dismiss by claiming Jesus wasn't really born at that time.

This is evidence that Murdock does not understand what constitutes a strawman argument and is merely using the term in an attempt to brush off criticism without addressing it. For the Christian responses to actually be a strawman argument, the responses must distort the film's position. In other words, the film would not actually center any of their arguments on the December 25 date. This is clearly not the case and so no strawman argument has occurred. Murdock then continues:

However, since the fourth century when this winter solstice celebration was designated as Christ's birthday, hundreds of millions of people have been taught that December 25 *is* the date of Christ's birth and hundreds of millions continue to celebrate that date every year. Indeed, Christian preachers today still insist that Jesus *is* the “reason for the season.”

This part of her response is so illogical as to almost defy description. She is responding to criticism that the December 25 date is not really Jesus' birthday but entered the Church centuries later. She then admits it became recognized as Jesus' birthday centuries later, the fourth century to be exact, but counters that millions of Christians *after* the fourth century believed it was Jesus' birthday. While the latter is true, it is also completely irrelevant. All that her point demonstrates is that the date was widely accepted after the Church instituted it in the fourth century – it does nothing to prove that anyone thought December 25 was Jesus' birthday at Christianity's origins.

As completely misguided as her response has been up to this point, it takes a turn for the crazy with the next part of her response:

Furthermore, in 2007, the United States House of Representatives passed House Resolution 847 officially declaring December 25 to be the birthday of Jesus Christ.

Murdock claims the United States House of Representatives officially declared “December 25 to be the birthday of Jesus Christ.” But did it? And if it did, does it matter?

I will tackle the latter question first. It is difficult to see how a declaration by a twenty-first century government adds something that one by a fourth century government (the Roman Empire) did not. Does the opinion of then House speaker Nancy Pelosi carry more historical weight than that of the Roman emperor Constantine? Both declarations were political decisions with the Roman one substantial (linking a new favored religion with the Roman state) while the latter was inconsequential (politicians currying favor with a voting block). There is also a delicious irony in having a supporter of a conspiracy theorist film tell us to believe something because a branch of the United States government said so.

Given we should not read much into this resolution, the answer to the first question only makes the spectacle greater. For nowhere does the

resolution state December 25 to be the birthday of Jesus. It is a fairly innocuous document that acknowledges the Christmas holiday and also Christianity's importance in America's history. The only mention of December 25 is the following:

Whereas on December 25 of each calendar year, American Christians observe Christmas, the holiday celebrating the birth of their savior, Jesus Christ ... [\[182\]](#)

This does not declare, as Murdock claims, “December 25 to be the birthday of Jesus Christ.” All it states is that December 25 is observed by American Christians to *celebrate* the birth of Jesus Christ. As if this were not humorous enough, Murdock only adds to the guffaws by having the relevant sentence appear onscreen in her video as she makes her erroneous assertion. Thus the visual images of her own video disprove her claims in real time.

Thus once more D. M. Murdock has given witness to her inability to properly understand the context of statements. Motivated solely by her own animus toward Christianity, she is blinded to even the most obvious of facts and nothing she cites can be trusted to be accurately represented at face value.

Appendix 11 – Acharya S, Cyprian of Carthage, and the Winter Solstice

Jesus mythicists continue to search for ways of connecting the origins of Christianity to the date of December 25. For everyone else in the world, it seems pretty obvious that this date entered Christianity centuries after its beginnings, but this would undermine their thesis so they need to find some evidence – or make some up.

One example offered as evidence by D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”) is a passage in a third century text titled *De Pascha Computus* that has often been wrongly attributed to Cyprian of Carthage.^[183] Murdock cited the Catholic Encyclopedia quoting the following passage from the work:

O, how wonderfully acted Providence that on that day on which that Sun was born ... Christ should be born.

and cited it as evidence of “the origins of the solar holiday of December 25th vis-à-vis Christianity.”^[184]

First of all, even if what she stated was true, all it would demonstrate is that the date had entered the reckoning of third century Christians at a local level – something few would dispute. However, it certainly has no bearing on the concerns of the original Christians centuries earlier and no one but the ideologically motivated would suggest it does.

However, the claim fails at an even more basic level. In *De Pascha Computus*, the author calculated the birthday of Jesus not as anything related to the winter solstice but as March 28. Relying upon Jewish tradition that the world was created on the same date as Passover, he then claimed to calculate that date to March 25. Since the Bible had the sun created on the fourth day, this also occurred on March 28 and hence the actual reason for the quote above. It had nothing to do with the winter solstice and

astrological considerations were never used. The portion omitted by the ellipsis (...) mentions the March 28 date.

Furthermore, the entry cited from the Catholic Encyclopedia merely states *De Pascha Computus* was the “earliest *rapprochement* of the births of Christ and the sun.” Hence, the implication was only that the birth of Christ and the creation of the sun were brought together but neither the date nor the reason was given. It certainly gives no indication the winter solstice was involved. In fact elsewhere in the same entry, it states:

With Clement's evidence may be mentioned the *De Pascha Computus*, written in 243 and falsely ascribed to Cyprian, which places Christ's birth on 28 March, because on that day the material sun was created. [\[185\]](#)

Once again, a source used by Murdock and some other mythicists has clearly been misrepresented. Yet, even with their abysmal track record, they continue to act surprised when no one takes their claims at face value.

Appendix 12 – We Three Kings

The film *Zeitgeist* has the following to say concerning the visitation of the Magi:

The star in the east is Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, which, on December 24th, aligns with the three brightest stars in Orion's Belt. These three bright stars in Orion's belt are called today what they were called in ancient times: The Three Kings. The Three Kings and the brightest star, Sirius, all point to the place of the sunrise on December 25th. This is why the Three Kings "follow" the star in the east, in order to locate the sunrise -- the birth of the sun.

Thus they explain the visitation of the Magi completely in terms of events that occur in the sky on the evening leading up to the rising of the sun on December 25.

The first and most obvious problem is that the entire theory is based upon the date of December 25 – a date that did not enter Christianity until centuries after the Gospel of Matthew was written. Furthermore, the date's supposed importance results from its being “three days” after the winter solstice on December 22. The problem here is that December 25 was not fixed to three days after the solstice until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1582. Under the older Julian calendar, the date of the winter solstice changed approximately every 125 years and so there could not possibly be any such pattern in place for Christians to emulate.

Yet such anachronisms are only the beginning of problems for this theory. The Gospel of Matthew refers to an unspecified number of magi or wise men and not three kings. The number three was assumed because there were three gifts but, since the gifts were likely from a group of magi and not three individuals, the exact number of the gifts was irrelevant.

The “Star in the East” is never identified in the Gospel of Matthew and there is no indication it is Sirius. Moreover, the claim that Sirius “aligns” with the three stars in Orion's belt on the night of December 24 is itself

bogus. The statement implies something unique occurs on that particular night when they “align,” but in reality the stars are in the same position relative to each other every day of the year. There is nothing unique in their alignment that occurs on December 24-25. These stars are always in a relatively straight line.

Nor does the claim of these stars in line pointing to the sunrise amount to much. Unlike the depiction presented in *Zeitgeist*, the stars in Orion's belt and Sirius do not rise and point in close proximity to the rising sun but have already set in the West when the sun rises on December 25. Nor does the claim that they point to where the sun will rise later amount to much: since the stars are on an angle, it cuts a swath across the Eastern horizon and thus likely hits the sunrise spot on many nights when they are visible – not just the night before December 25.

Not only does this association fail astronomically, it also fails as an allegory. All four objects (Sirius and Orion's belt) are stars and so a true allegory would “translate” all of them similarly. In other words, all four would be characters in the story and the character representing Sirius would lead the others to Jesus who represents the sun. But in their supposed allegory, there is a mismatch with the stars of Orion's belt becoming characters and Sirius left a star. Thus, the very nature of an allegory is violated at the outset.

Finally, and perhaps most damaging, a key assertion in the story is blatantly false: the three stars in Orion's belt were never called “three kings” in antiquity as this first appears in early modern star charts. While it might date back to medieval astrology, the label was derived *from* earlier Christian tradition and was not its cause. This is a major problem since, if no such association existed in the past, the supposed allegory lacks any factual basis.

In the work of such nineteenth century pseudoscholars as Gerald Massey, the use of the term in antiquity for the three stars was assumed but no evidence given. Massey and others needed such an association in antiquity to exist and so they assumed it did. In reality, it came much later and there is no record of such an identification in the ancient world.

D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”) has attempted to conjure up some evidence of an earlier use of the term for the stars in Orion's belt but none

of her examples withstand even a cursory examination. In every case, her supposed evidence points to a modern post-New Testament development.

For example, she used as evidence a nineteenth century publication on various oddities.^[186] However, this only answered an earlier question asking why Orion's belt is sometimes called "Three Kings."^[187] Thus the answer is referring to a modern – not ancient – usage. Moreover, the answer stated it was a reference to the "Three Kings" of traditional Christian lore and gave other terms used for the three stars that were also dependent upon the prior existence of the Christian faith. Similar references to eighteenth century astronomer Elijah Burritt, nineteenth century folklorist Annie Weston Whitney, and Simone Weil calling the three stars, respectively, the "three kings,"^[188] "three kings of soothsayers,"^[189] and "the Magi"^[190] also referred to modern developments.

Murdock also argued the importance to Egyptian thought of Sirius and Orion but this point is not in dispute. No one denies Sirius and Orion were important to Egypt – it is their importance to the story of the Magi in early Christianity that is in question. On this point, Murdock comes up empty.

Added to this was Murdock's allusion to the theories of Robert Bauval and Graham Hancock linking the pyramids of Giza to Orion's belt. The inference here was the three major pyramids at Giza were the tombs of pharaohs, the tombs were aligned with the three stars in Orion's belt, and thus the stars linked to three kings (or pharaohs). This claim, however, is complete nonsense.

The idea the Egyptians might have built these three pyramids to mimic the stars in Orion's belt does not seem out of the question until you realize Bauval, Hancock, and others are not claiming a match to stellar positions during the fourth dynasty when the pyramids were constructed. Instead, they claim the configuration matches the sky in 10,500 B.C. when a great global civilization remembered as Atlantis collapsed and survivors came to Egypt, built the Sphinx, and stored their wisdom in a secret chamber under that structure. It gets even stranger when they assert the energy at the Giza complex could lead to a global transformation and somehow tie it all to the supposed "face" on Mars and alleged pyramids on the red planet. The idea of the secret chamber, as well as the 10,500 B.C. date, is tied to the

occultists Edgar Cayce. Thus the motivation among some supporters of the theory is quite clear. Just as occurred with astrotheology, the ideas of "alternative Egyptology" are rooted in the esoteric visions of modern occultists.

More recently, Joseph and Murdock's joint source guide attempted to buttress their troubled theory with additional references to the stars of Orion's belt as the Three Kings:

The moniker of "Three Kings" for these stars in the belt of Orion is documented all over the world. For example, South Africans call Orion's Belt *Drie Konings* – "Three Kings" – while in French they are the "Trois Rois."^[191]

Of course, these references from all over the world were in fact *modern* and had no bearing on how things were perceived in antiquity. Nor were they truly global: the South Africans who use "Drie Kronings" are white speakers of Afrikaans – a language derived from Dutch.

Hence, at the most basic level, the entire theory concerning the Three Kings is completely misguided. It turns out that the identification of the magi as kings was derived not from stars in Orion's belt or prior pagan religions but from the Old Testament. In passages in both Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72 often interpreted as Messianic prophecies, there are references to kings bearing gifts. Of course, Jesus mythicists are only looking for pagan connections – not Jewish ones – and so they miss the obvious.

Appendix 13 – Acharya S, John L. Heilbron, and the Dating of Easter

In the Zeitgeist source guide by D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”) and Peter Joseph (the film’s creator), the following claim appears concerning Easter:

That the date for “Easter” is in reality based on astronomy, rather than an actual crucifixion of the Lord of the universe, is demonstrated by the centuries-long battle within Christendom as to when precisely this spring holiday should be celebrated. As stated by professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley, Dr. John L. Heilbron, in *The Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories*: “The old theologians decreed that Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox—that spring day on which the hours of daylight and darkness are equal.”^[192]

One would assume that if we were to read Dr. Heilbron’s book, it would add weight to the claim that the holiday was more based upon astronomy than an actual crucifixion. After all, that certainly appears to be the deduction made from the citation. However, as with many of the quotes Murdock and her allies cull from real scholars, the interpretation of Heilbron's words is more “quotemine” than a genuine representation of his opinion.

The issue at hand was the reason for the odd manner in which the Easter date is chosen. The thesis for his book is that the proper calculation of this date (which can vary by location) was a high priority for the Church and that a number of cathedrals were constructed to also be usable as a solar observatory for this purpose. This concern for astronomical interests, he

suggests, would give an impetus to the study of astronomy in Europe that reached fruition in later centuries.

However, he never claims the date for Jesus' resurrection indicated an astronomical rather than an historical event. The reason for the formula, one he covers in the book, is that the early celebrations of the death and resurrection of Jesus were based upon the Jewish Passover and converting the Jewish calendar to the Roman one is not a simple task. The date of Passover was 15 Nissan and, since Nissan was the first Spring month, the vernal equinox was chosen as a focal point. Jewish months began with the new moon and hence the fifteenth of the month, two weeks later, would be a full moon. Thus the Passover was attributed to the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Since Jesus rose on the Sunday following the start of Passover, this then gives us the formula of the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox. All of this is explained in detail within the first chapter of the book, but Murdock and Joseph chose to ignore it – if their familiarity with the book ever extended beyond a Google search for a usable quotemine.

Appendix 14 – Acharya S, J. M. Roberts, and the Gospel as Zodiac

It all comes down to sources. If you rely on crackpot sources, you will get crackpot results. This can easily happen if you are merely seeking a quote to use with little concern for the context of the statement. Take, for example, D. M. Murdock (aka “Acharya S”) who, in defending the idea of the Gospel as an illustration of the Zodiac, cited J. M. Roberts on the connection between Jesus and the solar year as follows:

. . . the passage of the Sun, in its annual course through the constellations of the Zodiac; having his birth in the sign of the Goat, the Augean stable of the Greeks; his baptism in Aquarius, the John the Baptist in the heavens; his triumph when he becomes the Lamb of God in Aries; his greatest exaltation on St. John’s, the beloved disciple’s day, on the 21st of June, in the Sign of the Twins, the emblem of double power; his tribulation in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the sign of the rural Virgo; his betrayal in the sign of Scorpio, the malignant emblem of his approaching death in the stormy and adverse sign, Sagittarius, and his resurrection or renewed birth on the twenty-fifth of December in the same sign of the celestial Goat . . .

At first look, this might seem quite impressive as there is a noted British historian named J. M. Roberts. However, this is not *that* J. M. Roberts. Instead it is Johnathan M. Roberts, a nineteenth century spiritualist. While this could now be initially dismissed, a look at Roberts’ book [\[193\]](#) only adds to the spectacle.

It turns out the cited quote was attributed by Roberts to the Roman historian Livy. In the same section, Livy was also said to have stated that had Christians not destroyed some of his writings in later centuries, we

would all have known about the true meaning of Christianity. By now you might be wondering how Livy could possibly know what Christians after his death might have done with his writings. Well, when someone actually bothers to read the book, they will find it to be a collection of messages Roberts supposedly received from the great beyond using a medium who apparently told him everything he wanted to hear. Either that or he made the whole thing up.

In any case, this “source” is so laughable that one wonders how anyone could have read this drivel and cited it as evidence of anything other than their own gullibility. Making the matter all the funnier is that Livy died around 31AD and thus had passed on before Christianity would have ever reached Rome. Hence there would not have been much for him to write about had he even sought to do such a thing.

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[1]

It must be noted that this does not mean just “Christian scholars.” Such views are not taken seriously by historians of ancient religion whether they be Christians, Jews, or simply lack any religious affiliation.

[2]

Wright, “Jesus' Self Understanding” in eds. Davis, Kendall, and O'Collins (2004), 48. Wright stated it in reference to Freke & Gandy, but it could apply equally well to others.

[3]

Credit must be given to those who did answer the call: Porter and Bedard (2006), Holding (2008), and Anderson (2011).

[4]

See Ehrman (2012) and Casey (2014).

[5]

I Peter 3:15.

[6]

This term was coined by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton to describe the common religious beliefs among American youth. See Smith and Denton (2005)

[7]

I often hear atheist activists complain that they are not apologists and seem to think the word applies only to religious believers. The term comes from the Greek *apologia* which means to give a defense. Thus those who are defending Christianity are “Christian apologists,” those who are defending Islam are “Islamic apologists,” and those who are defending atheism are “atheist apologists.”

[8]

I have covered this topic in detail in McIlhenny (2015b).

[9]

Thomas Paine was a supporter of the idea that Christianity was based upon pagan sun worship.

[10]

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson discussed Dupuis' ideas in letters to each other. See J. Z. Smith (1994), 4-5.

- [11] These include Godfrey Higgins, Robert Taylor, Kersey Graves, Gerald Massey, T. W. Doane, Albert Churchward, Madame Blavatsky, and Alvin Boyd Kuhn.
- [12] Murdock (1999), 397-405.
- [13] Among the sources she uses are books by James Churchward on the lost continent of Mu, Charles Berlitz on Atlantis, and John Keel on ancient astronaut visitations.
- [14] See Appendix 1.
- [15] Maxwell, "The Solar Cult" in ed. Maxwell (2000), 37.
- [16] Maxwell, "The Solar Cult" in ed. Maxwell (2000), 37-39, 41, 45, 47, 57, 61-64.
- [17] John 3:3.
- [18] John 19:5.
- [19] Joseph & Murdock (2011), Kindle location 2032-2051.
- [20] See, for example, Barton (1994), 13-14; Koch-Westenholz (1995), 51-53; Tester (1990), 13-14; Hunger and Pingree (1999), 17. There is a very good introductory article on the origin of the zodiac by Gary D. Thompson available online at: <<http://www.truthseekertimes.ca/database/text/Zeitgeist/TheOriginoftheZodiacbyGaryDThompson.pdf>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [21] Other names that have been suggested for this discovery are the Babylonian astronomer/astrologer Kidinnu and Aristarchus of Samos. The claim that Kidinnu discovered precession was put forward by Paul Schnabel in 1923 but decisively refuted by Otto Neugebauer [see Hunger and Pingree (1999), 215-219]. Aristarchus may have possessed the necessary information to discover precession but there is no evidence he put them together to reach this conclusion. In any case, either name only pushes the date back a century or two at most and this is still far too late for astrotheology. In favor of Hipparchus is the testimony of no less of an authority than Ptolemy. Given the tendency to exaggerate the antiquity of knowledge, this must have been known at the time for Ptolemy to ascribe it to a relatively recent Greek rather than the ancient Egyptians.
- [22] Alfred Jeremias, for example, traced its origins back to an "Age of the Twins" when the sun rose in Gemini on the spring equinox. See Jeremias (1911), 13.
- [23] See, for example, Murdock (1999), 395.
- [24] An understanding of this research requires knowledge both of the stellar phenomena described as well as the mathematical techniques employed by the ancient astronomers/astrologers. For example, Kugler and Neugebauer were, besides being Assyriologists, also mathematicians, and their writings assumed the necessary background in both subjects relevant to the topic.
- [25] Koch-Westenholz (1995), 34.

- [26] Koch-Westenholz (1995), 33-34.
- [27] Beck (2007), 10.
- [28] Barton (1994), 12.
- [29] Barton (1994), 13.
- [30] Barton (1994), 13.
- [31] Barton (1994), 15.
- [32] Barton (1994), 22.
- [33] Beck (2007), 13-14.
- [34] I have discussed the supposed Hermetic roots of astrology were discussed in McIlhenny (2015b).
- [35] Barton (1994), 19.
- [36] Hornung (2001), 28.
- [37] Hornung (2001), 30.
- [38] A few other names have been suggested for this discovery have been the Babylonian astronomer/astrologer Kidinnu and Aristarchus of Samos. The suggestion Kidinnu discovered precession was put forward by Paul Schnabel in 1923 but decisively refuted by Otto Neugebauer [Hunger and Pingree (1999), 215-219]. Aristarchus may have possessed the necessary information to discover precession but there is no evidence he put them together to reach this conclusion. In any case, either name only pushes the date back a century or two at most and this is still far too late for astrotheology. In favor of Hipparchus is the testimony of no less of an authority than Ptolemy. Given the tendency to exaggerate the antiquity of knowledge, this must have been known at the time for Ptolemy to ascribe it to a relatively recent Greek rather than an ancient Egyptian.
- [39] David Ulansey discusses the common mistake of confusing the ancient and modern divisions of the sky in an online appendix to Ulansey (1991) at <http://www.well.com/~davidu/appendix3.html> (accessed July 30, 2013).
- [40] See, for example, Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle locations 1935, 1976.
- [41] I have discussed such sources in detail in McIlhenny (2015b).
- [42] See Appendix 2.
- [43] See Appendix 3.

- [44] See Appendix 4.
- [45] See Appendix 5.
- [46] See Appendix 6.
- [47] See, for example, Exodus 32:31.
- [48] Mark 1:16-20.
- [49] See Appendix 7.
- [50] See Appendix 8.
- [51] This use of astrology was discussed in McIlhenny (2015b).
- [52] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle locations 1618-1621.
- [53] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle locations 1705-1708, 1752-1753, 1804-1807.
- [54] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle locations 1593-1596.
- [55] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle location 1862-1864.
- [56] At a less than scholarly level, some fundamentalists argue the date was chosen as part of a plot by Constantine to “paganize” Christianity. There are numerous books defending variations of the “Constantinian plot” thesis including Hislop (2009), Woodrow (1979), Broadbent (1931), and Viola and Barna (2008). While the theory still has followers, it has no historical basis and is rejected by scholars as conspiracy theorist nonsense. It is noteworthy that Ralph Woodrow, one of the authors previously mentioned, was challenged to investigate his claims, did so, and found them to be baseless. He then withdrew his book and published another book [Woodrow (1997)] refuting his earlier work.
- [57] See Hijmans (2009), 585-586; Talley (1991), 101-102.
- [58] See, for example, Talley (1991), 88-91.
- [59] Hijmans (2009), 588.
- [60] A full treatment of how December 25 emerged from among various alternatives is given in Talley (1991) but a basic outline is presented in Tighe, “Calculating Christmas”, *Touchstone* (December 1993). The latter article is available online at <<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-10-012-v>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [61] The date of December 25 was the winter solstice when the Julian calendar was created but inaccuracies in the calendar caused it to lose one day with respect to the solar year for each century and a quarter on the calendar. The date was still commonly held to be the winter solstice even when it actually was occurring on an earlier date.

- [62] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle locations 1258-1293.
- [63] Norden (1969), 38-39.
- [64] The dates of January 6 and December 25 are used but it is assumed to be speaking of the Egyptian equivalent.
- [65] See Maxwell, “The Solar Cult” in Maxwell, ed. (2000); Maxwell, “Astro-Theology” in Leedom, ed. (2003).
- [66] I have also discussed Maxwell's output in video and print in more detail in McIlhenny (2015f).
- [67] See Appendix 1.
- [68] Jabbar (2011), 35.
- [69] Harpur (2004), 80.
- [70] Tsarion (2007), 56.
- [71] Tsarion (2007), 56.
- [72] Tsarion (2007), 165.
- [73] Tsarion (2007), 166.
- [74] Murphy (2012), Kindle location 989.
- [75] Murphy (2012), Kindle location 1288-1300.
- [76] Murdock (1999), 395.
- [77] Murdock (1999), 395.
- [78] Waxman (2009), 74.
- [79] Tester (1990), 20.
- [80] Murdock (1999), 93.
- [81] <<http://www.risenjesus.com/a-refutation-of-acharya-ss-book-the-christ-conspiracy>> (Accessed January 21, 2015).

- [82] <<http://www.truthbeknown.com/licona.htm>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [83] See Appendix 6.
- [84] Murdock (2004), 26-43.
- [85] Murdock (2009), 265-269.
- [86] See Appendix 9.
- [87] Lockyear, ed. (1901), 581-582.
- [88] Hornung (2001), 175.
- [89] For a brief glimpse into the strange world of Schwaller de Lubicz, see <<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/02/28/books/that-old-black-magic.html>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [90] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle location 192-193.
- [91] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle location 2186-2190.
- [92] See Appendix 4.
- [93] Irvin and Rutajit (2009), 14-15.
- [94] Fideler (1993), 148-151.
- [95] Fideler (1993), 160-163.
- [96] Darlison (2007), 39-44.
- [97] See Appendix 2.
- [98] Darlison (2007), 41.
- [99] Gray (2012), iv.
- [100] Gray (2012), 1-9.

- [101] See Appendix 10.
- [102] Joseph and Murdock (2011), 1515-1519.
- [103] See Appendix 11.
- [104] Murdock (2009), 198-208.
- [105] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle location 1592-1611.
- [106] See Appendix 12.
- [107] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle location 1792-1798.
- [108] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle location 1888-1893.
- [109] See Appendix 13.
- [110] Murdock (1999), 161.
- [111] Murdock (1999), 161.
- [112] Murdock (1999), 161.
- [113] See Appendix 14.
- [114] Irvin and Rutajit (2009), 27.
- [115] Murphy (2012), Kindle locations 995-996.
- [116] Murphy (2011), 184.
- [117] Murphy (2011), 186.
- [118] Irenaeus, *AH*, Book II, Chapter 20.
- [119] Irenaeus, *AH*, Book II, Chapter 22.

- [120] <<http://www.solarmythology.com/lessons/solarmyth17.htm>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [121] <<http://www.solarmythology.com/lessons/solarmyth17.htm>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [122] <<http://www.solarmythology.com/lessons/solarmyth17.htm>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [123] Jabbar (2012), 44.
- [124] Jabbar (2012), 44-45.
- [125] Jabbar (2011), 33.
- [126] Jabbar (2011), 44-45.
- [127] Jabbar (2012), 55.
- [128] Jabbar (2011), 69.
- [129] Jabbar (2012), 55.
- [130] Jabbar (2011), 65-66.
- [131] Darlison (2007), 218-219.
- [132] Darlison (2007), 54.
- [133] Richard M. Dorson has given an outline of Müller's theory, the history of its initial acceptance and later rejection, and a generally sympathetic portrayal of Müller in Dorson, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology" in ed. Sebeok (1955).
- [134] I have presented a full discussion of the esoteric roots the "solar Christ" theories in McIlhenny (2015b).
- [135] See Neufeldt, "Christianity and 'Other Religions': Contributions from the Work of F. Max Müller" in *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Volume 5 (1992).
- [136] See Neufeldt, "Christianity and 'Other Religions': Contributions from the Work of F. Max Müller" in *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Volume 5 (1992).
- [137] See Lowith (1991), 23-24.

- [138] For details on the foundations of Renaissance esoteric Christianity, see McIlhenny (2015b).
- [139] Haeckel is best known among Christians today as the man behind the “Haeckel's embryos” fraud.
- [140] Haeckel (1900), 328-329.
- [141] Haeckel (1900), 280-281.
- [142] Haeckel (1900), 281-282.
- [143] For an excellent discussion on the misstatements concerning the relationship between the Nazi leadership and religion from both Christian apologists and anti-Christian polemicists, see Holding (2013).
- [144] Jung (1917), 80.
- [145] See Noll (1994); Noll (1997).
- [146] Case, “The Historical Jesus: An Estimation of the Negative Argument” in ed., Divinity Faculty of the University of Chicago (1911), 28-29. A more detailed refutation of the Joshua cult theory is given in Case (1912).
- [147] Murdock (1999), 376.
- [148] Murdock (1999), 348.
- [149] A later book in this series will deal with all the “Romans invented Christianity” theories – including Atwill's.
- [150] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle locations 278-279.
- [151] I have dealt with Maxwell's strange etymologies in McIlhenny (2015f).
- [152] Others included “Horus” and “horizon” , “Horus” and “hours”, and “Set” and “sunset.”
- [153] Joseph & Murdock (2011), location 278.
- [154] Murdock (2004), 76.
- [155] Bryant (1807), 3-9.

- [156] Bryant (1807), 51fn, 54.
- [157] Campbell (2002), 8-13.
- [158] Leach, "Bedtime Story" in *New York Review of Books* (Volume 14, Number 3, 12 February 1970).
- [159] Puhvel, Review of *Hamlet's Mill* in *American Historical Review* (Volume 75, Number 6, October 1970).
- [160] Davidson, Review of *Hamlet's Mill* in *Folklore* (Volume 85, Number 4, Winter 1974).
- [161] I have discussed the oddball nature of Godfrey Higgins' writings in the second book of this series. See McIlhenny (2015b).
- [162] Ulansey (1991), 8-11.
- [163] Ulansey (1991), 82.
- [164] See Ulansey's article at <<http://www.mysterium.com/appendix3.html>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [165] Joseph and Murdock (2011d), Kindle locations 2186-2190.
- [166] Krupp (1978).
- [167] Krupp (1978), 33.
- [168] Krupp (1978), 218.
- [169] Krupp (1978), 218.
- [170] <<http://www.risenjesus.com/licona-replies-to-acharya-part-2>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [171] Irvin and Rutajit backed a hybrid of astrotheology and John Allegro's mushroom cult thesis.
- [172] Irvin and Rutajit (2009), 15.

- [173] See Flavin's article at <<http://www.flavinscorner.com/karanovo.htm>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [174] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle Locations 2250-2255.
- [175] See Mellville (1892), 22, 56, 189, 289, 316, 347, 407, 420, 457, 459, 493.
- [176] Murdock (2009), 265fn.
- [177] Saint-Hillaire (1857), 203-204. The reference to *Origine des Cultes* refers to the French version of Dupuis' work.
- [178] Saint-Hillaire (1857), 185.
- [179] Murdock (2009), 265fn.
- [180] For the debates over the zodiac and its fallout on the relationship between science and religion, see Buchwald and Josefowicz (2010).
- [181] Burritt (1833), 40.
- [182] Available at <<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=hr110-847>> (accessed January 21, 2015).
- [183] While Cyprian was not the author, it is a text from Carthage written in the third century when he was bishop of the North African city so the confusion is understandable.
- [184] Murdock (2009), 81.
- [185] Herbermann, Pace, et al (1908), 724.
- [186] Gould and Gould (1888), 37.
- [187] Gould and Gould (1888), 16.
- [188] Burritt (1833), 57.
- [189] Whitney, "De Los' Ell an' Yard" in American Folklore Society, ed. (1896), 297.
- [190] Weil (2004), 474.
- [191] Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle location 1600-1602.

[\[192\]](#)

Joseph and Murdock (2011), Kindle locations 1888-1893.

[\[193\]](#)

The passage is from Roberts (1912), 182; it was cited in Murdock (1999), 162.