Reconstructing the Lost Years of Jesus

Uri Wernik

Institute for Globally Distributed Open Research and Education (IGNORE)

wernik@gmail.com

The inquiries about the lost years of Jesus have invited wild suppositions and speculations. This enigma was treated in the scholarly literature as a non-issue or an issue that for lack of facts, cannot be resolved. Two existing common will be reviewed in brief, and a new answer, based on an examination of Jesus' parables, using the methodology of structural corroboration will be offered. In this approach, different considerations and findings reinforce each other: Nietzsche's idea of philosophy as autobiography, studies on charismatic religious leaders, psychological theories of transition into adulthood and search for meaning, understanding Jesus as a prophet, and seeing him in the context of his family. It is suggested that some parables and sayings usually examined from different perspectives, can be understood as personal anecdotes, gleaned from his life experience during the undocumented years. Based on this portrayal, it becomes clear how Jesus found his mission in life, and some open questions in the Gospels' narrative can be answered.

Keywords: Jesus – New Testament – lost years – autobiography – parables– search for meaning

Wernik, U. (2022, March 19). Reconstructing the Lost Years of Jesus.

https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/s4t6p

1 The enigma and structural corroboration

The lost years of Jesus (also called the unknown, undocumented, missing, silent years) refer to the period between his childhood and the beginning of his public ministry when he was about thirty years old (Luke, 3:23). The New Testament does not include information about these years: in the Gospels of Mark and John, no details are given about Jesus' birth, early childhood, and adolescent years. These two Gospels begin with the encounter between Jesus and John the Baptist and continue from this point onward. Unlike them, the Gospel of Matthew opens with a genealogy of Jesus (Matt., 1) and then proceeds with the circumstances of his birth, his family's escape to Egypt, and return, when he was about three years old (Matt., 2). After these two chapters, the narrative picks up with his encounter with John the Baptist (Matt., 3). Thus, "Nothing is known about Jesus' childhood and early manhood," and the list of unknown details includes Jesus' friends, activities, religious studies, language used, his physical appearance, and family relations (Robinson, 2009).

The Gospel of Luke fills in the gap with a report of the twelve years old Jesus' visit to the Temple in Jerusalem together with his parents (Luke 2:41-50). It seems that the author of this Gospel anticipated the question that his readers would probably raise, about Jesus' earlier whereabouts, and his answers, not found in the other canonical Gospels, are mostly seen as non-historical, "The fellows of the Jesus Seminar (a group of about 50 critical biblical scholars and 100 laypeople) agreed that the saying in 2:40 and the surrounding story are Luke's composition" (Funk and Hoover, 1997, 276), and likewise, "It is unlikely that Jesus could have debated in the

Temple at the age of 12" (Browning, 2011, p.791). Assuming that the visit to the Temple is historical, the eighteen following unaccounted years, remain a mystery.

The interest in deciphering what happened in those years is not surprising. Jesus' life, words, and deeds are a source of inspiration to his believers, and naturally, they wish to know and learn from everything that can be found about him. The ideal of the imitation of Christ is a central element in Christian theology, spirituality, and ethics (Richardson and Bowden, 2005, pp. 266–285), which was seen by Saint Augustine as the fundamental purpose of the Christian life (Alexander, 2008, pp.386-391). Searching for information about a figure one identifies with, can be also conceptualized psychologically as a wish to get closer to an attachment figure, beginning with caregivers, usually a parent, and continuing with partners and children. Adolescence, a period of rapid social, neurological, and hormonal changes, shapes our personalities and predicts a wide range of outcomes in life (Blakemore, 2020; Hill et al., 2013). Hence, learning what transpires during the "lost years," can help us understand what impacted Jesus and made him the person that he became.

The much-discussed issue of the validity of claims made about the historical Jesus is reviewed elsewhere (Holmén and Porter, 2011; Levine, Allison, and Crossan, 2006). The very writing of the present article assumes a positivist position, which grants that it is possible to derive from the theologically motivated text, hypotheses about the life and teachings of Jesus the person, supported by sociological, psychological, and historical considerations. In his seminal *World Hypothesis,* Stephen Pepper (1942) postulated two routes to move from speculation to refined knowledge. One, in which hypotheses can be studied in vivo and replicated by others (multiplicative corroboration, a person with person corroboration), which he calls data. The other

route is of hypotheses that can be corroborated by a logical summation of various facts and considerations (structural corroboration, a fact with fact corroboration) which he calls danda. Indeed, this article is concerned with danda and will employ structural corroboration. The following danda will be considered: information in the New Testament, psychological theories about adolescence, findings of charismatic leaders, characteristics of prophets in the Bible, studies about the impact of step-fatherhood on children, and hypotheses about the connection between personal writings and a person's biography.

2. Prevalent Suppositions about Jesus' Lost Years

All the claims about the whereabouts of Jesus during the "lost years," even the unlikely ones, cannot be objectively proven or disproven, for example, it is impossible to prove now that Jesus did not visit England. Some of them are more probable than others and can be taken as one possible piece of the puzzle. None of them is exclusive, as one might have claimed, far-fetched as it is, that Jesus lived at home and worked together with Joseph, joined the Essenes' community in Qumran when he was 19, traveled to India by way of Egypt when he was 23, returned home and got married at the age of 25.

Two suppositions will be examined: that Jesus stayed at home and that he lived and studied with the Essenes. As far as the other suppositions, such as his travels abroad, it will suffice to quote from the following conclusive summary, which delegates the question of the hidden years to the works of fiction and arch-fi:

> Due to the lack of documentation, it is impossible to "reconstruct" the events of the life of Jesus as a young man. The issues of his education and personal

> experience before his Ministry are crucial in the research of the Historical Jesus. Scholars reject any speculations about Jesus traveling in Britain or India, or learning his wisdom from Egypt, Greece, India, or the Druids, and focus instead on the Jewish religious environment in which he lived (Boccaccini, 2014).

Jesus was seen as the carpenters' son (Matt., 13:55), and was known as a carpenter himself (Mark, 6:3). Therefore, it is taken for granted that Jesus worked as a carpenter or a builder, alone or together with Joseph his stepfather, and lived at home until his encounter with John the Baptist. A comprehensive review of the proposed theories to account for the life of Jesus during the unaccounted eighteen years (from his supposed visit to Jerusalem) concluded that none of them has any substantiating evidence and that, "the most likely thing is that he continued to live in Nazareth and ply his trade there..." (Losch, 2008, p. 209). In other words, according to this view, the problem of the "lost years" does not exist at all, as the obvious and clear answer is found in the New Testament.

Some scholars took an additional step and suggested that Jesus and his father probably worked in Sepphoris, a town close to Nazareth, where archaeologists uncovered Roman construction works (Isbouts, 2008, pp. 147-179). However, it is just as likely that they worked in other small towns in their vicinity. Also, in the Gospel of Mark (6:3), Jesus is described as "the carpenter, the son of Mary," while in the Gospel of Matthew (13: 55-7) he is described as "the carpenter's son," whose mother is called Mary. As no time frame is given in the text, Jesus might have left his home and upon his return, years later, still be remembered as having some connection to carpentry. "Carpenter" is the English translation of the original Greek τέκτων (tekton), a term which describes manual workers of different kinds, which nowadays would be

called "blue-collar." Thus, it is not certain that Jesus and Joseph had the same profession or that they worked together.

A variation on the “stayed at home” hypothesis, is that Jesus was married and even had a child. Such propositions are not new. They are based mostly on Gnostic texts which saw Mary Magdalene as the woman Jesus loved, or as his wife. However, Gnostic texts are doctrinal-theological texts and not historical ones (DeConick, 2016). A forged papyrus considered as the “Gnostic gospel of Jesus’ wife” taken as proving the marriage hypothesis, resulted in an academic fiasco (Sabar, 2020).

The second hypothesis, that Jesus lived and studied with the Essenes, was initially suggested due to the similarity between the teachings and practices of the early Christians and the Essene community as described by Flavius Josephus. Later, after the dramatic discovery of the scrolls of the great Essene library in Qumran, near the Dead Sea (1946-1956), the hypothesis gained further support. Karl Bahrdt, back in 1790, had already explained the mysteries in Jesus' life by suggesting that he was a "secret agent" of the Essene order (Schweitzer, 1910, pp. 39-41). Ernest Renan proposed in 1863, that the Essenes trained Jesus (Van der Kam and Flint, 2002, p. 321).

The similarity of vocabulary, ideology, and practices stand out indeed, and the parallels between Jesus and the Essene "Teacher of Righteousness," executed about a century before the birth of Jesus are striking. Some scholars argue that Jesus was not only trained by the Essenes but was also given the title and authority of the teacher (Potter, 1992; Knohl, 2002). The relationship between Jesus and the Essenes will continue to be a fertile field of investigation. Nevertheless, positive evidence does not exist: Jesus is not mentioned in Essenes' writings, they

are not mentioned in the New Testament, and in the Talmud. It is unknown whether Jesus had direct contact with them, was introduced to their ideas by John the Baptist, or whether such themes were added to the text by editors who were former Essenes themselves.

3. The Answer is Close at Hand

John Crossan wrote that Jesus' parables are "fictional events about fictional characters," and explained that "parable = metaphoricity+narrativity" (2013, pp. 12-14). This article argues, on the contrary, that many of Jesus' parables are a chronicle of events that took place in his life, anecdotes containing a significant message to his listeners. Thus, it is suggested that "parable = historicity+narrativity." Similarly, some of Jesus' sayings are biographical, opening a window into his life and circumstances during the "lost years." Jesus used parables as a didactic measure (Krosmark, 1996, pp. 103-35), "Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables" (Mark, 4:1-2). Jesus explained to his disciples, "The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand'" (Matt., 13:13).

Members of the Jesus Seminar decided that the parables found in the synoptic gospels and the Gospel of Thomas (but not in the Gospel of John), and especially those which do not reflect an apocalyptic view of history and foresee things to come, are highly authentic and should be attributed to Jesus. Among such parables are those of the Samaritan, prodigal son, dinner party, vineyard laborers, shrewd manager, unforgiving slave, corrupt judge, leaven, mustard seed, pearl, and treasure (Funk and Hoover, 1993, p. 137). The parables were a central means for Jesus to teach the Kingdom of God and they were likely his own words (Longenecker, 2000). If

the parables and sayings are based on his life's experiences, this article suggests that Jesus left his parental home in his adolescent years, and started a saga of wandering in the land of Israel, working in different occupations, staying in different places, and encountering different people. Before retelling his ventures, Here are some considerations that support this claim.

3.1 *The Author-Text or Person-Ideas Connection*

Friedrich Nietzsche argued in *Human all too Human* that everything persons write (and the idea can be extended to spoken messages as well) says something about them. Personal experiences are incorporated in our intellectual productions, regardless of how scholarly the work or the attempted objectivity of the author, "ultimately he reaps nothing but his biography" (1984, IX, 513). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he said, "Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir." He added, "that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown" (1982, I, 6).

This insight was shared by many others, among them Thomas Mann, who commented on the process of writing *Death in Venice* that, "The truth is that every piece of work is a realization, fragmentary but complete in itself, of our individuality" (Mann, 1960, p. 44). A comprehensive collection of similar views on the connection between a person's biography and her or his philosophy, ideology, attitudes, and creative works (among others by David Hume, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, William James, F.C.S. Schiller, Carl Gustav Jung, and Paul Feyerabend) can be found online (Suber, 2000). Also, according to a theory of communication, in addition to facts,

every message consists inherently of the facets of a relationship with a listener, an appeal for action, and finally self-disclosure (von Thun, 2007).

To these general observations, the fact that Jesus saw himself as a prophet, must be added. “Nevertheless, I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem” (Luke, 13:33). Other people saw him as a prophet as well, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee” (Matt., 21:1-11; Mark, 11:1-11; Luke, 19: 28-40; John, 12:12-15). Many commentators saw Jesus as a charismatic or apocalyptic prophet (Ehrman, 1999; Fredriksen, 2000; Lüdemann, 2001; Sanders, 1987). Tzvi Adar, in a perceptive classical conception of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, argued that prophets use essentially their life experiences to deliver their messages. Unlike poets, the prophet's words do not serve a need for self-expression, but are rather means for delivering God's wishes, educating the listeners to change their personalities and behaviors:

> The prophet always tries, as much as possible, to present the most abstract ideas in concrete terms [...] he thinks visually to make his listeners see things. He talks in parables, to make the moral closer to their mind. He makes symbolic acts in the eyes of the people, to make real what is symbolized, and out of his assimilation into his mission, he sees whole affairs in his life as living symbols. Sometimes his whole life becomes a symbol of his ideas (Adar, 1953, in Hebrew, my translation).

3.2 *Jesus' Family Background*

Details about Jesus' family life are scarce in the New Testament, and in the little that there is, it is difficult to distinguish between the historical and the doctrinal. Even when there is an agreement between commentators on facts, their interpretations are varied. Was Jesus born as a *Mamzer* (with doubts about his paternity and suspicions of illicit circumstances) or not? One author (Chilton, 2002) answers positively, the second opposed his view (Quarles, 2004). What kind of a stepfather was Joseph? One scholar saw Joseph as an accepting loving father figure (Miller, 1997, p. 54). Another saw him as a rejecting uninvolved or even abusive parent (Capps, 2000), and a third doubted whether he existed at all (van Aarde, 2001). What is more certain is that Jesus grew up in a society that cared about the purity of lineage and excommunicated those who were not up to standard (Bar-Ilan, 2000; Mosquera, Manstead, and Fischer, 2002).

It is proven that regardless of their investment, the very presence of stepfathers is stressful and liable to be detrimental to their stepson's wellbeing, with negative consequences in the areas of educational achievements, behavioral problems, and even physical growth. Furthermore, the very presence of a stepfather, predicts diminished maternal investment (Emmott and Mace, 2014), and it is reasonable that the negative effects of having a stepfather must have been more pronounced 2,000 years ago. Considering the characteristics of Jesus' family and environment, one author concluded the following: 1. Jesus grew up in a blended and perhaps fragmented family, which had to cope with rumors that he was a *mamzer*. 2. His loving over-protecting mother and some of his brothers dealt with the stigma in a tradition-bound conformist manner, trying to avoid other people's attention to the family, a style opposed to that of Jesus, who marched to the beat of his drum. 3. He grew up with a rejecting, hostile, and possibly abusive stepfather, who treated his biological children better, thus adding envy to injury. According to this reading, "To cope with stress in a traumatic family constellation, he had to

leave home early, and search for the meaning of his suffering and his life" (Wernik, 2020, pp. 37-8). It is known that children in non-intact families, as a rule, leave home earlier compared to children who grew up with two biological parents (van den Berg, Kalmijn and Leopold, 2018), and it is reasonable to assume, that this was also the case in Jesus' times.

3.3 *Transition to Young Adulthood and Finding a Life's Mission*

In the previous section, "push" factors were considered, ones that made Jesus leave home early. Now, "pull" factors, the psychological needs which called for action, will be examined. The psychological concepts considered below, are not independent of each other. They relate to some aspects of the transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

A moratorium, and emergent adulthood: Eric Erikson is the foremost theorist of the stages of human development. Among others, he coined the concept of a period of "psychological moratorium," that occurs when a person takes a break from "real-life" to actively search for his/her identity, "during which the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him" (Erikson, 1968, p. 156). Individuals in this stage of life do not yet have defined commitments, but they keep actively exploring alternatives (Clark and Justice, 2020). A similar process was described as "emerging adulthood," a period in which young people during the ages of 18 to 25 take the time to explore their own identity and the possibilities that life offers them, in a process that leads from adolescence to young adulthood. This is a period of instability, with a change of jobs, partners, and residency. To enable exploration and experimentation, responsibilities like marriage and parenthood are delayed (Arnett, 2015).

The charismatic prophetic personality: Len Oakes, studied the charismatic personality of leaders of new religious groups of whom Jesus was a prototype. Oakes interviewed some leaders (he was a former devotee of such a leader) and studied the biographies of others. He saw their narcissistic personality traits as a common denominator, the first of five stages in their development. However, the second stage is more relevant. In the incubation stage, similar to the moratorium mentioned above, the future prophet is "wandering in the wilderness," struggling to understand herself or himself, his/her distinctiveness and calling. Although detached, the prophet to be, gains experiences and skills, such as teaching, preaching, and healing, which will become essential later (Oakes, 1997, pp. 74-97).

Oakes described solitude as a means for self-discovery and transformation "After hearing a call from a god or a spirit the trainee withdraws into the desert or the woods to meditate in solitude, often undergoing some kind of spiritual test such as a journey to the underworld" (Oakes, 1997, 6). Wandering and traveling are additional ways to "broaden the mind," providing an opportunity to encounter otherness whether in terms of different cultures or the more than the human realm of nature and wilderness' (Morgan, 2010, pp. 246–268). Jesus' forty days of wandering, trials, and transformation in the wilderness are described in the Gospels (Matt., 4:1-11; Luke, 4:1-13).

The search for meaning: Jesus, this article suggests, needed to find the meaning of his suffering and unusual family situation. The concept was popularized by Victor Frankl in *Man in Search of Meaning*, "In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice […] that is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning" (Frankl, 2006, p. 117). The search is the outcome of the

desire to understand oneself and the world, through reflection and wandering (Silver and Updegraff, 2013). The need is stronger when a person is inquisitive and is low on dogmatism and authoritarianism. It is also stronger when the environment demands compliance and does not encourage personal growth and discovery (Steger et al, 2008). The search stems from the need and desire of people to understand themselves and the world around them, and to satisfy it, they use cognitive and behavioral means, such as reflecting and wandering. People vary in the intensity of the need and the investment they make, and it is higher when their personal growth, control of their environment, self-acceptance, and construction of a suitable worldview is hindered.

Finding ones' mission in life: some of the people who search for meaning in life, eventually give up. Others continue the quest and find their mission in life, dedicating themselves to causes more important than their private life. In his *Human all too Human,* Nietzsche, wrote in an aphorism titled *Traffic with one's higher self*, that finding one's higher self is not a voluntary act but rather "a gift of the gods or a chance." Most people avoid the demands of their higher self, fearing to give up the security of routine and conventions. Jesus did not (1984, IX, 624). In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche affirmed that finding one's cause does not guarantee release from pain, but only grants passion and direction, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how" (1974, Maxims, 12).

4. What Jesus did and where he was

The following themes reinforce the contention that Jesus was a wanderer who walked in the wilderness, villages, and towns throughout the Land of Israel:

Survival skills: A wanderer must read the weather signs to plan his journey 'Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, "A shower is coming," and so it is. And when *you see* the south wind blow, you say, "There will be hot weather," and there is" (Luke, 12:54-59, Matt., 26:2; Mark, 8:11-13). Also, "When it is evening you say, '*It will be* fair weather, for the sky is red," and in the morning, "*It will be* foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening" (Matt., 16:2-3; Luke, 12:56). In a similar vein, he realizes that "…the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west" (Matt., 24:27). A wanderer is on the lookout for food, work, and shelter. It takes time and observing nature until one builds confidence that he will manage, a feeling Jesus expressed in an insightful poem:

> Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these (Matt., 6:24-34; Luke, 12:24-27).

Specific work-related knowledge: some parables suggest that Jesus worked and gained firsthand experience in occupations, where temporary employment was common. They document his understanding of agriculture, identifying weeds growing amongst the wheat (Mt 13:24-30), being familiar with the growth cycle of seeds (Mark, 4:26-29; Matt., 13:31; Mark, 4:30-32; Luke,

13:18), and mastery of the very specific technical details of sowing (Mark., 4:3-9; Matt., 13:3-9; Luke, 8:5-8). It took an observing sensitive person to look with admiration at seedlings, and use it later as a metaphor "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark, 4:26-29). Jesus knew personally how it feels when a worker waits for a long time until a foreman hires him for a day's work (Matt., 20:1-16). He was also familiar with the process of negotiation of wages between plowers, herders, workers, and their proprietors (Luke, 17:7-10). In his different jobs, he encountered fair employers as well as ones taking advantage of their workers. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard describes a dilemma he encountered about payment per hour or per day, regardless of the number of hours of work. Did Jesus encounter a fair-minded and generous employer, or did he simply describe the desirable approach? (Matt., 20:1-16).

In addition to farming, plowing, and herding, Jesus must have worked in vineyards (Matt., 21:33, 20:1, 21:8, Mark, 12:1, 20:9; John, 15:1) found in the Galilee and Judea, and fishing, probably in the Sea of Galilee. In his parables, are found details of net throwing, gathering, sorting out fish, and disposing of the bad ones (Matt., 13:47-53). The parables show that Jesus was occasionally a devoted shepherd of sheep and goats. This is a solitary occupation, in which the shepherd roaming the mountains has time for reflection (Luke, 15:3-10; Matt., 18:12-14; Matt., 25:31-46). If so, Jesus' saying "for wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together" (Matt., 24:28; Luke, 17:37), was something he encountered which made a

strong impression on him. A sick sheep died and the carcass was lying on the grass. A wake of vultures soon descended, devoured it, and left behind only a pile of white bones.

The two faces of humanity: in his wandering, Jesus encountered poverty, exploitation, and injustice on one hand, and generosity, goodwill, and helpfulness, on the other hand. When Jesus told the parable of a judge in a certain city who "did not fear God nor regard man," and a widow who repeatedly asked him to "Get justice for me from my adversary" (Luke, 18:1-8), he told his listeners about something he witnessed during his journeys. Similarly, the parable about the Good Samaritan (Luke, 10:25–37), is based on events he observed on the way between Jerusalem and Jericho, and the parable which compares the Pharisee and the tax-collector is an anecdote about people he met (Luke, 18:9–14). The parable about the dishonest estate manager (Luke, 16) is again taken from his experiences as a hired laborer, in the "real world," where shrewdness is of the highest value.

The parable of the sheep and goats does not speak of a proverbial king, but rather about some of his experiences on the road with people who helped him in dire situations: Jesus was talking about himself when he said, "I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matt., 25:34-6). Still, on occasion, he could not find generous hosts and had to sleep in a field, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head" (Matt., 8:20; Luke, 9:58).

Painful memories: It is possible to understand the parables of the lost prodigal son (Luke, 15:17–20), the lost sheep (Luke, 15:3-7), and the lost coin (Luke, 15:8–10) in the context of the "lost years." If Jesus indeed left home without a clear plan and the blessing of his mother and

stepfather, it was probably experienced by all persons involved as a split, involving feelings of guilt, insult, and disappointment. While these parables are usually understood in terms of the power of repentance and forgiveness, sin, and salvation, another aspect stands out too. In these parables a lost son, sheep or coin is found again and loved even more dearly than others. Possibly, these parables reflect coming to terms with past hurts and imagined fulfillment of the wish to be loved and accepted by all his family members.

The description of the prodigal son as one who “wasted his possessions with prodigal living” (Luke, 15:13) is remindful of a puzzling saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt., 5:22). *Raca* (or *Reca*) is an Aramaic word, quite tame as insults go, which means an empty-headed or a good for nothing person. What can explain that Jesus, a peace-loving person, becomes so vindictive here? We know that Jesus' mother and siblings (or semi-siblings) were concerned about his wandering style of life, association with marginal people, and aspirations to be a prophet. When he talked to the multitudes they tried to restrain and bring him home with them, “when His own people heard *about this,* they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind”’ (Mark, 3:21). Conceivably, in one of their disputes, when his older brothers tried to “straighten him out,” one of them might have called Jesus “good for nothing” and “a fool.” This painful memory still lingered on in Jesus’ statement, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house” (Mark, 6:4).

5. Conclusions

This article suggested that during the "lost years" Jesus set out on a journey of self-discovery, wandering in the country, working in different occupations, making friends, learning about life in its many facets. In addition to offering an answer to the riddle of the lost year, this hypothesis shines a light on some open questions: How can one understand that the two brothers Simon-Peter and Andrew, were willing to leave everything and immediately followed Jesus (Matt., 4:18-20)? Our hypothesis suggests that they knew and appreciated Jesus already in earlier times when he worked with them as a fisherman. What can explain how Judas Iscariot, who came from Judea and was unknown to the other disciples, joined them (Mark, 3:19)? Jesus met him in his wandering and they became close friends. Similarly, how did he become friends with Lazarus and his two sisters, “Now a certain *man* was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha” (John, 11:1)? They must have hosted him when he arrived in their town and they learned to love each other.

The fact that Jesus spent time as a shepherd, alone in his mountain, with time for reflection, meditation, and prayer, might have been crucial in his development of private prayer, in which one carries on a conversation with God. This period alone on the mountains also enabled moving from the conception of God as King to God the loving father. Walter Benjamin distinguished between two kinds of storytellers: those who went on a journey and came back with something to tell, and those who stayed put and absorbed the traditional knowledge of their native locale. Jesus, this article shows, did not stay put (Benjamin, 2019, pp. 84-85).

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