

Contents

Preface and my working method.

I.1. The definition of concept „miracle”.

I.1.1. The philosophical approach.

I.1.2. The etymology of the concept in the Bible.

I.1.3. The concept in apocryphal literature.

I.1.4. The concept in rabbinic literature.

I.1.5. The concept in apocalyptic literature.

I.1.6. Conclusions.

I.2. The historical Jesus

I.2.1. The complete exclusion of the biblical miracles and reinterpretations in theological and philosophical history

I.2.2. Hermeneutics and traditions.

I.2.3. The rhetorical method, and analysis.

I.2.4. Conclusions

I.3. The Jesus quest and the social sciences.

I.3.1 Jesus and his time. Contemporary history, cult and folklore.

I.3.2. The rabbinical literature and Jesus. The early rabbinic literature.

I.3.3. Miracle, magic and healing in Jewish mind.

I.3.4. Conclusions

II.1. The miracle stories in the New Testament.

II.1.1. The faith of Israel in Jesus time.

II.1.2. The miracles of Jesus.

II.1.3. The miracles of apostol Peter and Paul.

II.1.4. Other miracle workers

II.1.5. Conclusions

II.2. The analysis of miracle stories in the Old Testament

II.2.1 The presentation of the biblical miracle stories

II.2.2. The research of similarities.

II.2.2.1. Jesus and Elijah- in context of the gospel of Matthew and Luke

II.2.2.2. Jesus and Moses- in context of the gospel of John

III. Final conclusions.

Literature.

- **Keywords:**

- miracle, magic, wizardry.
- Jewish and greek philosophical and theological thought.
- Historical Jesus quest
- rabbinic thought
- miracle workers
- healing
- Talmud
- faith, superstitions, angels, demons
- Shekina, belief in the One God.

Abstract

The background of our Savior miracle's in the Old Testament

There are three reasons for my interest in the research of Biblical wonders:

- as a preacher, my aim has been to find that message of the Biblical miracle stories which does not break away from the general context of the Holy Scripture, while also being intelligible and acceptable for modern people;
- from a scientific point of view, under the influence of various philosophical theories, several attempts have been advanced for the explanation of miracles;
- finally, I have also been interested in the way in which Jesus' contemporaries looked at wonders and in the manner in which they attempted to draw the line between wonders and magic or wizardry.

My working method relied mainly upon the exploration of the characteristics of Jewish philosophical and theological thought, also comparing these, of course, with the opinions of philosophical and theological researchers on miracles.

„The wisest of the philosophers asked the following question: We recognize that our predecessors were wiser than we are, yet we criticize their remarks, and what is more, we even reject them, stating that we are the ones who are right. Now, how is this possible? The wise philosopher answered him: Who can see farther, a dwarf or a giant? Of course, it is the giant, whose eyes are much higher than the dwarf's. But if you seat the dwarf so that he rides on the giant's neck, then who can see farther? (...) In this way, we are dwarfs riding on the necks of giants. Their wisdom is also ours, but our wisdom is greater. We are wise through their wisdom and we know all that we know due to them, and not because we are wiser.”¹

This passage occurs in one of the writings of the 12th century rabbi Isaiah ben Mali, in which he proposes the lively dialogue with the ancestors' teachings and the principle according to which the purpose of this dialogue is interpretation and reinterpretation, or in other words, “to preserve the original significance of the divine Word that resounds within our constantly changing world in ever-changing languages”.²

My main preoccupation was to clarify the concept of the miracle as such. Thus, in the first part of my thesis, I review the way in which this concept appears in the works of the philosophers from different historical periods. I take a brief look back at the beginnings, on

¹ Törpék az óriások vállán, Válogatott Misna traktátusok, szerk. Görgei Etelka, Printart-Press Kft., Debrecen, 2010, 7.

² Op. cit. 7.

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, presenting some of the relevant ideas of the classics of Greek philosophy, capable of illuminating our subject.

Plato views the entire cosmos as a living animal (*zoon*) endowed with soul and reason. The cosmos is ruled by reason, and “our body receives its soul from the soul of the great cosmic body”.³ The philosopher describes the order of creation in the following manner: “the Demiurge created the deathless divinities who, on their turn, created the living beings through adding the body, the dying part, to the deathless component, the soul.”⁴ Then, the Creator associated each of these souls to a star and presented to them the laws of fate and the nature of the universe.⁵ Following this train of thought, the author reaches the conclusion that “knowledge is nothing but remembrance in each case”, the so-called *anamnesis* of things seen by the soul in the world of ideas, adding that “he who has never seen reality cannot take a human form”.⁶ The reason for this is that, “if someone is to be a human, then he has to understand that which is expressed in the form of the concept, transformed into a singular unity from the multiplicity of sense experiences.”⁷

Consequently, the soul is the primary factor, and the body is merely secondary. The world inhabited by humans composed of body and soul stems from the union between Necessity and Reason. Plato does not specifically define the concept of the miracle, but he clearly states about the world that it is born as a mixture.⁸

The Greek philosopher presents matter as something found at the border of existence and nonexistence and not as a true reality. God is transcendent to matter, but the Divinity is not the object of faith to the philosopher, but of knowledge. One can reach him through moving from hypothesis to hypothesis, until we arrive at the final basis of being. Thus, God is the ultimate foundation of existence for Plato. Miracles are not necessarily impossible, but everything has to be the object of knowledge.

This idea is carried further by Aristotle, who presents the development of knowledge and the place of God within the causal relationships.

In his *Metaphysics*, he states about the *wise man* that he has to know everything and to recognize the things “which are not easily known to humans”.⁹ Furthermore, the ground of wisdom among sciences is the science of the first principles, since “the true teachers are those

³ Platón: Philébosz. In: Platón összes művei III. 199.

⁴ Platón: Timaiosz. Op. cit. 340.

⁵ Op. cit. 341.

⁶ Platón: Phaidrosz In: Platón összes művei II. Op. cit. 749.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Platón: Timaiosz Op. cit. 48.

⁹ <https://hu.scribd.com/document/83165503/Arisztotelesz-Metafizika>, 2. Last downloaded on 10.10.2016.

who teach us the causes of each thing”¹⁰ and recognize the supreme goal, which is nothing else than the Highest Good.¹¹

In this context, Aristotle sees the beginning of philosophy in the fact that people first “started to wonder about the things closest to them”¹², and later wanted to get rid of their ignorance, and have thus looked for answers to the questions raised by myths through the methods of philosophy.

In contrast with Plato, God is not the transcendent creator (Demiurge) of this world, but the permanent goal and pinnacle of the world’s movement. God is the immovable mover who abides as a pure and complete reality.

The conclusion we can draw is that unexplainable phenomena are part of Socrates’, Plato’s and Aristotle’s respective worldviews, but humans are nevertheless capable of finding explanations to these phenomena through their knowledge.

Against this background, I analysed the way in which Jewish philosophical thought relates to Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical thought.

According to Tamás Staller, the “the debut of Jews on the stage of world philosophy is in fact simultaneous with their appearance as a people”.¹³ Jewish self-determination practically begins with the knowledge of God and the interpretation of His deeds. To the question of the relationship between Greek and Jewish philosophical thought, Tamás Staller proposes the following answer in his dissertation: “as the Greeks once did, so the Jews also begin with a Reform of culture and thought. Their belief in the Creator of the world, who is one and non-anthropomorphic, abstract and graspable exclusively through intellectual means, unsayable, unnameable, and ruling over the universe in the absence of an opposing principle of universal Evil, presents a remarkable synchronicity with the *philosophia* of the ancient Greeks. We can relate the religion of the Jews to the philosophy of the Greeks on two levels. Both are anti-mythological in their character, and both prefer a higher rational thinking than everyday thought. Regarding their historico-sociological aspects, one can establish that both stem from a system of thought in which free and sovereign individuality manifests a far-reaching buoyant force with an unquestionable repercussion upon the psychological and spiritual freedom of the individual”.¹⁴

¹⁰ Op. cit. 2.

¹¹ Op. cit. 2.

¹² Op. cit. 2.

¹³ A zsidó filozófia történeti vázlat, Dissertation, p. 2. http://www.or-zse.hu/phd/staller_habil.pdf Last downloaded on 10.10.2016.

¹⁴ Op. cit. 3.

The difference in thinking consists in the fact that the Old Testament Bible lies at the centre of Jewish philosophical thought. “Its first commandment consists in the representation (!) within the world of the moral worldview and the ethical order, which are considered to be divine. This is the sole true meaning of the «*chosenness*» mentioned by others in completely different contexts.”¹⁵

Jewish philosophy is also a part of this religious world order and thus it refuses the Greek cultural background “due to its shockingly profane nature”.¹⁶

In his work entitled *On the Life of Moses*¹⁷, the first Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, describes in detail the ten plagues preceding the exodus from Egypt. He speaks about signs (or tokens), but also about miracles: “Now, the tokens were as follows. The rod which Moses held in his hand God ordered him to throw down on the ground; and immediately it received life, and crawled along, and speedily became the most powerful of all the animals which want feet, namely an immense serpent, complete in all its parts. And when Moses retreated from the beast, and out of fear was on the point of taking to flight, he was called back again; and when God laid his commands upon him, and inspired him with courage, he laid hold of it by the tail; and the serpent, though still crawling onwards, stopped at his touch, and being stretched out at its full length again returned to its original elements (...) This now was the first sign. The second miraculous token was afforded to him at no great distance of time. (...) These two lessons he was taught in solitude, when he was alone with God, like a pupil alone with his master, and having about him the instruments with which these wonders were worked, namely, his hand and his rod, with which indeed he walked along the road.”¹⁸

This short excerpt also shows us that Philo does not consider the ten plagues to be unnatural, but rather conceives of them as signs (or tokens) originating from God. In his wording, although there is no semantic variant, the “token” (or “sign”) and the “miracle” are clearly separated. This also shows us that the author does not want to break away from the wording of the Old Testament. Furthermore, it is also quite conspicuous that the miracle, although God is the active part here, is something that can be taught and learned, since God teaches Philo as the master teaches his student.

¹⁵ Op. cit. 4.

¹⁶ Op. cit. 7.

¹⁷ This work was written for pagans sympathizing with the Jews, that is why I considered it important to quote from it. Philo offers a Biblical biography of Moses while also integrating several elements of the oral tradition into his account.

¹⁸ Alexandriai Philón, Mózes élete, Atlantisz, 1994, 34-35.

Regarding the story in which Moses produces water from the rock, the author very significantly observes:

“And, if any one disbelieves these facts, he neither knows God nor has he ever sought to know him; for, if he had, he would have instantly known, he would have known and surely comprehended, that all these unexpected and extraordinary things are the amusement of God; looking at the things which are really great and deserving of serious attention, namely, the creation of the heaven, and the revolutions of the planets and fixed stars, and the shining of light – of the light of the sun by day and that of the moon by night – and the position of the earth in the most centre spot of the universe (...) and an infinite number of other beautiful objects. And the whole of a man's life would be too short if he wished to enumerate all the separate instances of such things (...). But all these things, though they are in truth really wonderful, are despised by us by reason of our familiarity with them. But the things to which we are not accustomed, even though they may be unimportant, still make an impression upon us from our love of novelty, while we yield to strange ideas concerning them.”¹⁹

In this fragment, we have a third expression related to miracles, i.e. the “not accustomed”, in contrast with all that is already accustomed to us (e.g. the miracle of creation).

At this point, we can observe an idea in Philo that crosses the line from philosophy into theology, since he does not contest the revealed Word of God, while Aristotle knows nothing of this.

Yet Aristotelian philosophical thought, as I have emphasized within my research, decisively influences both Christian and Jewish theological thinking about miracles. In this context, I present Thomas Aquinas' definition of wonders and his distinction between three types of wonders.

- „Now, there are various degrees and orders of these miracles. Indeed, the highest rank among miracles is held by those events in which something is done by God which nature never could do (e.g. the sun reverses its course or stands still in the sky).
- those events in which God does something which nature can do, but not in this order (e.g. a person lives after death, sees after becoming blind, or walks after paralysis of the limbs).

¹⁹ Op. cit. 62.

- God does what is usually done by the working of nature, but without the operation of the principles of nature (e.g. someone is cured from a sickness which could have also been cured by doctors, but over a much longer period).²⁰

Along with Thomas Aquinas, I have also analysed the work *A Guide for the Perplexed*, written by one of the most outstanding Jewish theologians and philosophers, Maimonides. In this text the author attempts to create a bridge between theology and science. In my dissertation, I have also presented two alternative conceptions about the tripartite categorisation used in this work, both cited from Tamás Staller:

a. „The disciplines are presented in the following way in the three parts of the *Guide*. The first part presents philosophical anthropology and philosophical linguistics. The second part has metaphysics and ontology as well as epistemology. Finally, the third part contains moral philosophy, ethics, and hermeneutics.”²¹

b. “Heller’s opinion is seemingly similar but different in its essence. She explains the tripartite character of the work with the obvious preconception of Maimuni, which is unquestionably present in the *Guide*. According to this premise, any anthropomorphisation of God’s name would destroy the spirituality of Jewish monotheism, which is given within the Law. Heller is right in stating that in all three part of this work, the author somehow follows the mythocritical tendency of philosophy, already given at its beginnings. Thus, according to Heller, the first part represents the ‘criticism of God’s anthropomorphic conception’. The second part, ‘Maase Beresit’ is an analysis of the work of creation, which primarily builds upon the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. The third part, ‘Maase Merkava’ (the Divine Throne-Chariot) or ‘the empire of transcendence’ is the one that reveals the divine intention for the reader. As Heller is surely right in pointing out, Maimuni takes his reader to such heights of philosophical thought which he could never have experienced before.”²²

As for our research subject, Maimonides’ attitude towards miracles, I would like to point out the following aspects:

- “angels are spiritual forces and not specific beings
- the prophet is not a miracle worker

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas: Summa Contra Gentiles, III. 101. 2-4

²¹ Tamás Staller, A zsidó filozófia történeti vázlata, Dissertation, p. 91. http://www.orzse.hu/phd/staller_habil.pdf Last downloaded on 10.10.2016.

²² Op. cit .91-92.

- their mission lies not in producing miracles or extraordinary phenomena, but in the content of their prophecy, in the illumination of their spirit and in the fulfillment of their prophecies
- the Messiah will excel through his purity, and he will establish an empire in the Holy Land, leading all nations to the worship of God
- the soul reaches its immortality through transcending to the heights of lofty ideas and pure morality.”²³

In my view, Maimonides offers one of the definitive directions of Jewish thought: “The Lord created ten things on the advent of the Sabbath at sunset: the mouth of the earth (Bemidbar 16:32), the mouth of the well (Bemidbar 21: 16-18), the mouth of the donkey (Bemidbar 21:16-18), the rainbow (Bereshit 9:13), the manna (Shemoth 16:15), the rod of Moses (Shemoth 4:17), Shamir (Kings 1. 6:7,8), the Jewish letters, writing, and the ten commandments” – citation from the Mishna, Pirkei Awot, 5,6 chapter, emphasizing that the origin of miracles can already be seen within creation and these do not present any deviation from the natural laws.²⁴ One must also emphasize that “the Jewish philosophers are first and foremost apologists, that is to say, people protecting their community”.²⁵ This is perhaps one of the main differences between the conception of Jewish and Christian philosophers on miracles.

From the Christian side, it was David Hume who, regarding the definition of miracles, has come to the conclusion that “(...) if religious enthusiasm is added to the attraction to miracles, then common sense is silenced, and human testimony loses all its credibility. The enthusiast easily becomes a fanatic and sees things which do not exist in fact.”²⁶

This beings so, the principle of “either...or” applies, according to Hume. We must choose between “religious enthusiasm” and “common sense”. The two cannot be reconciled, but are mutually contradictory.

The 18th century Jewish thinker, Moses Mendelssohn, who also emphasized the importance of reason, reaches the conclusion according to which “God and the world He created cannot be thought of as being identical, even if we transpose God itself into a certain order of creation. The reason for this is that we would be questioning the ‘omnipotence’ (one

²³ Dr. Blau Lajos, Maimonides élete, működése és jelentősége, in Magyar Zsidó Szemle, 1905, 135. http://kisebbssegkutato.tk.mta.hu/uploads/files/olvasoszoba/magyarzsidoszemle/Magyar-zsido_szemle_1905.pdf

²⁴ Lengyel Gábor, Gondolatok néhány bibliai csodáról Maimonidész és Spinoza írásain keresztül, in <http://yerushaonline.com/content/?v=eq64aya06> Last downloaded on 21.01.2017.

²⁵ Staller Tamás, Babits Antal új kötetéről, in <http://www.remeny.org/remeny/2010-3-szam/babits-antal-uj-koteterol-judaizmus-egyetemistaknak-staller-tamas/> Last downloaded on 20.02. 2017.

²⁶ Hume, Tanulmány az emberi értelemről, <https://www.scribd.com/document/237239070/Hume-Tanulmany-Az-Emberi-Ertelemr%C5%91l> Last downloaded on 11.10.2016, 43.

of the divine names – Shem – that can be said) and the ‘eternity’ of God (the other divine name that can be said) in this way. At the same time, in the Judaic (!) interpretation of Jewish Medieval philosophers, saying the Name, or as Mendelssohn’s ‘warning’ goes, its identification with the philosophical idea of God, i.e. its substitution with anthropomorphic attributes, would inevitably amount to a kind of intellectual dominance over God, a kind of dethronement.’²⁷

For Mendelssohn, the immortality of the soul is in no need of proof. Referring to Socrates, he describes a miraculous “survival” that was due to his strong physique, and does not include it in the category of divine intervention. “Others tried to protect themselves against the cold, but he remained in his usual clothes and walked barefoot on ice. Both the military camp and Athens were devastated by the plague. It is almost unbelievable, but attested both by Diogenes Laertius and Aelian: Socrates was the only one not attacked by the sickness. This circumstance could also have been due to pure coincidence, but it certainly denotes that he was endowed with a strong and resistant physique, which he preserved through moderation and practice in such a way that he was trained for every eventuality and hardship of life. And what is more, he also practiced his spiritual fortitude in military campaigns and forced himself to even greater endeavours. People have seen him standing in the same spot for twenty-four hours, absorbed in his thoughts and with an intense gaze, as if his spirit would have departed from his body, as noted by Gellius. It was undeniably rapture or at least a certain predisposition for enthusiasm, and we can see several traces in his life for the fact that he did not remain completely free of these.’²⁸

In my dissertation, I have added the remarks of two outstanding philosophers of the 20th century to these considerations. One of them is *Hans-Georg Gadamer* and the other is the philosopher and Talmudist *Emmanuel Lévinas*. They both focus on the interpretation of texts. For Gadamer, the concept of the miracle can be approached within the understanding of the Other, while Lévinas, who is a follower of Maimonides and Mendelssohn, considers the concept of the miracle to be graspable within the Revelation. “During these extraordinary moments, the lucid work of the science of Judaism, which reduces the miracles of the Revelation or the national genius to a series of influences, loses its spiritual significance. In place of the miracle of the unique source, there shines the marvel of confluence. The latter is understood as a voice calling from the depths of converging texts and reverberating in a

²⁷ Staller Tamás, A zsidó filozófia történeti vázlata, Dissertation, http://www.or-zse.hu/phd/staller_habil.pdf letöltve 2016.10.11, 104.

²⁸ Op. cit. (the material from the ORZSE homepage does not have page numbers)

sensibility and a form of thought that are already there to greet it. What does the voice of Israel say, and how can it be translated into a few propositions? Perhaps it announces nothing more than the monotheism which the Jewish Bible brought to humanity. At first, we might recoil from this hoary old truth or this somewhat dubious claim. But the word denotes a set of significations based on which the shadow of the Divine is cast beyond all theology and dogmatism... One must follow the Most High God and be faithful to Him alone. One must be wary of the myth that leads to the *fait accompli*, the constraints of customs and locale... One follows the Most High God, above all by drawing near to one's fellow man, and showing concern for 'the widow, the orphan, the stranger and the beggar', an approach that must not be made 'with empty hands'. It is therefore on earth, amongst men, that the spirit's adventure unfolds.

The traumatic experience of my slavery in Egypt constitutes my very humanity, a fact that immediately allies me to the workers, the wretched, the and the persecuted peoples of the world. My uniqueness lies in the responsibility I display for the Other. I cannot fail in my duty towards any man, any more than I can have someone else stand in for my death. This leads to the conception of a creature without falling into the egotism of grace. Man is therefore indispensable to God's plan or, to be more exact, man is nothing other than the divine plans within being.²⁹

In the summary of the first part of my dissertation, I emphasize the following points on the basis of my analysis of the concept's philosophical and theological background:

1. the concept of miracle does not have a fully rational explanation even within philosophy. The followers of Greek philosophical thought, such as Gadamer, come to a point where the concept of the miracle becomes graspable within the understanding of the Other man. Jewish philosophers and theologians do not break away from the God who reveals himself within our world.
2. although the Holy Scripture differentiates between signs and miracles, it is the liberating God who reveals himself within miracles, both in the Bible and in extra-Biblical literature.
3. citing from rabbinical literature, I illustrated the conception of the rabbis' that miracles can only come from God, and if the human person is brought into the foreground, then it is not a miracle, but witchcraft.

²⁹ Lévinas Emmanuel, On Judaism, translated by Csillag Gábor, [http://pilpul.net/komoly/judaizmus-1963 letöltve 2016.10.12.](http://pilpul.net/komoly/judaizmus-1963%20letoltve%202016.10.12)

In the following subchapter I looked into the way in which Biblical miracles have been interpreted in the history of theology. In order to do this, I have put great emphasis on the results of the historical research on Jesus, on the interpretation methods of different theological schools, and on rhetorical analysis.

I have emphasized four major stages of historical researches on Jesus: *the stage of the "first" or the "old" question (from Reimarus to Schweitzer, 1778-1906), the so-called „no question" period (from Schweitzer to Kasemann 1906-1953), the period of the "new" or "second question", 1953-1970) and finally the „third question" (from 1980 to the present).*

Reimarus already distinguished the discourses of Jesus himself from the discourses attributed to him by the early Church. This rational method of analysis is also followed by Venturini, according to whom the miracles of Jesus are no miracles at all from an enlightened perspective. According to him, Jesus never healed without using medicine and, in fact, he always had with him his medicine box. For instance, he cured the Syrophenician woman's daughter by marking her house for his disciples while the woman recounted her tale to Jesus and having his disciples calm the child while he was discussing with the woman. As she arrived home, her child was already healed.

The resurrection of the dead was nothing else than their return from coma, since Jesus had quite advanced medical knowledge and could thus differentiate between true death and states of unconscious coma.

Natural wonders were rather based on the intuitions of Jesus than on conquering the power of nature. Since he had precise knowledge about the functioning of the natural elements, he could also foretell what would happen. Venturini offers a quite simple explanation of the miracle at Cana. Jesus brought along some barrels of good wine as a wedding gift and deposited them in another room. As the original wine ran out, and the stoneware was filled with water, Jesus has asked the servants to serve up the wine he brought along. Of course, he also asked them not to tell anyone about the source of the wine. Since the Evangelist John has only been a disciple for a couple of days at that time, he did not dare ask Jesus for an explanation of this alleged miracle.³⁰

The author also proposed an interesting theory on Jesus' childhood and education, which will stir up the imagination of the researchers after the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls.

³⁰ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1961, 44-45.

According to this hypothesis Jesus was raised and educated by the Essenes, along with John the Baptist. They were both raised to become liberators of their people, but while the Jews saw their chance for liberation in political revolt, they both knew that this could only be achieved through spiritual renewal. Once, Jesus and John have met a revolutionary group and convinced them that their intentions are impure. One of these revolutionaries was Simon himself, who later became a disciple of Jesus.³¹

In fact, Jesus' death was also illusory, since he was revived by the Essenes in his grave. The disciples saw two such Essenes at His grave and not angels.

Thus, it is clear that, in Venturini's case, reason completely overrules faith. In fact, the tension between these two factors will always accompany the historical researches about Jesus.

The 19th century will bring along, as a new characteristic, Strauss' theory on myths. He distinguishes between the following types of myth:

- *Historical myths*, which recount real historical events, but mix the divine and human, the natural and supernatural elements.
- *Philosophical myths*, which hide a simple idea or concept within the historical narration.
- *Poetical myths*, which mix the historical and the poetical elements, and place it into an ornamental framework in which the original idea is obscured by the poetic imagination.

The most important value of his work consists in the fact that he reflects upon all the previous solution proposals and lifts the historico-critical perspective from its stagnation. The author considered all previous approaches unsatisfactory. In his view, the supernatural explanation cannot be reconciled with the natural scientific one. Reimarus' "theory of deception" misinterprets the dynamics of the Gospels' genesis. The simplifying rational interpretation offered for miracles by Paulus misinterprets the true nature of the Gospels and the narration, and eliminates the message that is historically real, precisely in order to save the historical."³²

As I have shown in my work, 20th century historical research relies upon the results achieved so far. Taking the results of the new historical, archaeological, and sociological

³¹ Op. cit. 46.

³² Czire Szabolcs, A történeti Jézus. A kutatás múltja és jelene, Presa Universitara Clujeana/Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó, 2009, 43-44.

researches into consideration, the researchers have attempted to draw different pictures of Jesus.

I have discussed more fully the work of Albert Schweitzer in my thesis. According to his view, Jesus “has come to us as an anonymous and ageless companion. He has come to those who did not know Him, and addresses the very same words to us today: Follow me! – while preparing us for the tasks that He will accomplish in our historical age. And He is the one who commands. For those who obey him, whether they are simple people or wise men, he reveals himself within their suffering, efforts, and conflicts experienced in their community with Christ. All of this is an unspeakable mystery, since people will only learn through their own experience who he is.”³³ In this manner, Schweitzer precludes all possibility for the further discussion of the historical Jesus issue, and places the problem of understanding Christ on an ethical and experiential level. Similarly, Bultmann’s demythization also brought along with itself several questions related to the interpretation of Jesus’ deeds, words, and miracles.

There is a further theologian who is seldom discussed, but whom I considered to be of great importance for my topic, since his thinking about miracles has later become quite influential: the Roman Catholic theologian and Dominican friar Edward Schillebeeckx. He proposes the following perspectives for the explanation of miracles:

- We know the geographical place where Jesus produced most of His wonders. It is Galilee, where those who have “transmitted” the narrations about Jesus combined them with several local traditions, so these have acquired their final form after their synthesis with Christian theological ideas.
- Jesus addressed himself to the common man through His miracles. In His society, the image of the “benefactor” was very popular, being defined by various legends. This can also be seen in the Gospel According to Mark, where Jesus almost appears as a “rural which doctor” or a magician.
- In “congregation Q”³⁴ it is not the miracles which are of primary importance but the categorisation of Jesus’ acts according to different criteria. For instance, Jesus exorcises demons using “God’s finger”, since it is plain to see that Kingdom of God has come. The background culture is represented by late Jewish demonology, which also explains why the cause of the sickness is a demon and also why it cannot be healed through simple exorcism of the demon. As a result of the exorcism, the sick person learns to communicate and begins to talk again. It is also interesting in

³³ Op. cit. 42.

³⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende*, H. Nelissen Bloemendaal, 1975, 151.

these stories, according to Schillebeeckx, that they cannot be attributed solely to Jesus' glory, but emphasize God's power much more strongly. If the Kingdom of God has come, then it is God who reveals Himself to men through these acts. Thus, we have an "eschatology in the present tense"³⁵, which was characteristic for the original congregation. This association between exorcism and the arrival of the Kingdom of God necessarily presupposes a Christian background, against which Christ appears as an eschatological prophet who will soon return.

- Another category of healings from the Q source is "healing at distance". All these instances take place within a pagan medium, due to the Jewish laws on purity which only allow the visiting of pagan homes under very specific circumstances. However, the central message of these narratives is that Jesus possesses such power that it suffices for him to say a word, and the sick are immediately healed. In these cases, in fact, the authors do not establish a Christology, but a soteriology³⁶: a possibility for salvation according to the will of God, which represents a path open to everyone.
- The prophetic tradition of the Old Testament lies also behind the resurrection of the dead. This also attests to the fact that the Gospels identify the activity of Jesus with that of an eschatological prophet. The thematic discussion of the miracles also emphasizes that it is Jesus in whom the Kingdom of God has come and He is the one whose coming was foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus' answer to the question of John the Baptist is quite clear: "And he answered and said unto them, Go and tell John the things which ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them." (The Gospel According to Luke 7,22) This is the sentence which defines the expectations towards Jesus and which will determine almost all of his actions. In other words, his miracles are not random, but were included in the Gospels with clear theological intentions.
- Jesus' healings definitely have a historical background, since He demonstrates through these that the Kingdom of God has the power to defeat evil. However, there are also miracles through which Jesus only illustrates certain messages, using them as allegories. He answers with a miracle to the question whether he is also obliged to pay the Temple tax (and this is a rather legend-like allegory), which answers that, as

³⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende*, H. Nelissen Bloemendaal, 1975, 152. In the original Dutch version of the expression is: „praesentische eschatologie”.

³⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende*, H. Nelissen Bloemendaal, 1975, 152.

a prophet, he would not be obliged to do this, but in order to avoid any cause for stumbling, God will see to it that he can pay it.

The contemporary researcher Crossan states that Jesus was cynical, according to Géza Vermes' opinion he was a charismatic prophet, and Borg distinguishes between a pre-Easter and a post-Easter Jesus.

The final conclusion of this chapter of my dissertation could best be summarized through the words of Adolf Harnack: "Gentlemen! It is religion, the love of God and our fellow man that gives purpose to our life. Science is unable to do this. Believe me when I tell you, on the basis of my own experience, as someone who has dealt with issues seriously for thirty years. Pure science is an exceptionally great thing and woe to the one who underestimates it or suppresses in himself the thirst for knowledge! However, science is as unable today to answer the questions of wherefrom, whereto, and why, as it was three thousand years ago. Science reveals us only facts and exposes contradictions (...), but does not tell us anything about the beginning of the world and our own existence (...), as it is also silent on their end goal."³⁷

In the next chapter of my thesis, I dealt with the historical description of Jesus' age, the relevant characteristics of the cult of His times, and the folkloristic material that defined the religious thought of his contemporaries. Anthropology and sociology helped me to emphasize the differences between the anthropological model and the community religious life of today and those of Jesus' historical period. Placing the figure of Jesus in this context, I discussed in my dissertation the attitude toward wonders of Jesus' contemporaries.

In my discussion of the historical period I considered it important to present the Jewish perspective, for which I have used the monumental work of Heinrich Graetz, also translated into Hungarian. In his foreword to this great work, Miksa Szabolcsi writes as follows:

„As he composed his history, Graetz experienced again all the glory and suffering he presents. He rejoices with his people when it acts wisely, exclaims in shock when it receives blows from fate, as well as condemns and punishes when it goes astray. One can see him tremble for its great figures, applaud their successes, and mourn their fall. He writes his history with his heart, and that which comes from the heart also finds its way to the heart of the readers. While reading, we as well experience his emotions and the events. We feel and act in unison with his heroes. Some of them we would like to pull back from the edge of the

³⁷ Op. cit. 136.

abyss; we are flushed with anger when they act wickedly; when the time for mourning comes, we mourn with them, but also rejoice with them just as sincerely, if our heroes achieve their purpose. Without even noticing, we can suddenly see ourselves at the various historical sites. Thus, we become the children of Israel again. Graetz's spirit carries us."³⁸

Graetz does not use the Christian scientific methods when writing the history of his people. Nevertheless, "in the great work of Graetz, behind its apparent religious and Church history, one can discover national history".³⁹

In my presentation of the historical period, I considered it important to discuss the manner in which the religion and culture of the Jewish people was defined by their encounter with the culture and the religion of various nations.

The appearance of angels and demons in Jewish literature is due to Persian culture. "Similarly to the Persians, they called the angels sacred 'guardians' (Irin kadishin). What is more, the angels even received individual names: Michael was the angel of the people of Israel or their Heavenly Lord, who had to protect his people; Gabriel was the strong one, and Raphael cured different illnesses; and there were also other archangels, such as Uriel (or Shuriel) and Metatron, among others. In the same way in which imagination transformed the Persian demons into angels, endowing them with a Jewish character and Jewish names, it also copied the so-called *devas* and introduced them into the world of Jewish ideas."⁴⁰

Greek culture brought along with itself the secularization of both everyday and religious life and left its mark also on Jewish language. This is also attested by the appearance of Greek words within the Jewish language. "In the domains of political and military life, as well as in other areas, the Jewish people needed completely new words, which were borrowed from the Greek language. In the area of legislation, such terms were: ζυνήβοπορ = defender, = κανήβοπορ = accuser, κήνζορ = punishment; 3. terms from military life: ζηπαηιώηδρ = warrior, general, 4. πόλεμορ = war. 5. Amusement games also received Greek designations, such as: κσαεία = gambling; 6. Greek terms were borrowed for designating the various categories of buildings: ααζιλική = basilica, 7. ζηάδιον. One also finds several Greek words designating concepts from the domain of commercial life. Traditional literature most often used words of Greek origin for designating the different occupations as well as monetary

³⁸A zsidók egyetemes története 6 kötetben, Graetz nagy műve alapján és különös tekintettel a magyar zsidók történetére, szerk. Szabolcsi Miksa, Phönix irodalmi részvénytársaság, Bp., 1907., http://www.unitas.hu/sites/default/files/a_zsidok_egyetemes_tortenete_1_kotet.pdf, VII. Last downloaded on 27.11.2016.

³⁹ Kiss Ende, Róma, Jeruzsálem, Moses Hess, <http://www.or-zse.hu/hacofe/vol7/kisse-moseshess-egyenloseg2013.htm> Last downloaded on 27.11.2016.

⁴⁰ Op. cit.135.

units. At first, only indispensable words were borrowed from Hellenic language. Already from the middle of the IIIrd century (B.C.) our sources mention a Jewish person about whom Aristotle states that: Ελληνικὸν ἦν οὐ ἡδ' ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν – i.e. he was Greek not only in his speech but also in his soul.”⁴¹

Along with the influence of language, Graetz also mentions that “the morality and the immorality”⁴² of the Jewish people has also become Greek in its character. One of the outstanding personalities of this historical period was Simon the Pious (or the Just), who served as the high priest between 300 and 270 B.C., being “the greatest of his brothers and the pride of his people”.⁴³ He was the one who renovated the Temple and the stone wall as well as introduced water into Jerusalem. Jesus Sirach praises him in the following manner:

„How glorious he was when he came out of the Most Holy Place!

He was like the morning star shining through the clouds, like the full moon,
like the sun shining on the Temple of the Most High, like the rainbow gleaming in
glory against the clouds,

like roses in springtime, like lilies beside a stream, like the cedars of Lebanon in
summer

Then the priests shouted and blew their trumpets of hammered silver

...

Then the choir began to sing his praises, and the beautiful music rang out.”⁴⁴

His spirituality could be described through two of his sayings that have been preserved. One of these is a teaching given to his students: “The world is based on three things: the law, the worship of God, and the practice of love.”⁴⁵ His other saying is the motto of his pupil Antigonus of Sockho, which is also attributed to him: “Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of reward; rather, be like servants who do not serve their master for the sake of reward”.⁴⁶

It is said of his death that “the visible signs of grace that manifested themselves until then in the inner sanctuary completely ceased with his death”.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Op. cit. 6.

⁴² A zsidók egyetemes története 6 kötetben, Graetz nagy műve alapján és különös tekintettel a magyar zsidók történetére, szerk. Szabolcsi Miksa, Phönix irodalmi részvénytársaság, Bp., 1907., http://www.unitas.hu/sites/default/files/a_zsidok_egyetemes_tortenete_2_kotet.pdf, 154. Last downloaded on 27.11.2016.

⁴³ Op. cit. 159.

⁴⁴ Op. cit. 159.

⁴⁵ Op. cit. 160.

⁴⁶ Op. cit. 160.

⁴⁷ Op. cit. 161.

As I already mentioned above, the Hellenic influence left its mark also upon the cult of the Temple. Our sources are scarce on this subject, but the issue is nevertheless discussed at length and very seriously between the rabbis. “Naturally, the teachers of the Mishna and the Talmud put greater emphasis on the traditions and the rituals of the Jerusalem Temple which could also be performed during their lifetime. At the same time, they were rather less interested in the rituals associated with the existence of the Temple, but seemingly less important, and were satisfied with a laconic tradition, without trying to discuss it further as a result of wider investigations and further commentaries.”⁴⁸ Lajos Venetianer⁴⁹ discusses the festival of Sukkot, about which the Talmud has preserved few records. What can be known for certain is the following: “This part of the Festival of Tabernacles is not a matter of debate, since the disputes only refer to the following inessential issues. 1. The name of the festival. (...) 2. Another inessential debate concerned the material of the vessel (whether it was silver or gypsum) from which the water was torn on the altar. 3. Finally, a more serious debate ensued about the issue whether the strictness of the Sabbatic or festive ban can be broken through the ceremony of the rejoicing festivity. The participants of the debate called the festivity ‘a superfluous joy’.”⁵⁰

According to Venetianer, the cult of the Sukkot leads us back to the Eleusinian Mysteries and their effect on Jewish religious life. “More precisely, it was the cult of Demeter and Persephone that gained entrance into the Jerusalem Temple.”⁵¹

It is also only natural that the rabbis had to take up the fight against superstitions and magic that started to spread as a result of the influence of various cultures. In the Talmud, we read about superstitions the following: “If a raven croaks and someone exclaims: Alas! – or the raven croaks, and someone exclaims: – Come back! – then that person makes himself guilty of the Amorites’ superstitions. And the persons who says: Eat the bud of this garden salad so you think of me; or says: don’t eat it, so you can avoid cataract; kiss the coffin of the dead, so he will appear to you; or: do not kiss the coffin of the dead, so he will not appear to you at night; put on your shirt backwards, so you can see dreams; or: do not put on your shirt backwards, so you can avoid seeing dreams; sit on the branch, so you can see dreams; or: do not sit on the branch, so you can avoid seeing dreams – these are all superstitions of the

⁴⁸ Dr. Venetianer Lajos, Az eleuziszi misztériumok a jeruzsálemi templomban, in Magyar Zsidó Szemle, 1895, 214. http://kisebbssegkutato.tk.mta.hu/uploads/files/olvasoszoba/magyarzsidoszemle/Magyar-zsido_szemle_1895.pdf Last downloaded on 23.11.2016.

⁴⁹ His short biography can be read on the website: <http://www.or-zse.hu/hirdetes/venetianer2008.htm>.

⁵⁰ Dr. Venetianer Lajos, Az eleuziszi misztériumok a jeruzsálemi templomban, in Magyar Zsidó Szemle, 1895, 214-215. http://kisebbssegkutato.tk.mta.hu/uploads/files/olvasoszoba/magyarzsidoszemle/Magyar-zsido_szemle_1895.pdf Last downloaded on 23.11.2016.

⁵¹ Op. cit. 222.

Amorites. So, if someone exclaims: do not sit on the plough, so you avoid making your work harder, then this is a superstition of the Amorites; but if he says it in order to prevent the plough from breaking, then it is permitted.”⁵²

Sorcery is defined most precisely by Lajos Blau: “We believe that we are not far from the truth if we say that any kind of sorcery is superstition, but not any superstition is sorcery. Riess makes the following statement about the relationship between the two: ‘It is already clear from the designation that superstition is something at rest, a medial entity, a belief and not a practice. However, in the same way in which religion cannot be satisfied with believing in gods, but turns into a cult in practice, thus also superstition becomes practical within sorcery, which in a certain sense represents its cult. Through sorcery, the superstitious person wins over the forces that threaten and control him, or invokes the protective forces in order to break their influence.’”⁵³

I emphasize here these aspects because I consider it very important to clarify how the Jewish people who lived after Christ viewed his person as well as in order to review the information of the contemporary historical sources and the Talmud about Jesus. According to my conclusion, Philo of Alexandria does not mention Jesus at all, and Josephus Flavius has only a few sentences about him, but contemporary researchers do not attribute even these passages to Flavius.

The information of the Talmud reflects the fact that the rabbis were largely ignorant of the narratives about Jesus. They speak about his origins in the following manner: „1. His legal father was Pappus ben Judah, called Josephus in the Gospels.

2. The real name of his mother was Mary Magdalene, called Mary in the Gospels.

3. The seducer is Josephus ben Pandera, who is, of course, not named in the Gospels.

4. The name that is used for stigmatizing the seduced woman is Satda, the correspondent of which is Elisabeth in the Gospels.”⁵⁴

Consequently, in the light of the above, the explanation of Jesus’ insulting sobriquets from the Talmud is based on many errors and on the lack of information, while it is also true that “in these dark times of the Jews, their anger and desperation awakened in their hearts the idea that the most important doctrine of Christianity is not devoid of ironic overtones”.⁵⁵

⁵² Dr. Molnár Ernő, *A hagyomány gyöngyei, A Talmud könyvei*, Budapest 1921-1923, Korvin Testvérek Könyvnyomdája, 108-109.

⁵³ Op. cit. 2.

⁵⁴ Op. cit. 349.

⁵⁵ Op. cit. 349.

The Talmud does not tell us much more about Jesus' death either: "On the day before Easter, Jesus (from Nazareth, as the manuscript adds) was hanged from tree. Before this event, a crier kept announcing forty days: 'He has to be stoned, for he practiced sorcery, and he deceived and lead Israel astray. If anyone can say something in his defence, then let him come forward and testify for him.' But since there was no one to come forward, Jesus was hanged from a tree on the day before Easter.' Researchers have been tempted to call into question the authenticity of the text due to its apologetic orientation. The introduction of the crier is meant to emphasize Jesus' guilt as well as the fact that the punishment procedure was respected. All this cannot be historically accurate. The hanging of the corpse from a tree, which supposedly followed his stoning, does also not hold up historically. The mentioning of a Jewish way of execution is explained by the fact that the rabbis could not accept the fact that an uncircumcised person (Pilate) should pass judgment in an internal Jewish matter."⁵⁶

Following the historical and religious-historical presentation, I offered an analysis of the belief system of contemporary Israel on the basis of the works of two excellent theologians, Martin Buber and Ephraim Urbach, in order to find an answer to the question regarding the basic characteristics of the Jewish people.

Based on his book entitled *Two Types of Faith*, the interpretation of faith can take two forms for Buber. We can interpret both on the basis of our own individual life. The first kind of faith is when I trust someone without being able to offer reasons for it. The other form of faith is when I do not know the reason, but I accept something as true without being able to justify it. The fact that I trust (believe) in something/someone, or accept something as true, cannot be motivated with the shortcomings of my thinking, but represents a characteristic of the relationship between myself and the entity or person in which (or in whom) I have put my trust, or which accept as true. It is a relationship which, according to its nature, is not based on "reasons", since, according to Buber, reasons are not yet sufficient for belief, or to put it differently, belief functions even without reasons.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Francois Bovon, *Jézus utolsó napjai*, Budapest, 2004, 8. <http://docplayer.hu/4531366-Francois-bovon-jezus-utolso-napjai-ford-miss-zoltan.html> Last downloaded on 12.12.2016.

In his note nr. 9, the author also references another well-known passage from the Talmud: "Rabbi Abbahu says thus: If someone tells you: 'I am your God', then he is lying; if he says: 'I am the Son of Man', then he will be sorry for it in the end. He might even say that: 'I will ascend to the Heavens', but he cannot do it." (Talmud, Taanit, II,1, or according to another edition of the text: II, 65b, 59). However, according to the author, "if this text is indeed about Jesus Christ, then it is much more likely that it is a part of the polemics between the Synagogue and the Church, and does not refer to the life of Jesus. It probably reflects the strong Jewish antipathies against the Christological demands of the Church."

⁵⁷ I cannot precisely define the reasons for which I believe. (My observation.)

In one of his excellent works, entitled *The Sages, Their concepts and belief*, Urbach does not only deal with the beliefs of Israel but also with the core dogmas of the “sages” creed, which are, of course, also reflected within the belief of the people.⁵⁸ In my dissertation, I studied the following dogmas and their meanings for the Jewish people:

- belief in the one God
- the presence of God within the world
- God is ubiquitously present, both near and far
- the power of God
- on miracles
- the heavenly court of God
- God spoke, and thus He created the world
- on man

As a conclusion, I established that, according to both theological thinkers, the sages always try to reinterpret faith, which must always be recontextualized due to historical changes, while firmly remaining on the basis offered by scripture. In Urbach’s approach, the sages⁵⁹ base the faith of the Jewish people⁶⁰ on the one God, and their fierce fight against idolatry, magical practices, and witchcraft also stems from this source.

In the final part of my dissertation, I present a comparison between some miracles presented in the Old Testament and in the Gospels. From the miracles of the Old Testament, I emphasized those which offer a background to Jesus’ miracles and can be associated with his deeds.

I analyzed the stories of three miracle workers of the Old Testament: Elijah, Elisha, and Moses. The common thread which leads us to the understanding of Jesus’ miracles can be discovered in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Mark. In Matthew, we can observe a strong parallel between the figure of Elijah and that of John the Baptist, while in Luke the parallel is between Elijah and Jesus Himself. In John’s Gospel, there is a parallel between Jesus and Moses.

As a final conclusion, I would like to draw attention to the title of my dissertation. From this perspective, the background of Jesus’ miracles consists in that excess faith of his disciples through which they believe that Jesus is not a mere wonder rabbi or one of the charismatics of their historical period, but the Saviour Himself, the Messiah in whom all the

⁵⁸ Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and beliefs*, Trans. by Israel Abrahams, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1975.

⁵⁹ I tried to emphasize the opinions of the sages who were Jesus’ contemporaries.

⁶⁰ He does not state dogmas.

promises of the prophets have been fulfilled. These people were convinced that he died and has arisen again as well as of the fact that he will return to judge both the living and the dead. Thus, Jesus cannot be separated from the other prophets, and their messages are associated, while their acts denote the Shekhinah of God; nevertheless, Isaiah's prophecies were fulfilled in Him: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." (The Gospel According to Matthew 11,4-6).

As for myself, I am also convinced of the fact that although we do not view Jesus in the same way, nevertheless it is the common desire of both the Jewish people and Christians to be together with Him who is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13,8) at the common banquet that he Has prepared for us.