

Up until the 1920s, critical scholars who were deep into questions of New Testament studies had focused a lot of their attention (not all of it, obviously) on questions of textual criticism (how do we know what the “original” text was?) and source criticism (what are the written sources lying behind the New Testament - especially the Gospels?). The former was a matter of concern largely because it was thought that the words of Scripture were inspired by God - so it was important to know what those words were! The latter was a matter of concern in no small measure because of the intriguing questions themselves (was Mark the first Gospel? Did Matthew and Luke copy it? Did Q exist? and so on) but even more because of the significance of their answers for understanding the historical Jesus. If we want to get back to Jesus, and the later Gospels represent alterations of the traditions about him by later authors, then surely the best procedure is to determine our \*earliest\* sources. And if Mark is our earliest source, then it is the most historically accurate.

And so, scholars in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially, wrote numerous “Lives of Jesus” based on the premise that Mark was the earliest and therefore most historically reliable Gospel. This entire episode in historical Jesus scholarship is chronicled with unparalleled wit and intelligence by none other than Albert Schweitzer in his great classic, [The Quest of the Historical Jesus](#), a book still very much worth reading today. In German it was entitled [Von Reimarus zu Wrede](#), not a very catchy title, in that it was simply called by the names of the first and final historical Jesus scholars it discussed.

Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) was the very first scholar of modern times to attempt to describe what the historical Jesus was \*really\* like, given the fact (that he saw as a fact - a prescient insight, as it was not widely shared or even thought of in his day) that our Gospels have so many historical problems with them. They do not give a historically accurate account of what happened. So what did happen?

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