

[MEDIATOR FIGURES ANNOTATED BASIC BIBLIOGRAPHY](#)

TOP TEN READING LIST FOR DIVINE MEDIATOR FIGURES IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD

Please note that I present this list as *my* top ten books on the subject, that is, the ten books that have had the most influence on my thinking to date. Another specialist in the area would almost certainly have a different list, although I suspect there would be a lot of overlap. No ranking is implied by the order I give the books; they are in alphabetical order according to author's or editor's last name. The blurbs for each represent my interpretations and my opinions alone. The authors are not responsible for my comments (and I welcome their corrections if they think I've gotten it wrong). I also welcome debate and discussion in general about my list and the comments therein.

Dr. J. R. Davila

Last updated: 4 June 1998

jrd4@st-andrews.ac.uk

-
- Margaret Barker, [_The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God_](#) (London: SPCK, 1992).

The pre-exilic royal cult in Jerusalem identified the Davidic king with YHWH. Early christology applied this pattern of the royal cult to Jesus. Controversial, but brilliant and thought-provoking.

-
- James H. Charlesworth (ed.), [_The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity_](#) (Minneapolis Mn.: Fortress, 1992)

A wide-ranging collection of essays on a category crucial for the understanding of ancient divine mediators and early christology.

-
- John Dominic Crossan, [_The Historical Jesus: the Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant_](#) (San Francisco, Ca.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

The historical Jesus was a cynic philosopher, more or less. Crossan is perhaps the best-known member of the Jesus Seminar, although his conclusions are not always the same as those of the Seminar.

-
- Stevan Davies, [_Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity_](#) (London: SCM, 1995).

Jesus wasn't a teacher; he was a spirit-possessed intermediary and his deification developed from the idea that he was possessed by the holy spirit or the

son of God. For my money, the most economical and persuasive reconstruction of the historical Jesus currently on the table.

- Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

Looks at popular and peasant concepts of messianism and prophecy in the time of Jesus. Important because Jesus and his followers presumably would have been more familiar with these than with the literary traditions scholars normally study.

- Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* (London: SCM, 1988).

Jesus is the only mediator figure in the Judaism of his time to receive worship in a cult, even though others may have been deified in some sense. The Jesus cult that gave birth to Christianity is the result of a still very imperfectly understood "binitarian mutation" within Judaism. This book is the starting point for any discussion of divine mediator figures and the origins of the worship of Jesus.

- Gershom Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).

In the 1660s Sabbetai Zvi, a manic-depressive Turkish Jew, decided that he was the messiah and his cult spread rapidly, but briefly, over Europe and the Middle East. His case is extremely well documented and demonstrates that the message of a messianic figure can be completely distorted and rendered legendary even in the lifetime of the figure. A cautionary tale for historical Jesus scholarship.

- Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

Explores the descriptions of the "two powers" heresy in rabbinic literature, the scriptural exegesis behind the notion of "two powers in heaven," and possible origins for the heresy.

- Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978).

Jesus was a magician. A pioneering effort that in retrospect has serious methodological flaws, but starts to ask the right questions.

- Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: SCM, 1983).

Jesus was a Galilean charismatic sage. Draws on rabbinic and earlier Jewish literature to reconstruct what such sages (e.g., Honi the Circle Drawer) were like and tries with a fair bit of success to place Jesus into a plausible historical and cultural context.
