CHAPTER TWO

KING JESUS AS BIOGRAPHICAL ENCLOSURE
WITHIN THE EPOCH

"It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for sometime past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed" (Luke 1 3-4)

2.1.1. Robert Graves was born on 24 July 1895, in a Catholic family, in Wimbledon. His father Alfred Percival Graves is a well-known Irish poet and songwriter. And his mother is a descendent of the German historian, Leopold Van Ranke. Patrick Grant writes about Graves that, "he belongs, in one sense, among the mythographers of the main stream western tradition, prior to the Puritan revolution which inaugurated the modern era of technology and scientific nominalism. Also, he is a product of a highly articulate and 'prosaic' post-Renaissance culture, and his perspectives and techniques are highly self-conscious and sophisticated" (65)

2.1.2. Graves is mainly known as a poet. He has also done distinguished work in prose as historical and modern novelist, as a humorous and polemical pamphleteer, as a critic, as a mythographer, as a translator, and as an eccentrically original student of the Old and the New Testaments. His fascination with the Jesus story is clear from the fact that
he has written two Jesus reconstructions: *King Jesus*¹ and *The Nazarene Gospel Restored*. He speaks about his reconstruction process in *King Jesus* that he found it very difficult, as he was focused not on the problem of myth but on the problem of history. As he found the history of Jesus from His nativity onwards very close to a pre-ordained mythical pattern, he could presume events whose historicity could be proved later through research. As he found the Hebrew Scriptures unacceptable at their face value due to the tampering of priestly editors and by accidental changes, he attempts in this novel to reconstruct the original story with the help of popular myths of the Hebrews and that of the Cannanites and the history of the Jews and their neighbouring nations. His knowledge in both the Old Testament and the New Testament has been clearly established in the novel. He extensively quotes from them both.

To counter the argument that there is no historical data available to prove the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth, Graves places Jesus in the contemporary epoch as the secret heir to the Herodian throne and proves his claim with the help of Bible clues and historical data. He approached Jesus with an attitude that the proper way to understand him is to place Him in the socio-political cum religious environment of the first century AD. He states that he wrote this novel after serious research in remote fields like Calder’s *Hearings of the Scholars*, the Welsh *Llyfr Coch o Hergest*, “Babylonian astrology, Talmudic speculations, the liturgy of the Ethiopian church, the homilies of Clement of Alexandria, the religious essays of Plutarch, and recent studies of Bronze Age archaeology” (353).

¹Graves, Robert *King Jesus* 6th ed London Cassell, 1962 All further references to this book will be by page numbers
2.2.1. The first chapter of *King Jesus* clearly states that this novel is a biographical reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth:

> It is the history of the wonder-worker Jesus, rightful heir-at-law to the dominions of Herod, King of the Jews, who in the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, the governor-general of Judaea. Not the least wonderful of Jesus' many feats was that, though certified dead by his executioners after a regular crucifixion, and laid in a tomb, he returned two days later to his Galilean friends at Jerusalem and satisfied them that he was no ghost; then said farewell and disappeared in equally mysterious fashion. King Jesus (for he was entitled to be addressed) is now worshipped as a god by a sect known as the Gentile Christians (7).

2.2.2 In the course of the novel almost all the Biblical personages are recreated. The twelve apostles, the women followers, the Palestinian public and His enemies, the Pharisees, the Saducees and the priests, and the Romans, Pilate and his soldiers all are reconstituted in the novel. Paul of Tarsus is depicted as the person responsible for the conversion of the gentiles (7=Acts 22.21). The leadership of James, the brother of Jesus, over the Judaic Christians is mentioned (11) An elaborate and detailed analysis of the socio-cultural settings of the early Church is recreated in the novel. The first Christians' confusion regarding gentiles and the Jewish attitude to women are depicted with truth and clarity.
2.2.3. Similarly, almost all the events narrated in the Gospels are reconstructed in this novel with a conscious effort to provide historical accountability. Zechariah's mysterious experience in the Holy of Holies, his dumbness and the mysterious birth of John at his parents' old age (64-67 = Luke 1.5-25), the visitation of Elizabeth by Mary (68-72 = Luke 1.39-56), Mary's betrothal to Joseph (111-114 = Luke 1.27) and the annunciation (113 = Luke 1.26-38) are narrated systematically. The annunciation is reconstructed as a meeting between King Antipater's messenger and Miriam (113). Jesus is born in a cave in Bethlehem (120 = Luke 2.7). Some shepherds visit Him (120 = Luke 2.8-20). Three wise men offer Him gold, frankincense and myrrh (130 = Matt 2.1-12). Herod orders the Bethlehem massacre and the Holy Family escapes into Egypt (131-134 = Matt. 2.13-18). After the death of Herod they return to the land of Israel and settle at Nazareth in Galilee (149-156 = Matt. 2.19-23). His parents lose him at the Jerusalem Temple and find Him after three days while He was arguing with the Doctors of the Law (160-66 = Luke 2.41-50). John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus (196-97 = Matt. 3.1-12). Jesus receives baptism from John (220 = Matt 3.13-17; Mark 1.9-11; Luke 3.21-22). Jesus fasts forty days and defeats the temptations (193-201 = Matt 4.1-10; Mark 1.12-13; Luke 4.1-13).

2.2.4. All the Biblical retinue of Jesus is reconstituted in the novel. He calls disciples to follow Him. Simon the son of Jonah (Peter), his brother Andrew from Capernaum, the sons of Zebedee James and John, Thomas a carpenter, Philip, Bartholomew, Simon of Cana, James the less, Matthew, Thaddaeus and Judas of Kerioth are the twelve Apostles of Jesus, both in

2.2.5. The resurrecting of Laz'arus is reproduced in the Biblical style (283-85, John 11.1-44). Disciple Thomas' willingness to die with Jesus is reconstituted in the Biblical context (283- John. 16). The restoration of sight to the blind man of Jericho is recreated with a blending of Luke 18. 35-43 and John 9. 6-7. The sending of the seventy-two (273 = Luke 10. 1-12), the transfiguration experience (275-76 = Matt. 17.1-8; Mark 9. 2-8; Luke 9. 28-36), the Phoenician woman's faith in Jesus (276 = Matt. 15. 21-28; Mark 7.24-30), and the instant healing of the bleeding woman on touching the hem of Jesus' dress (277 = Matt. 9.20-23; Mark 5. 25-29) are narrated in the novel too. Jesus' glorious entry into Jerusalem is recreated in accordance with Matt. 21. 1-11. Matthew 21. 18-21 narrates the instant drying up of the fruit-less fig tree on Jesus' command. And it is reconstituted exactly in the
Biblical terms (292). Jesus' satisfying the Pharisee's questions regarding His authority by asking them to state whether John's baptism is from God or man (Matt 21. 23-27; Mark 11. 27-33; Luke 20. 1-8) is also reproduced in the novel (299).

The central theme of the Gospel: “The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner” (Mark 12 10), and its parable, the parable of the vineyard owner (Matt 21. 33-46; Mark 12 1-11; Luke 20 9-19) are recreated in an exact parallel Jesus' prophecy of Peter's denial (312= Matt. 26 33-35, Mark 14. 27-31; Luke 22.31-34; John 13.36-38) and the inauguration of the Eucharistic ritual (8) are elaborately narrated. The foot-washing (313= John 13 4-11), the prayer at Gethsemane (313 = Matt. 26 36-46, Mark 14 32-42, Luke 22 39-46), the betrayal and the arrest (Matt 26 47, Mark 14 43-52; Luke 22 47-53; John 18 3-12). Malluch's ear gashing by Peter and Jesus' healing touch (315 = Luke 22.50-51; John 18 11), Jesus' interrogation by the elders (318= Matt. 26 57-68; Mark 14 53-65; Luke 22 54-55,63-71; John 18. 13-14, 19-24), by Pilate (326-30 = Matt 27 11-26, Mark 15. 2-15; Luke 23. 3-5; John 18. 28- 19.16), by Herod (331 = Luke 23 8-12), liberation of Barabbas (333= Matt. 27 15-21; Mark 15 6-14, Luke 23. 18; John 18.39-40), Pilot washing his hands off the guilt (334 = Matt. 27.24), the inscription of the charge against Him “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews” (334 = Mark15.26; John 19 19), the arrest (315= Matt 26. 47-56, Mark 14 43-52; Luke 22. 47-53; John 18 3-12), and the disciple escaping naked (315 = Mark 14.52) are reconstructed realistically in the novel.
Judas' suicide (Matt. 27. 3-10), the purchase of the 'Potter's Field' with the thirty silver pieces, the name of which was later changed to Akeldama, 'the Field of Blood' (338= Matt. 27.8), the scourging, crowning with thorns (340 = John 19. 1-3), carrying of the cross (341= John 19.17), Simon being forced to carry Jesus' cross (341= Matt. 27.32; Mark 15. 21; Luke 23 26), Jesus consoling the weeping women of Jerusalem (341= Luke 23 31), the crucifixion at Golgotha (342 = Matt. 27. 33; Mark 15 22; Luke 23 33, John 19 17), the two thieves (340,42,43= Matt 27. 44; Mark 15. 27-28, Luke 22.32-33, John 19 18), the division of Jesus' cloths among the soldiers (342 = Matt 27. 35, Mark 15. 24, Luke 23. 34; John 23. 24), His prayer for His enemies (343 = Luke 23 34), entrusting His mother to John (343= John 19 26-27), offering Paradise to the good thief (343= Luke 23 42-43), the darkness at noon (344= Matt 27. 45, Mark 15.33; Luke 23. 44), the cry of despair to the Father (344= Matt 27 46; Mark 15.34), declining of myrrh-wine (344 = Mark 15.23), His death at the ninth hour (345= Matt 27 46; Mark 15 34; Luke 23.45), the piercing of His heart (345= John 19 31-37), Joseph's request for the body (346 = Matt 27. 57-58; Mark 15. 42-44, Luke 23 50-52; John 19. 38), the funeral (347 = Matt. 27. 59-60, Mark 15 46, Luke 23. 53, John 19. 40-42), the resurrection (348-350 = Matt 28, Mark 16; Luke 24.1-12; John 20), Thomas touching His wound (350 = John 20.24-290 and the appointing of Peter as the shepherd (350 = John 21. 15-23) are reconstituted exactly following the Gospel guide-lines.

2.3.1. Even though the whole story of Jesus is fictionalised by Graves in King Jesus, fictionalisation occurs specially at four levels. In the
delineation of the identity of Jesus; in the elimination of the divine intervention in the initiation of events; in converting His miracles into psychological handling of inferior minds by a superman; and in the figure shift of Judas from the betrayer to the protector. These four are interrelated as the four aspects of the one and the same person.

2.3.2.1. As it is practically impossible to prove the Godhood of Jesus through historical research, Graves focuses on Jesus' identity as the Son of David. The multifarious identity of Jesus as the Son of God, Son of Man and the Son of David is compressed into the single identity, the Son of David. To fill the gap in the Biblical account of Jesus' birth narrative, Graves creates a self-made history of Jesus' birth. In the Gospels Jesus becomes the Son of David through Joseph (Matt. 1.16, Luke 3.23). As Joseph is depicted in the Gospels not as the biological father of Jesus but as His foster father (Matt. 1.18-25, Luke 1.35), researchers found it confusing. To solve this problem Graves imagines that a secret marriage occurred between Antipater, the eldest son of Herod the great, and Miriam who was the heiress of Michal. As Antipater was afraid to reveal this marriage to the King, Simon the High priest arranges a fake engagement between Mary and Joseph of Arimathea. "Let her pass as the wife of another until you can acknowledge her as your Queen" (56). In accordance with this style of narration, in the annunciation scene Antipater's messenger is introduced as Angel Gabriel (113). Thus the role of Divine initiation in events like the virgin birth is substituted by secret plots planned by the High Priest, Simon Boeheus with a conscious intention to make Jesus the Son of
David. But when Antipater was executed by Herod, Joseph adopts Mary and her child into his family.

2.3.2.2. Traditionally, Joseph is pictured as a native of Nazareth and Jesus as the Son of David is born in Bethlehem. The Gospels solve this disparity by mentioning a census decree published by the Roman governor (Luke 2.2). As historians calculate the date of Quirinius' census, on a later date than Jesus' nativity (Arav and Rousseau 18), Graves assigns it to Mary's wish to give birth to her son in the town of her husband, King Antipater (114) To affirm Jesus' right as the Son of David, Graves adds a coronation ceremony with forty days fast, temptation and marriage (198-226)

2.3.3. The water into wine miracle of Cana shows the author's fictionalisation of miracles

Jesus instructed the servants to fill up the wine jars again with the lustral water, which every pious Jew uses for cleansing his hands before and after meals, and to serve it with the same ceremony as if it were wine. They hesitated to obey until his mother, as the senior matron, insisted on their doing so. He then himself accepted the first bowl of water, praised its delicious bouquet and colour and sipped it like a connoisseur. "Adam drank such wine as this in Eden", he said. The master of ceremonies followed his example and swore that never had he tasted such good wine (246).

The multiplication of the loaves also is recreated in the same manner as an imaginary eating of the bread. With regard to healings Graves's Jesus
always checks whether there were psychological impediments. To accept Graves' miracles the reader may need the simplicity of the child. No one could believe that through such simple mass handling Jesus could attain such fame and name as a miracle worker through millenniums. So the fictional coating of the novel stays visibly separate from the historical substance of the novel as if they are oil and water. The raising of Lazarus is related to the use of the secret Holy name of God which is forbidden to the Jews.

2.3.4. Judas is depicted as a good Israelite anxiously waiting for the arrival of the Messiah. He took Jesus as the Son of David, the redeemer of Israel. So when he found Jesus planning to become the worthless shepherd of Zacharias' prophecy by accepting death from the hands of His own disciples, he betrays Him to the leaders with an intention to protect Him (302-12). The judgement scene is fictionalised by introducing Herod bargaining with Jesus for buying His right to the throne (331). The scene of Atonement adds another fictional element in the identity of Jesus.

Near the summit three women stood side by side on a knoll. Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary his queen, and a very tall woman whose face was veiled. These three beckoned to him as if with a single hand, and he went towards them, smiling. But before he reached them, a sudden mist enveloped the mountain and, when it cleared, Jesus and the three women were gone (351).

He is shown as a victim of the conflict between matriarchy and patriarchy. As the second Adam Jesus' self-imposed task was to undo the evil which
according to the patriarchal legend, the first Adam had caused by sinfully listening to the seductive plea of his wife Eve (Grant 90).

2.4.1.1. Regarding the necessity for enclosing the story in its own epoch, Graves writes in his historical commentary on *King Jesus* "To write a historical novel by the analeptic method - the intuitive recovery of forgotten events by a deliberate suspension of time - one must train oneself to think wholly in contemporary terms" (353). The intention of Graves in writing this novel is to contradict those Jesus historians who dismiss the puzzling incidents in the life of Jesus such as the Bethlehem massacre and the Temptation, on the assumption that they do not make any historical sense. He invites the readers to strip away the layers of varnish and overpainting with which the true story was covered up- at first for political rather than doctrinal reasons- in the first century AD and to discover who Jesus really was and in what primitive Christianity consisted.

2.4.1.2. To create a real-life environment to the story, the author introduces a narrator, Agabus the Decapolitan, the son of a Syrian father and a Samaritan mother who had seen Jesus when he was a child. The narrator was one among the children whom their mothers took to Jesus for His blessings (279 = Matt. 19. 13-15, Mark 10. 13-16, Luke 18.15-17). He had begun the work of this book at Alexandria in the ninth year of the Emperor Domitian and completed it at Rome in the thirteenth year of the same. That means this reconstruction is supposed to have taken place between A.D 89 and 93 (7). Approximately, this is the period of Gospel writing. The Gospel According to Mark was written between A.D 65 and
Luke wrote after A.D 70; Matthew between 75 and 90 and John in A.D 95.

In Graves' view, the greatest hindrance to a reasonable view of Jesus is not the loss of a large part of His secret life up to the age of thirty, but the influence of the Gospel according to John, in which Jesus was attributed with Alexandrian - Greek rhetoric due to the author's wilful ignorance of Jewish culture (354). As a solution to this problem, Graves makes a conscious attempt at reconstructing Jesus in the exact Jewish setting. Consequently, almost all-prominent events of Jesus' life are rediscovered through the eyes of a Jew belonging to the First century A.D. He presents Jesus not as an inconsistent spiritual adventurer or a carpenter's son with megalomaniac obsessions or as an omnipotent being, co-equal with God the Father, though disguised as a man. But as the lost heir-at-law to the Herodian throne, a prophet unswervingly loyal to the Jewish faith as defined by Hillel and the Sages, and the central character in a moving and complex tragedy.

2.4.2. The Jewish system of temple virgins is introduced to clarify the traditional belief that Virgin Mary was brought up in the Temple in piety and holiness (16). According to the Protevangelium, Mary's parents dedicated the child-to-be to the service of the Lord's temple. The Jewish attitude to barrenness and their proud existence is recreated through the description of childless Joachim and his experience during the day of giving donation to the temple (18). Jewish faith in mystery births is introduced in the case of the ninety year old Joachim and Hannah begetting Miriam (23-
30). The protovangelium of James begins with an account of the special birth of Mary, Jesus’ mother. According to this apocryphal book, Anna and Joachim, Mary’s parents were unable to have children until the Lord sent his angel to promise a miraculous conception (Blomberg 217).

2.4.3. Though the mystical virgin birth doctrine connected to Jesus’ nativity is rejected on the assumption that it is the result of iconotropy (355), it is reconstructed as the result of a secret but lawful union between Miriam, the heiress of Michal and Antipater, the legal heir to the Herodian throne (113) Paul’s Letter to the Galatians where it is stated that Jesus “is born under the law” (Gal 4.4), and certain stories prevailing among the Jews and the historical finds related to them might have prompted Graves to produce this type of a reconstruction “The Talmud, and other post-biblical writings preserve a tradition that Jesus was the son of a Roman soldier named Pantera. The tombstone of a Roman soldier by that name was found in Germany” in October 1859 (Arav & Rousseau 223) A probable cause for alluding Jesus as the son of Pantera by non-Christians might have been the fact that Jesus was called ‘the Pantokrator’ by the first Christians due to Greek influence. In Greek panto means ‘all’ and krator means ‘mighty’ and Pantokrator is ‘all mighty’ (O’Hear & Groves 120). In his ‘historical commentary’, Graves himself admits a counter argument against this, that if Mary had such an illegal relationship, then, she might have been stoned to death according to the Jewish law. (354). Graves Makes Jesus the lawful heir to the throne of Herod, the king of Jews on the basis that such a hypothesis could explain Pilate’s concern for Jesus, the wording of the inscription above the Cross and the manner of his execution.
2.4.4.1. The rule of Herod the Great and the Jewish antagonism against him (Price 48) are depicted realistically and the Herodian family tree is drawn adopting Josephus’ historical description (Price 43) with an intention to show Jesus as a natural part of it as well as the Maccabee family tree (33-59). King Herod is depicted with a cancer in his bowel (56). His fox-like cunningness and his violent nature (Price 44) are recreated in a realistic vein. His defiling of the temple by installing an image on the temple wall and the Jewish uproar against it are mentioned (118-119). Herod’s death, funeral and the revolt of the Jews during the Passover, Archelaus’ impudent suppression of it, and the division of Herod’s kingdom among his sons, all are narrated (135-137) in historical fidelity. Emperor Augustus nullified Kingship in Israel after Herod’s expiry and appointed his sons Antipas, Archelaus and Philip as tetrarchs (Price 50) on the basis that Antipater’s heir is the lawful heir to the kingdom according to the will of Herod (137).

2.4.4.2. The census taken by Herod is narrated (122) with a reference to the power struggle among the royal family. Contrary to the Gospel depiction, the census happens in the novel after the birth of Jesus. This proves Graves’ conscious attempt to be true to Josephus’ statement, “The populace gladly responded to the call of Saddok the Pharisee and Judas the Galilean when they opposed Quirinius’s decision to take a census and exact tribute in 6 C.E” (Arav & Rousseau 232). But, Craig L. Blomberg speaks of the micrographic analysis of two fragmentary Latin inscriptions, found
later, which points to an earlier term of office for Quirinius before Christ’s birth (Blomberg 195).

2.4.5.1. The nativity scene in the grotto with shepherds’ visit and the angelic music is reproduced with a description of the rural culture of Judea. (120-21) Graves borrowed such details as Jesus’ birth in the cave and the motionlessness of the nearby animals and river” at the time of Jesus’ birth from the Protevangelium of James (Blomberg 217) Arav and Rousseau suggest the possibility of the grotto-birth in their book *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (18). The three astrologers are also included to highlight the long prevailing dream for a King to save the world (126). They offered gold, myrrh and frankincense to proclaim Jesus’ position as a King (130) The massacre of the children is recreated (131-33).

2.4.5.2. Child Jesus is drawn as a “prodigy of a sort not rare among Jews “(144) In the Gospel attributed to Thomas child Jesus is depicted as a prodigy (Blomberg 216). He could confound His teachers by explaining to them the true meaning of the letters of the alphabet (Ibid 216-17). In this manner, the Jewish educational system is made familiar. While describing the Holy family’s return journey from Egypt, Graves gives a description of the geography of Palestine at the time of Jesus and a map of it is attached to the novel as an appendix. Then Jesus’ identity as a Nazarene is established clearly. The journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover is narrated with a description of the important Biblical places between them.
Twelve-year-old Jesus’ debate with the doctors of the Law and his parents’ finding him after three days is also narrated (166).

2.4.6.1. Graves includes discussions of terms, names and customs, which had prominence among the Jews. A detailed analysis of the word ‘Messiah’ and its various significances to the Jews were brought out “The word Messiah signifies “the Christ” or “the Anointed One”, and is applicable only to an anointed king, not to a commoner however greatly distinguished by spiritual gifts or military achievements”(139). The five titles connected to the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Joseph, the Son of Man, the Great Priest and the Suffering Servant are also analysed (139) The first three suggested an earthly ruler who defeats the enemies of Israel to establish the Kingdom of the Lord and a Golden Age. All three are supposed to be the descendants of David born in Bethlehem of Judah. Hillel is given a prominent place in the narrative as the teacher who taught Israel many new things. The customary process of making marriage contract by the Jews is described to prove Jesus’ identity as the legal heir to the throne (170). Jewish tradition of men taking Nazirite vows and the Essene-community life are introduced (174-79). Jewish rules regarding clean and unclean food is discussed elaborately (195). John the Baptist is introduced with a description of Jewish attitude to repentance and baptism (194-95). A short narration of Jewish history is provided in the chapter titled ‘The Terebinth Fair’ (201-90). The anointing of the King by the prophet and the Jewish marriage ceremony are depicted with realistic details. The Jewish fast during the time of Jesus is recreated (231). Different sects of the Jewry like the Pharsees, the Sadducees, the Essenes.
the Zealots, and the Anavim, or Messianic mystics and their cultural identities are brought out (241). The system of stoning of the sinners, especially prostitutes (241), the distance between the Jews and the Samaritans (242), staunch observance of the Sabbath (243) are clearly described.

2.4.6.2. Miracles are reconstructed, as it was a common ordinary happening in the time of Jesus (Arav & Rousseau 194). A possessed man was freed in the Synagogue at Capernaum (231), Peter's mother-in-law was healed of fever (232), a leper was healed (233), a paralytic who was placed in front of Jesus by breaking the roof was given forgiveness for his sins and was physically healed. The Doctors of the Law became antagonistic on the basis that "Only the Lord God and the Messiah are empowered to forgive sins" (234). Jesus was compelled by the people of Nazareth to perform the miracles that he had performed in Capernaum in their place too. People started arguing whether he was doing miracles by magic or Satan or by divine power (235). Herod Antipas' bad relationship with Pontius Pilate due to his refusal to support Pilate when he introduced into the city a set of votive shields inscribed with the emperor's name, in violation of the Jewish law commanding not to make any images, is reconstituted as a cultural background of the story of Jesus (300). Similarly, the debate on paying tax is adapted to make clear the contemporary attitude to the Roman coin and Jesus' intelligent handling of his accusers (300-1). Jewish orientation to temple-piety is revealed through the elaborate depiction of their different feasts and their mode of celebration. The Feast of Tabernacles is narrated vividly in fidelity to the Jewish customs (24-26)
2.4.6.3. Jesus is established as king, teacher, prophet, healer and miracle worker “in the line of Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Zechariah, Zephaniah, Micha, Enoch and the rest” (244) The tax-system in Palestine and its negative effects are narrated in connection with the call of Matthew the son of Alpheus, a customs official of Capernaum Jesus’ contemporaries’ response to his message and his way of life is discussed realistically (253-56). The Jewish attitude to women is implanted in the mouth of Jesus. “Do not prolong converse with a woman... not even with your wife” (261) The High Priesthood and the Sanhedrin are introduced with historical accuracy (280) The Pharisees were considered as the successors of the ancient prophets and therefore the recognised guardians of public morality. Their general body was the Great Sanhedrin. The President of the Sanhedrin was the High Priest nominated by the Romans. They had a Jewish judicial system centred on the Pharisaic High Court, which dispensed the Mosaic Law and co-ordinated synagogue-worship throughout the world. The Jews deprecated Messianic fervour as being always hottest among the idle, the ignorant and the impatient. A Sage, they said, should never be unprepared for the coming of the Messiah, but should shut his ears to wild cries of “Lo, there!” They believed that there would be unmistakable celestial signs with the arrival of the hour of the Messiah. So they were keeping constant watch over Jesus so that they could arrest Him on the slight suggestion of revolutionary activity. Jewish reverence and fear in pronouncing the powerful name of God is brought out in relation to the resurrection of Laz’arus. Arav and Rousseau quote a connected text:
In the temple was the foundation Stone on which were engraved the letters of God's Ineffable Name. Whoever learned the secret of the Name and its use would be able to do whatever he wished... Yeshu came and learned the letters of the Name; he wrote them upon the parchment which he placed in an open cut ...and lifted out the writing. Then he remembered and obtained the use of the letters (194).

Jewish faith in such miracles is actively created by mentioning “The prophet Elijah, when by his invocation of the Lord the widow's son was raised from the dead... and Elisha... of the shunemite's son” (284). Introduction of the Greek tradition of ransoming a life from Hades with the life of a substitute provides more cultural probability to the Jesus story.

2.4.6.4. Quoting Is 63. 1 “Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?” along with Zech 9 9 and Ps 118 19-26. Graves furnishes historical background to the Hosanna event of the Gospels (287-88) The alabaster anointing of Jesus by Mary Magdalene in the house of Simon the leper is used as a context for discussing Jewish attitude to sinners in contrast to that of Jesus (286- Matt 26.6-13) Judean attempt at stoning Jesus (283-John 11 8) appears to have some connection with the legal procedure in the Mishna, according to which there are four stages for condemning an accused. At the first stage the condemned is thrown down from a platform nine feet high by the first witness, if he survives it the second witness casts a heavy stone on his chest and if he still survives, those present stone him and afterwards his body is hanged on a tree (Arav & Rousseau 264). The prophet Isiah describes the Messiah in the following
words. "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not" (53.1-12). This is recapitulated in the novel to ensure Jesus as the long prophesied 'Man of Sorrows'. Similarly, Graves' Jesus breaks the good-shepherd's staff in fulfilment of Zechariah 11:10 "And I took my staff Grace, and I broke it, annulling the covenant which I had made with all the peoples" to confirm Jesus' role as the long expected Messiah of the Jews. The same passage speaks about the thirty shekels, the price Judas took for betraying Jesus (Zech 11:12) "And they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver" The Temple purifying scene (Matt. 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19.45-48; John 2.13-22), is utilised as an occasion for analysing the Temple-centred culture of the Jews and how it was misused by them at the time of Jesus (292-296) This scene also is depicted as a sign to show Jesus as the fulfilment of prophesies (Jer 7:1-15)

2.4.6.5. The Gospel Jesus' discussion of the Scripture statement

"The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit at my right hand,
till I put thy enemies under thy feet" (Ps 110:1; Mark 12.36).
is placed against the Jewish tradition of keeping a cushioned throne in the Chamber of the Hearth (Arav & Rousseau 284) with a perpetual fire for the Messiah, the Son of David. Though people believed that a fire from heaven would scorch any one except the Anointed Son of David who sits on the throne, Jesus sits on the throne without any damage to prove himself as the anointed Son of David (301-2)
2.4.6.6. Jesus' installation of the Eucharist is enlivened in the cultural background of the Jewish Passover. The novelist has even explained how that special Passover happened on a Thursday.

This was the Thursday of the week and, as it happened that year, the Passover fell on a Saturday; therefore, according to a ruling of Shamai's the disciples could not roast the Paschal Lamb on the Friday evening, because the prescribed moment for the roasting is sunset, and the Sabbath day begins at the previous sunset, and work is forbidden on the Sabbath, and roasting is work. Shamai's solution was to celebrate the Feast on the Thursday night and the Galileans had adopted it, with Levite permission, though the Judaeans followed a ruling of Hillel's, by which the Passover was held superior to the Sabbath, so that the meal might legitimately be eaten on the Friday evening (302).

Price furnishes the following table to present the sequence of events associated with the Jewish Passover feast

Nisan 14. The day of preparation
   Noon Use of leaven and leavened foods prohibited.
   1.30 P.M. Slaughter of the daily evening sacrifice.
   2.30 P.M. The offering of this sacrifice From this time until sunset everyone fasted. The Passover lambs were slain. Nisan 15 The day of Passover, or the first day of Unleavened Bread.

   Around 6.30 P. M Sunset, the end of Nisan 14: The beginning of Nisan 15; the Passover was celebrated. (Price 227)
Regarding the preparation and the celebration of the Passover by Jesus and His disciples Graves follows the Gospel version (302-5= Matt 26.17-25; Mark 14.12-26; Luke 22. 7-21; John 13.21-30) which is basically a repetition of the customary Jewish Passover. A psychological analysis of Judas and the cause of his betrayal of Jesus are added to the narrative. Jesus expresses His desire to eat the Passover meal with His disciples and equates His own body and blood to the Passover bread and wine. This prompted Judas to equate Jesus with the Worthless shepherd of the prophet Zechariah's dream, whose assassination broke the spell of evil and moves the people of Israel to repentance (305-307). Jesus' words at the conclusion of the Passover meal confirm his doubts. "And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me. 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfillment" (Luke 22.36 38) This analogy led Judas to the conclusion that Jesus was "inciting his own disciples to turn against him and destroy him as a false prophet, so that when the people of Jerusalem looked on his pierced body they would understand at last, and repent, and thus precipitate the Pangs of the Messiah" (308). So when Jesus told him, "What you are going to do, do quickly", he took it as a command to become the assassin of Jesus (John 13. 23-26).

He seeks help from Nicodemus to save Jesus from death. Considering it as his duty to save the one and only hope of Israel, Nicodemus tells Judas, "you must go to the High Priest at once and offer him your help in arresting your master. You had better ask for payment, or else the subterfuge may be suspected"(310). Judas' acceptance of thirty
shekels as the price money for Jesus is made realistic by relating it to the context of slave trade where “it is the value of a Canaanite slave as established by Law; and I am selling you a free Israelite” (316).

Nicodemus’ plan was, “that when Judas had saved Jesus from the swords of his disciples by helping Caiaphas to arrest him, Nicodemus would approach Pilate, with whom he was on fairly good terms, and inform him that Caiaphas had arrested a Roman citizen, none other than the secret heir to the Herodian throne... He would be obliged to remove Jesus from the custody of the High priest” (311-12)

2.4.6.7. The electrified atmosphere in Jerusalem at the arrival of Jesus due to the mistrust of the Pharisees and Sadducees prepares the way for the crucifixion scene (280) The geography of Gethsemane is given, “They left the city by the East Gate, descended into the Kidron valley and crossed the brook by a foot-bridge, then they climbed the Mount of Olives, taking a path which led them to the high-walled olive orchard called Gethsemane, “the oil press” (313= Matt 26.36; Mark 14. 32). Arav and Rousseau speaks of “Two parallel traditions pointing to an area in the lower part of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley from the city gates” (110). The trial of Jesus is placed exactly in the cultural context of the Judicial custom of Judaea during the time of Jesus (318-333) As thirty-nine strokes were the highest punishment that the Sanhedrine could inflict on Jesus for the only charge proved against Jesus that is blasphemy, the elders under the leadership of Annas and Caiaphas took Jesus to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate and persuaded the people to demand the crucifixion of Jesus (317-24) Keeping up the Jewish custom the elders
wait outside the *praetorium* so that they could eat the Passover without defiling themselves (325 = John 18.28).

2.4.6.8. With an intention to prove the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion Graves makes an elaborate discussion of the origin, philosophy and the procedure for crucifixion (338-40). According to the narrator, crucifixion was a fate reserved for the annual Sacred King in every country around the Mediterranean Sea. Later, it became merely a punishment for crime.

yet elements of the traditional ritual persist long after its sacred origin has been forgotten, and among the Romans these include laming of the victim while he is hanging on the cross. Since the Sacred King was originally lame, the substitute also must be lamed. It is difficult to discover how much of the Roman ritual is of native origin and how much is Canaanite; for the early Romans used an X shaped cross, but during the war against Hannibal the present T shaped one was borrowed from the Carthaginians, who are Canaanites by origin (339)

Modern archaeology states that Roman crucifixion consisted of three elements: scourging, carrying of the cross by the condemned and nailing and lifting. The cross can be either T shaped or dagger shaped. In both cases the upright beam was normally planted in a fixed position and the *patibulum* "crossbar" was movable and carried by the condemned. The cross can be either a "low cross" on which the feet of the victim were from
ten to eighteen inches above the ground or a “high cross on which the feet were about three feet above the ground” (Arav & Rousseau 75).

He was buried in a manner fit to a Jew. Burial caves excavated in Israel provide evidence of the fact that the bodies of the condemned were not necessarily thrown into a common cave, but families and friends could claim the bodies and give them the customary burial (Ibid 76). Joseph of Arimathea took the body down from the cross with the permission of Pilate and laid it in a tomb and kept guards against tomb-robbers and witches (346-47 = Matt. 27.57-66; Mark 15.42-47, Luke 23. 50-53; John 19. 38-42). Price attests the fact of the funeral historically “It would have been a violation of Jewish law to have left Jesus’ lifeless body hanging on the cross overnight. Its removal was all the more urgent since death had occurred within a few hours of the Sabbath.” (Price 239). The narration of the traditional empty tomb and the appearances is used as the method of reconstituting the resurrection phenomena (348-350).

2.5.1. Graves published King Jesus in 1946, with an intention to silence modern Jesus-historians who cancelled the historicity of the puzzling incidents in the life of Jesus on the basis that modern scientific historical research did not yield conclusive result. David F. Strauss wrote a rebuttal titled The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History. In 1778, G. E. Lessing posthumously published the writings of H. S. Reimarus on Jesus. Hermann S. Reimarus contributed an anti-dogmatic, anti-theological and anti-Christian sense to the term. He contended that an absolute distinction should be drawn between what Jesus said and did and what the Evangelists
reported Him to have said and done. Reimarus initiated the historical study of Jesus by stating that

The real Jesus was 'a Jewish revolutionary who failed in an attempt to establish an earthly Messianic kingdom'; the Christ of the Gospels was by contrast 'a deception created by the disciples who stole the body of Jesus from the tomb and invented the doctrines of the resurrection and the parousia' (Blomberg 110).

2.5.2. The publication of Schleiermacher’s lectures on the life of Jesus from student notes in 1864 initiated the study of the ‘historical Jesus’ (Keck 18). Following the publication of Adolf von Harnack’s *What is Christianity?* in 1900, liberal theology gave a positive direction to this negative meaning. But, at the end of the nineteenth century prominent theologians started to attack this historical Jesus appropriated by the liberals. In his 1892 publication, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und dergeschichtliche biblische Christus*, Martin Kähler pointed out that the Jesus constructed by nineteenth-century lives of Jesus was an abstraction without foundation in history (Keck 19). In 1964 Carl Braaten’s translation of it was published as *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Biblical Christ*. In 1906, in his book, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* later published as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Albert Schweitzer produced a survey of the sweep of historical research and concluded that the reconstructed Jesus of the historian is a reflection of the scholar’s own paradigm (Keck 190). Wilhelm Wrede argued that *The Gospel according to Mark*, the foundation of the liberal lives of Jesus was not a historical account, but an expression of Mark’s own theory of the Messianic self-consciousness of Jesus (Keck
Bultmann argues that "Historical science cannot lead to any sort of result which could serve as a foundation for faith, for all its results have only relative validity" (quoted in Keck 54). For him, Jesus is 'alive' in the message of the Church and not in any kind of transcendent or metaphysical sense. Following the line of existentialists he promoted the theory that the cross saves men not as any kind of objective act by God but as the means of revealing human predicament and the possibility of authentic existence (Marshall 77). Anderson states, "More recently, John Allegro has on different occasions, suggested that the Christ of the Gospels was a mere reflection or reconstruction of the 'Teacher of Righteousness' who inspired the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls" (15). The 'Christ myth' theoreticians, around the turn of the century suggested that "there had never been a real Jesus of Nazareth and that the basis of the Christ of the New Testament was a mythical, supra-historical figure to whom Christians had subsequently given a time and place, thus artificially historicizing him" (quoted in Anderson 160). To expose the meaninglessneses of such arguments, Graves reconstructs the prime events of Jesus' life with a focus on their historical possibility.

2.5.3. In this novel itself the author speaks of the formative forces behind its production through his mouthpiece, the narrator "The Acts and Sayings of Jesus originally written in Aramaic, but circulated in Greek translation among the Gentile Churches, should not be read without careful critical reserve. Several variants exist. The editing is often ignorant, sometimes disingenuous and occasionally fraudulent" (238). This doubting attitude might have inspired the author to make a detailed study of the
epoch of Jesus and to reconstruct Him in that atmosphere. Jesus is portrayed as the fulfilment of ancient prophecy (239). Hence, Graves’ Jesus is fixed into the Messianic frame which prevailed in the mind of the contemporary Jewish society. Jesus lived in a culture which had the following normative principles. “The collective consciousness of being a chosen people bound to God by a covenant, obedience to Torah as the divine law of the land, the centrality of the Temple and a widespread patriarchal system.” (Arav & Rousseau 3) Graves has used methods of ‘extrapolation’, ‘interpolation’ and ‘retropolation’. The resulting picture of Jesus is that of a Messianic King who becomes the suffering servant to fulfil long time prophecy Graves portrays Him “As a sacred King, the last legitimate ruler of an immensely ancient dynasty, his avowed intention was to fulfil all the ancient prophecies that concerned himself and bring the history of his house to a real and unexceptionable conclusion” (239)

2.5.4. In the historical commentary he describes how he happened to assume this assumption

My first clue to a new solution of the nativity problem came from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter xiii in which Sergius Paulus the Roman Procurator of Cyprus is recorded to have been ‘amazed’ by Paul and Barnabas when they told him about Jesus... These considerations made me ponder on Pilate’s extraordinary favour in granting Jesus a private interview, usually reserved for Roman citizens and on the unconventional titulus, which was fixed to the cross at his orders (352).
The logical development of these interrelated problems, in the light of certain passages in the *Gospel to the Egyptians* and the *Proto-evangelium* led to this reconstruction.

2.5.5. Graves makes Jesus the victim of a damaging ignorance of women out of revolt against the British patriarchal society. Grant says,

We are told in *The White Goddess* [that] the Puritan revolution established in England a ‘purely patriarchal’ culture. Previously, between the Crusades and the Civil war, the ‘Queen of Heaven with her retinue of female saints had a far greater hold in the popular imagination than either the Father or the Son. This enhanced sense of female power endured into the reign of Elizabeth ‘the last Queen to play the muse’. But the Puritan revolution was essentially a reaction against Virgin worship. established the puritanical Thunder-God in sovereignty (43)

2.6.1. Graves has done something remarkable in attempting to reconstruct the Jesus who walked and talked beside the Sea of Galilee. Dismantling the Jesus preached in the Church, he probes deep to rediscover the real, actual, historical Jesus untainted by dogma or interpretation. He believed that this process would produce a reliable portrait of the real Jesus. He admits that many of the historic assumptions are not valid. And all that matters is the influence of these assumptions on the respective events (356). So in spite of his devotion to history and the endless pain taken by him in search of the historical background, there occurs a number of petty
contradictions in his account of the Jesus story due to the fusion of rival traditions. Patrick Grant states,

If Jesus is bold in rejecting the matriarchal and runs the risks of nemesis, so by analogy does Graves run risks in himself taking on so boldly the world of specialised scholar-ship and daring to show it up as incorrect, while also claiming the need to interpret it accurately. Organised scholarship, asserting its rights on this question, has been less than convinced that Graves has indeed honoured the facts as he claims he ought (Grant 59)

2.6.2. Thus Graves' King Jesus shows how an interpretation based on 'enclosure within the epoch' may deviate substantially from the base text. Even though Graves approached Jesus with an ardent desire to support His historical existence, the Jesus figure delineated by him deviates from all other Jesus reconstructions. This happened mainly due to the extreme focus given to the earthly life of Jesus. The multifarious personality of the Gospel Jesus is constricted into singular personality of the legal heir to the throne of Herod. As a result Jesus' identity as a religious figure - the Son of God - is completely ignored. Thus the work becomes just another fictional expression which is primarily meant for leisurely reading for pleasure. Fiction is like dream where anything and everything is possible and permissible. The author as creator dominates the world of fiction as its God S/he creates her/his characters and events, as s/he likes. It is unfair and unwise to question her/his freedom of expression. But the reader also has her/his freedom and responsibility to differentiate between fact and fiction. In King Jesus Graves has fictionalised the Jesus story by delinking Jesus
from divinity and enclosing Him in humanity. Readers would appreciate Graves' Jesus as his attempt at personal interpretation of and individual response to the Gospel story. As a human being bound by time and space his interpretation would be a limited one. The consciousness of this fact would enhance a better understanding of the text and the Jesus story by a modern reader.