

Browsing through my blog posts I came across this one from exactly six years ago today. Amazingly, I still agree with it! It deals with an unusually important question, one that, in a sense, involves a decision that changed the entire history of our world.

QUESTION

Just what did the historical Jesus think he was doing that last week in Jerusalem? It looks to me like he was working as hard as he could to get himself killed. If that's what he was doing, then why was he doing it?

RESPONSE

Interesting question! There have been scholars, of course, who have argued that this is precisely what Jesus was doing, that he went to Jerusalem in order to be crucified.

It is interesting that those who take that view cover as wide a range of ideology and theology as you could possibly imagine. Conservative Christian thinkers (from protestant fundamentalists to Roman Catholic theologians to ... well, take your pick) have long thought that the point of the Jerusalem trip was in fact the crucifixion, since this was all part of God's plan. Jesus' mission on earth was to be crucified; he went to Jerusalem to make it happen. This is what I myself thought for many, many years.

On the other side of the theological spectrum is someone like Hugh Schonfield, the British New Testament scholar and Dead Sea Scrolls expert who understood Jesus in very human terms, and thought that Jesus came to understand himself as the messiah and purposefully arranged to have himself killed in order to fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah. All of this is laid out in Schonfield's brilliant but absolutely quirky best-selling book, The Passover Plot (1965).

Here I can summarize the thesis of the book from my discussion of it in my book Forged (I do not claim that Schonfield forged his book! I look at it as a modern fabrication of Jesus' life. I do this in the context of considering modern forged Gospels about Jesus).

Schonfield was a brilliant and widely acknowledged scholar of ancient Judaism, with a complete set of bona fide credentials. But his historical reconstruction of what really happened to Jesus reads more like a Hollywood production than serious scholarship. The short story is ...

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