

In the previous post I indicated some of the initial reactions, four years ago, to my Newsweek article on the Gospel stories about Christmas. I received yet more reaction after that old post, and so posted again, dealing this time with people who thought I was too kindly disposed to anyone who found the stories meaningful. Here is what I said at the time. (I still stick by it, for what it's worth!)

When the editor at Newsweek ask me if I would be willing to write an article on the birth of Jesus, I was hesitant and wrote him back asking if he was sure he really wanted me to do it. I told him that I seem to be incapable of writing anything that doesn't stir up controversy. It must be in my blood. Still, he said that they knew about my work and were not afraid of controversy, and they did indeed want an article from me.

What's interesting to me is that I've been getting it from all sides. I don't know why that should surprise me. It seems to be the story of my life. For years my agnostic and atheist readers were cheering me on from the sidelines as I talked about the problems posed by a critical study of the New Testament: there are discrepancies and contradictions, the Gospels are not written by eyewitnesses, and the stories they contain were modified over time, and many of them were invented, in the oral traditions before anyone wrote them down. Etc. My "non-believer" readers were pleased that all this was coming out in a popular format for the general reader.

And then I wrote Did Jesus Exist?, arguing that there is no serious doubt for virtually any real scholar of antiquity (whether biblical scholar, classicist, historian) that Jesus of Nazareth really did live. And many of my agnostic and atheist allies suddenly felt completely betrayed and began to attack me even more virulently than the conservative Christians had earlier done.

You can't please all the people all the time, and sometimes you just never can please anyone. But so it goes.

History is like that. People line up on various sides, and if what you're really interested in is uncovering the truth that history can convey (e.g., in an earnest attempt to do nothing other than reconstruct what actually happened in the past), you're going to offend people, no matter what your views/reconstructions are.

And so too

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