In my recent posts I have argued, against the Mythicists, that the idea of someone (or lots of someones) inventing Jesus as a crucified messiah does not seem plausible, given the fact that no one expected a messiah to be crucified. If you were to invent a messiah, it would not be one that was completely different (opposite, actually) to what anyone expected.

In response to these posts, several readers have asked why, then, Jesus’ own followers thought he could be the messiah while he was alive: the historical man himself, as reconstructed by contemporary scholars, also does not seem to be like what anyone would have expected the messiah to be. He too was not a warrior-king, or a cosmic judge coming on the clouds of heaven, or a mighty priest (he was not from the priestly line, for one thing). So why would anyone think a lower-class itinerant preacher from the rural backwoods of Galilee was the messiah?

It’s a great question, and obviously a completely fundamental one. The followers of Jesus did think he was the messiah. And they must have thought that before he was crucified (for a reason that I’ll explain in a moment). So what would make them think so?

My short answer is that …

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