COMMENT BY A READER:

I like the “literary-historical” approach, but only up to a point, just so long as the claims of primitive history, the interpretations of bible scholars, and the anti-Semitic pronouncements of its religious authors, don’t outweigh or override the literature. After all, Jesus did NOT have personal biographers who took notes and reported what was going on throughout his lifetime. We only know of him as the protagonist within an ill-defined genre, someone carefully crafted after-the-fact in order to appear more god-like than human. Thus, it seems a mistake to treat the Gospel of Mark, or any similar ancient narrative (whether canonized or not), either as the legitimate retelling of history, or merely as one particular form of Greco-Roman storytelling.

RESPONSE:

Yes, if anyone thinks the literary-historical approach involves making historical claims about the narrative they have misunderstood what it is trying to do. Let me explain.

There are numerous ways, of course, that one can approach the Gospels of the NT, just as there are numerous ways that one can approach any text. But there is a fundamental difference (I can’t stress this point enough) between reading the Gospels in order to know how well they attest to historical events in the life and death of Jesus, and reading them in order to see how they function as pieces of literature with a story to tell. The first approach is interested in the Gospels as historical witnesses. The second approach is interested in them as literary endeavors. These are two very different approaches.

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The Comparative Method
Jesus’ Death and Resurrection in Mark