

I am interrupting my thread on the relationship of Jesus to the Jewish law (I haven't gotten very far: I'm still on Marcion!) because of what is most pressing on my mind right now, the debate I'm having this evening with Robert Price. It is here in Milwaukee sponsored by a group called the Milwaukee Mythicists. It's a small group of people committed to, or (for some of them) at least attracted by, the idea that Jesus was not a real human being but is a myth invented by his later followers. I suppose roughly speaking, most Mythicists are a subgroup of people who are atheist.

Originally, for most of these people, Jesus was understood to be a divine being who lived in the heavenly realm ("outer space," as some of them put it) who was crucified by demonic powers. Later followers of Jesus historicized him and made him, in their myths, into a human being. And then the stories emerged about him that we now have in our Gospels. They are based principally on characters and events in the Old Testament, told in a new way now about a man that the story-tellers invented out of whole-cloth. The apostle Paul doesn't know any of these stories. That's why Paul almost certainly, they claim, did not know anything about a historical Jesus.

My talk is only going to be thirty minutes, followed by Bob's talk of thirty minutes. These then are to be followed by an hour of questions back and forth, followed by an hour of questions from the audience. So it's a three hour event. (!) But I am allowed to lay out my case only in thirty minutes. That's a bit tricky.

I have decided to focus on the positive arguments that there almost certainly was a historical man Jesus about whom we can say some important things. I will only be addressing the Mythicists' own arguments briefly, in order to show why I don't find them at all persuasive. To do so I have chosen just two arguments that are commonly made.

The first is that there could never have been a Jesus of Nazareth because there was no such place as Nazareth. Mythicists often argue ...

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