

I indicated in my last post that, to my surprise, I had never written about the history of the scholarship on the Gospels in terms of the major shift from seeing them as Supernatural Histories to Natural Histories to Myths. And just as I was preparing to write about the move to see them as Natural Histories, in today's post, I read a comment from a reader (Bless his soul, as we used to say!) who pointed out that I did indeed have a detailed discussion of the matter in my first trade book Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium. I looked it up, and lo and behold, I absolutely did — and inn precisely the terms I wanted to discuss the matter here on the blog. For some reason none of my search engines picked it up when looked through all my files.

So, today I will talk about The Gospels as Natural Histories, as lifted from that treatment in my book. As I hope you'll agree, this shift in understanding the Gospels was both significant and incredibly interesting.

The Gospel Accounts As Natural Histories

The Enlightenment that swept through Europe in the eighteenth century involved a whole new way of thinking and looking at the world. Such intellectuals of the Enlightenment as Descartes, Locke, Newton, and Hume had come to distrust traditional sources of authority and started to insist on the power of human reason to understand the world and the human's place in it. This was an age of science and the development of modern technology. Scholars began to assert the "logic" and importance of cause-effect relationships. They developed scientific notions of "natural law," i.e., highly predictable ways that nature worked, along with the concomitant view that these "laws" could not be broken by any outside agency (for example, a divine being). They modified the grounds of human knowledge - away, for example, from the traditional teachings and dogmas of the church to such "objective" processes as rational observation, empirical verification, and logical inference.

In terms of religious belief, scholars of the Enlightenment recognized that ...

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