In my recent post in which I made a paean to memory – which will be the way I end my current book dealing with memory and the historical Jesus — I said the following.

MY REMARK: “The comment that I sometimes get from readers that I find puzzling or disheartening is when they tell me that if there is something in the Gospels that is not historical, then it cannot be true, and if it is not true, then it is not worth reading. My sense is that many readers will find it puzzling or even disheartening that I find this view puzzling and disheartening. But I do.

Please call me a prophet if you must, but I would like to point out that a number of readers on the blog did indeed find my view puzzling and disheartening. Mainly puzzling. The following was a very well reasoned response from a reader, to which I would like to reply:

READER’S COMMENT: Indeed, stories that aren’t true are no less worthwhile to read. The Bible most definitely is an important part of literature that should be read and studied (I wouldn’t want you to be out of work!). However, I’m not sure I understand what you mean by the word ‘truth’. To me (and I am not a native English speaker so maybe this is a linguistic problem), truth has always meant something that corresponds to reality. If a story didn’t happen, I don’t see how it can be true. The very definition of a true story is that it happened. It can still be important, have significance in our lives, etc, but I don’t see how it can be called truth.

I completely understand this point of view. It is a point of view that I myself had for a very long time. It’s not one that I hold now, and I want to explain why.

In my view, there can be true stories that never happened. In fact...

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