

Jesus and the Logic of History, by Paul Barnett. New Studies in Biblical Theology, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997. Pp. 182.*

This interesting contribution to the recent debate regarding the so-called "historical Jesus" is sure to spark some further fruitful discussion on this all-important subject. In an age when publications on Jesus keep pouring from the presses featuring a bewildering array of idiosyncratic Jesus figures, Barnett's work, with its focus on proper historical methodology, comes as a breath of fresh air. In particular, Barnett advocates a reading of history that takes seriously the connection between the earthly Jesus and the early church. Moreover, he suggests that the New Testament epistles, not merely the Gospels, should be given significant weight in the study of the historical Jesus.

In the opening chapter entitled "Jesus and the Practice of History," Barnett shows how Jesus research is frequently plagued by flawed methodology. The significance of social science research is exaggerated; history is viewed in terms of mere cause-and-effect relationships; and only a given scholar's preferred sources are consulted. But as Barnett points out, personalities who make a significant impact on history have a tendency to transcend their environments. The historian should strive to find the most plausible explanation for certain events, and all the available evidence should be considered. The point of the brief second chapter is simply that there is a historical connection between Christians and Christ, and this connection should be taken seriously by historians.

The third chapter, "Jesus in Proclamation and Tradition," surveys the information regarding Jesus provided by the New Testament epistles, especially Paul's. Chapter 4, "Jesus in Historical Context," seeks to place Jesus in the later context of contemporary history, with primary focus on the five persons referred to in Luke 3:1–2: John the baptizer, Herod Antipas, Annas and Caiphas, and Pontius Pilate. "Jesus in the Gospels" (chapter 5) deals with difficulties in reconstructing Jesus from the Gospels; "Jesus and the Spread of Early Christianity" (chapter 6) investigates the relevance of material from early church history (primarily but not exclusively the Book of Acts) for historical Jesus research. Chapter 7, "From Jesus to Gospel Text," addresses the question of why the Gospels came to be written and how oral and written tradition was converted into gospel. The final chapter shows how the extensive space awarded to Jesus' death in the canonical Gospels defies the conventions of ancient biography (*bios*).

What emerges from this remarkable and original work is a highly integrative, historically responsible portrait of Jesus in his larger historical context. In the process, Barnett considers virtually all the relevant historical evidence for Jesus, be it biblical (New Testament epistles, Gospels, Acts) or extrabiblical (Greco-Roman or Jewish). Significantly, Jesus is vindicated as the crucified and risen Savior who birthed the church and whose impact reverberated in the ministry and writings of the apostolic witnesses. It is not necessary to follow Barnett in every single detail of historical reconstruction to appreciate the significant apologetic value of his work in dealing with contemporary distortions of the so-called "historical Jesus." That alone is a great service to have rendered in defense of biblical, historic Christianity. I recommend this book very highly and intend to use it as a text in future classes.

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