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# Lifelines: The Historical Jesus

## Part III

**This is the third and final 'Lifeline' looking at the issues raised by modern research into the 'historical Jesus'. Part I (Anvil 18.3) was a general overview looking at the work of key writers such as Marcus Borg and Ed Sanders, and also at the work of the Jesus Seminar. Part II (Anvil 19.3) looked in more detail at the work of Tom Wright (especially his *Jesus and the Victory of God* [SPCK 1996]). This final part now offers some reflection and critical feedback on Wright's presentation of Jesus: some of this is drawn from the volume of essays responding to Wright in Newman (ed.), *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel* (IVP 1998).**

What are we to make of Tom Wright's presentation of the historical Jesus? *Jesus and the Victory of God* (summarized in Part II) is a magisterial accomplishment, grounded in a careful historical reasoning but rich in theological consequences. Wright's 650 pages whistle by in enjoyable prose and forceful sweep of argument. He enters the debate without getting us lost in endless debates about authenticity. Instead he has established a new paradigm for the debate and no work in this field hereafter will be able to by-pass his work. If the readers of *Anvil* are Anglican Evangelicals, then we owe our colleague the most enormous debt of gratitude. For, above all, Wright has convinced many that the Jesus recoverable by historians is not inherently at odds with the Jesus confessed in the creeds and worshipped in our churches today.

Yet, as with any scholarly work, Wright's presentation of Jesus has raised some important questions. Putting it bluntly, is Wright's Jesus right? This *Lifeline* offers a friendly critique, voicing some of the concerns that have been raised since his book's publication, as well highlighting some of the key insights which readers may find refreshing and significant for the task of Gospel ministry today.

### **Positive appreciation: five key areas**

#### **A real Jesus: the Christ of faith**

One of the most refreshing aspects of Wright's work is the way in which Jesus comes across as a viable and intriguing figure of history – both imaginative and imaginable. He appears as a far more interesting human being than some of the stained glass images have made him. Here we have Jesus restored, as it were, to three-dimensions.

In particular we are never allowed to forget his place within the real life and history of Israel. The result is that we see familiar things set in a new relief, for example:

- his dramatic announcing of the long-awaited Kingdom of Israel's God and his novel understanding of Messiahship;
- his creative theological mind (not merely a blank slate onto which a community later imposed its own wishful thinking) and especially his extraordinary self-understanding that Israel's destiny now revolved around him;
- his real concerns in his debates with the Pharisees (not born out of some latter-day anti-Jewish sentiment, but rather rooted in the conviction that Israel's story was now moving into its long-awaited final act);
- his courage in going single-handedly into the political and religious vortex of Jerusalem and in laying down his prophetic challenge to the Temple;
- his faith in his God, going forward to inevitable death, trusting that somehow this God would not let him down, but would vindicate him 'on the other side'.

This is a Jesus, contrary to some later presentations of Jesus within the course of Church history, who begins to make sense as a real 'flesh and blood' historical person – a man with a mission to his own people in their own day.

Yet, at the same time, the Jesus whom we see in Wright's presentation is not inimical to the Christ proclaimed at Nicaea. He may appear more 'human', but he is not thereby less 'divine'. Instead Wright has uncovered various ways in which Jesus himself may have hinted at his mysterious, unique identity: for example, his talking of the Temple (the previous place of God's presence) and then claiming that he was now something 'greater' or its effective replacement (Matt. 12:6; John 2:19); or his hints that his entrance into Jerusalem was embodying the 'return of the Lord to Zion' (Luke 19:12 ff; cf. Isa. 52:8). These are significant hints, dressed in authentic first-century Jewish language, of pointing to Yahweh's unprecedented arrival in the life of Israel *in and as* Jesus.

No doubt this is an area where the critique of Wright will be fierce. In response Wright himself can sometimes seem dismissive of the ways in which orthodox Christians have imagined Jesus: Jesus did not merely voice heavenly and timeless truths, quite divorced from the real issues of first-century Israel; Jesus' miracles do not *in and of themselves* point to Jesus' divinity; the terms 'Messiah' and 'Son' did not automatically have connotations of divinity at that time. These points, frequently made by liberal critics of orthodoxy, can be conceded. Nevertheless those attracted to his overall reconstruction will recognize in Wright's Jesus the clear seeds of (what would later be termed) the 'incarnation'. If so, then Nicaea becomes a legitimate development of a basic theological intuition that can be traced back to Jesus. The real Jesus of real history may also be the Christ of the Creeds.

### **The cross of Jesus: substitution rooted in history**

Secondly, new light is also shed on Jesus' death. Contrary to many scholars, Wright does not think it bizarre or incredible that one of Jesus' purposes in going to Jerusalem was in order to die. This was no unintended accident nor the act of a failing desperado, but the enactment of a unique vocation, wrestled with in prayer and rooted in a reading of the scriptures (including Isaiah 53 – a vocation to offer

his life on behalf of others as 'the one for the many'. In an earlier article Wright (1985) had developed some key strands in his argument: Jesus came as a prophet announcing judgement upon his people Israel, but he also saw himself as embodying the destiny of Israel, and so now in his death he willingly *bore the punishment upon Israel which he himself had announced*.

This focus on Israel may seem disconcerting at this point; we want to come out (where indeed the apostles come out) with an understanding that Jesus died for *all* people (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:4). Wright does not deny this, but by re-introducing here this focus on Jesus' mission within Israel he is able to lay down a vital building-block for a key argument: namely, that 'substitutionary atonement' was not a later, non-historical idea which could have made no sense to Jesus himself. On the contrary, within the Israel of Jesus' day there were a variety of themes (some rooted in scriptures, others growing in popular belief such as the Messianic woes preceding the age to come, or the vicarious deaths of the Maccabaeans martyrs) that might well have fuelled Jesus' understanding of his death: his death would be God's intended way of bringing Israel out of exile, of bearing her punishment, of exhausting God's wrath. So the apostolic preaching (that Jesus' death was 'for our sins'), even if it developed it in more universal ways, was something rooted in the historical intention of Jesus himself. Wright convincingly argues (over against scholars such as C. K. Barrett and Morna Hooker) that Jesus consciously construed his vocation in the light of Isaiah 53; yes, before his death he understood he was giving his life as a 'ransom for many' (Mark 10:45).

Wright's presentation thus gives new historical depth both to Jesus' character and to his death. To use the categories of later theology, our understanding is enormously enriched of both the Person and the Work of Christ. The teaching of the rest of the NT, with both its high Christology and its focus on Jesus' sin-bearing death, is seen to flow out organically from the mission and ministry of Jesus himself. Wright has uncovered a probable 'middle term', between first-century Judaism and the apostolic church – the likely intentions of Jesus himself. Although developed beyond that which Jesus himself would have articulated in his own context, these are not alien ideas imposed on an unsuspecting Jesus. His followers were following his lead.

### **The synoptic evangelists: loyal followers**

A third result of Wright's work is a new appreciation of the Gospel writers. Here too his followers are just that – loyal followers of someone greater and more original than they. Wright never denies the capacity of the Evangelists to be theologically creative; yet, time and again, we sense that they have been remarkably restrained in their presentation – they were 'constrained' by the tradition. So, far from creating a Jesus in their own 'Christian' image, they have frequently preserved the original 'Jewish' Jesus – even at times 'to their own hindrance'. It is more often we the *readers* who have 'Christianized' the Jesus they have presented, by setting him in the context of latter-day Gentile concerns, or by too quickly moving onto the issues of a systematic and universal theology, forgetting the flesh-and-blood realities of the biblical story-line which the Evangelists lay before us.

What Wright has done, therefore, is to put historical reality, depth and colour behind the Jesus presented in the Synoptic Gospels. He has set the synoptic

accounts within a larger story (and within the symbolic worldview of Second-Temple Judaism), enabling us to hear them as Palestinian Jews might have done in the first century. He has not replaced the canonical narrative but rather given us an appropriate lens. He has not been going behind the Evangelists to peel away their supposed accretions in search of a different Jesus. If anything, he has rather been going behind the original Jesus to bring him back into three dimensions and to present to us a canonical Jesus who yet has his feet firmly placed within first-century Judaism and is historically credible and real. The end-result is that, although no special privilege could be allowed in this debate for the Synoptic Gospels as 'scripture', what we gain is precisely a new appreciation of that 'scripture'. Their authority is not assumed at the outset, but revealed at the end.

Nor is there any subtle assumption that, if we only we could unearth it, a greater authority would properly pertain to some 'fifth Gospel' (the original behind Mark or even the original Jesus). As a historian Wright instead takes the Gospels as our unparalleled primary evidence and seeks simply to explain how events in Palestine gave rise in due course to what we find there. Marcus Borg points out that, as far as he knows, Wright does not disallow the authenticity of a single part of the canonical Gospel tradition. That is quite an achievement. Yet it results from a historical commitment to construct a hypothesis that explains what we find in the text. If ever there is an apparent discrepancy between the modern hypothesis and the ancient text, the ancient text is rightly given the priority. The historian must go back and come up with a better hypothesis. The result is that the canonical Gospels emerge with a new authority, rooted in history.

### **The centre of the Bible: Jesus himself**

Next, Wright's approach helps us with the wider task of *biblical theology*. A key part of his presentation is that Jesus enters Israel's biblical narrative and claims to be the one in whom the story finds its climax. Jesus thus becomes the key actor in what some see as a 'six-Act-play' (though Wright prefers to think of *five* acts, joining the last two acts together): Jesus introduces an exciting fourth Act (after the Creation, the Fall and the calling of Israel) and setting the course for the Fifth Act (the age of the Church) and the Finale. Moreover, according to Wright, this Actor is also, in some profound sense, the *Auctor* (or Author) – a divine 'Hitchcock', as it were, appearing in his own script. This 'historical Jesus' turns out to have dramatic repercussions for the way we envisage the whole Bible.

In particular Jesus' creative, fresh, subversive but loyal use of the OT gives us important directions for how we ourselves should interpret the OT in the light of his coming. In many instances Jesus interpreted the scriptures around himself. This '*self-centred*' hermeneutic then explains historically the development of the apostles' *christological* hermeneutics. Where did they get this extraordinary idea that the OT pointed to Jesus and must be interpreted through this unique filter? From the daring example of Jesus himself (cf. Luke 24:27)! Why did they insist that the Jesus-story was the fulfilment of the Israel-story? Because that's what Jesus had said. So this 'christological' approach (espoused by the Church through most of its existence) is not some arbitrary or 'spiritualizing' invention of the later Church, but rather goes back to that creative theologian, called Jesus.

### Jesus and Judaism: Israel restored?

Finally, 'historical Jesus' studies can never be far removed from the hard issue of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, both ancient and modern. Some minimize his Jewishness. Others, sensing perhaps an unconscious anti-Semitism in that approach, portray a very Jewish Jesus; yet this Jesus ends up being so identified with this background as to render inexplicable the rise of Christianity. The post-Holocaust context of current NT scholarship makes this second option very attractive. Wright's Jesus, however, goes straight into the heartland of Judaism, but emerges as something distinctive. Gentiles must enter back into the story of Israel, but they will emerge with a view of the world that is unashamedly Christian.

Wright accepts Sanders' main case that Christians have too easily caricatured first-century Judaism as a religion of legalism, not grace; this is not the key dividing issue between the two faiths. Instead the key issues are Christology (Who is this Jesus? Was he the Messiah and the Lord?) and 'eschatology' (Did Jesus truly bring in the long-awaited new age of the kingdom?). Yet his portrait of Jesus raises a further key area of dispute: that of Israel's 'restoration'. For Wright Jesus preached and accomplished the prophesied 'end of exile' for Israel: in him Israel was restored and reconstituted. Many today (both Jews and 'dispensational' Christians) locate the restoration of Israel somewhere in the *twentieth* century. According to Wright, however, Jesus (and his apostles) located this event firmly within the *first* century.

Throughout most of its history the Church has thought that Jesus was right, but the last 200 years has seen Christians challenging this view. Unpopular as it may be in our own climate, Wright puts this issue back clearly on the table. Did Jesus, or did he not, 'restore Israel'? Will Israel's 'restoration' today occur, as many believe, in the regaining of the Promised Land or instead in the rediscovery of the promised Messiah? Wright's Jesus turns out to be far from academic: he has something very powerful to say to those living in Israel/Palestine today.<sup>1</sup>

### Critical responses

Yet not everyone is convinced. Within the fraternity of the 'historical Jesus' scholars outlined above, Wright is sometimes dubbed 'eccentric' or a closet 'fundamentalist' who only pretends to do history. Borg acknowledges that he is 'brilliant' at defending a traditional approach but (amongst many other things) argues that the Christian truths about Jesus' identity and death can be perfectly true without having to be rooted in Jesus' own pre-Easter understanding.

### Some scholarly doubts

Some think he too easily dismisses the apocryphal material (especially *Thomas*). More question his seeming acceptance of the synoptic material at its face value (especially his idea that differing accounts of Jesus' teaching might reflect his speaking on the same subject more than once). More importantly, many see much of the Synoptic material as already *late* and therefore potentially unreliable. By seeking to find a hypothesis that will plausibly account for the synoptic Gospels,

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1 See further *The Land of Promise* (chapters 3a & 3b) where I have followed through the implications of Wright's theology on the issue of Israel and the Land today.

Wright has admitted as evidence material which should be discounted. Wright claims that his Jesus is 'historical' but for his critics it smacks too much of conservative confessionalism.

Wright responds to this latter point by stressing that his Jesus is also *dissimilar* to some traditional, confessional portraits. So, for example, his Jesus was rooted in contemporary Jewish issues; he was not imparting a timeless doctrine about *post-mortem* salvation, nor setting up a new religion of grace in contrast to Judaism; perhaps most significantly, he also did not teach about his 'Second Coming' (on this, see further below).

So, if Wright's Jesus endorses conventional views in some important respects, it also challenges them at key points. This, says Wright, is a mark of doing serious history and letting the results take you to unplanned places. At this point Wright can find himself painfully caught between his scholarly colleagues (who remain sceptical towards his prior conservatism) and his 'orthodox' friends (who now find their picture of Jesus being revised in some unexpected ways). This friend happens to think the 'gains' far outweigh the 'losses', but (given the vast range of material he has covered) there is certainly scope for some friendly questions, on issues both large and small.

## Some friendly questions

### a) The end of exile?

Has Wright overemphasized the importance of this theme? Many think he is basically correct: other contemporary Messianic movements employ this same set of ideas and, even if Jesus did not explicitly mention the word 'exile', his primary concept of 'kingdom' necessarily evoked this theme of 'return from exile'; in Daniel 9 (an oft-quoted chapter in first-century Judaism according to Josephus) the 'seventy years' of exile predicted by Jeremiah have been explicitly extended to seventy 'weeks of years' – here is the Bible making plain that the exile was not truly over in the sixth century BC! Others disagree: was 'exile' really such a leading concept in contemporary Jewish thought? Can Exodus imagery be equated with 'return from exile'? Is it really Jesus' controlling theme, or just one among several? Is the metaphor being applied in so many ways as to begin to lose its meaning?

There certainly remain some questions here. What might this 'end of exile' mean in the period after the Resurrection? And why do the apostles speak of Christians still being in 'exile' (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:17; cf. Jas 1:1)? Meanwhile, for ethnic Israel, the exile clearly did not end but got worse (as seen in the events of AD 70). So some suggest that, even though a 'restoration' did occur in Jesus, this allowed certain aspects of 'dispersion' to continue – a full ingathering was still awaited in the future. According to Wright, however, Jesus never promised a straightforward 'national' end to exile, but precisely a *revised* version of restoration which would only be discovered and enjoyed by a *reconstituted* Israel centred on him. The 'continuing exile' of national Israel might precisely illustrate the nature of Jesus' challenge to Israel: in effect, 'follow me out of exile into Resurrection or else experience further exile'.

### **b) The destruction of the Temple in AD 70?**

Does Wright place too much on this? On occasions he appears to make this, rather than the Resurrection, to be the vital moment when Jesus was vindicated. Does this destructive act really reveal Jesus' 'glory'? This impression may well be caused by the fact that Wright's detailed focus on the Resurrection has been held over into a third volume (due now in 2003). But there continue to be a host of issues here: in particular, how do we speak, truly but carefully, of divine 'judgement' in relation to the events of AD 70?

### **c) The revolutionary pharisees?**

Wright argues that the Shammaite party had the ascendancy within the Pharisaic movement in the period before 70 (in contrast to the dominance of the milder 'Hillelite' party after 70) and that the Shammaites' agenda would have been strongly nationalistic and anti-Roman. Thus, when Paul speaks of his 'zeal' as a Pharisee (Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:6), this zeal (as that of the 'Zealots' after AD 66) was almost certainly not merely 'religious' but strongly political and nationalist. But is this right? Is Wright correct to see the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees in the 30s as being about rival political agendas?

### **d) Over-interpreting the parables?**

Wright interprets many of Jesus' parables (the Sower, the Prodigal Son, the Wheat and Tares) in quite novel ways as referring originally to Israel. Some think this works for the Prodigal Son, but not for the Sower, others *vice versa*! Generally Wright's attempt to hear Jesus' parables and other teaching within an Israel-bound context makes good sense and makes for some fresh readings, but there may be places where he over-states his case. Not all parables concern Israel as the original *referent* (though, no doubt, they could be *applied* to Israel, as indeed to us).

### **e) Individual salvation?**

Wright generally eschews individualism and argues that Jesus' contemporaries were not interested in their own personal *post-mortem* salvation; instead they were corporately concerned about the destiny of Israel. This may be a helpful corrective but again there may be some over-statement. For example, the parables about money and the after-life (Luke 12:13-21; 16:1-31) suggest a concern about personal salvation in the face of death. So even if 'Resurrection' may have been a word in Judaism with communal and eschatological meanings, it could also have raised hopes of a personal after-life. Wright generally focuses on the communal dimension (the 'macro' picture); yet that need not be seen as denying the personal dimension (or 'micro' picture). Certainly, once Jesus has accomplished the all-embracing salvation in Jerusalem, the apostles are swift to point out its important consequences for individual persons.

### **f) Over-'naturalism'?**

Wright has generally adopted the necessary ground-rules of 'historical Jesus' debate that plays down *in the first instance* any appeal to divine activity and works in a context of 'naturalism'. For example, Jesus' predictions about his death and the destruction of the Temple might well be explained as natural deductions from the

current 'state of affairs' and do not especially need to be attributed to divine prescience or agency. This 'methodological naturalism' is clearly a necessary strategy on occasions when dealing with those who dismiss talk of divine activity; but it can become a straightjacket. Some think Wright has conceded too much at this point.

Yet this may be a confusion caused by terminology. Wright seems to identify 'supernaturalism' with a form of Deism and Docetism, and wants to argue that the biblical view of God's activity draws no such Enlightenment distinctions between 'nature' and 'supernature'. This is the dualism he wishes to counter, promoting instead a more biblical vision of the living God at work *in and through* his creation. So Wright may appear to be anti-'supernatural', but his opposition is primarily to the terminology. He remains open, as is classical theism, to divine activity through 'exceptional' means, but he would prefer not to describe this as 'supernatural', since this terminology has been frequently used to downplay the reality of God being actively at work through apparently 'natural' means.

Yet, at the end of the day Wright is quite willing to assert that we see in Jesus a unique act of God. There may be occasions, however, when Christians reading the Gospels in the light of the Resurrection, may jump a little too quickly to this conclusion. There may be real dangers of short-circuiting the issue in this way – the chief of which, he suggests, may be a skewed perspective on what Jesus was doing in his own historical period.

All these tricky issues, however, are ultimately 'par for the course' in any historical work which has as its subject the unique mystery of the Incarnation. For, if this is indeed what we are dealing with here, then this is an event which precisely spans our normal divisions between 'history' and 'theology', between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural', and thereby reveals the inadequacy of working within such divisions.

### **g) The absent Second Coming?**

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, Wright questions whether Jesus himself taught about his Second Coming. The traditional texts (e.g. Matt. 10:23; Mark 9:1; 13:24-27; Luke 17:23-24) on this subject are often rejected by scholars: they are either inauthentic or point to Jesus' mistaken beliefs about certain events taking place 'within this generation'. Wright instead accepts their authenticity but seeks to give them a different meaning.

So the imagery of 'coming on the clouds', when understood in the light of Daniel's vision of the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13), speaks not of a coming to earth, but of a coming *to God*: it speaks not of a physical descent but of Jesus' vindication before God (in his resurrection and exaltation, and then in the destruction of the Temple vindicating Jesus as the true prophet). Then again, parables about a 'returning' King may apply to Jesus' first coming to Jerusalem as King, not to his second (e.g. Luke 19:12ff). Generally the colourful language of apocalyptic does not refer to the end of the space-time universe, but rather would have been recognized at the time as being metaphorical language, describing future events within ongoing history that would yet have cosmic and world-changing significance. Wright concludes by wondering whether in any case the disciples could have



grasped Jesus' teaching about his Second Coming, when they still had understood so little about his First – one thing at a time!

At this point some wonder if this re-reading of eschatology is in danger of rescuing Jesus from one error, only to have him fail at another. Was Jesus really vindicated in this way in the events of AD 70? Some point out that there is some other teaching about the 'end' beyond ordinary history (e.g. the future feasting with Abraham: Matt. 8:11). Yet others see Wright's position as brought about by his insistence that since such apocalyptic language does not refer to the end of the space-time universe, it must refer instead to natural events within the on-going course of history. But what about a non-natural inbreaking of divine power with cosmic qualities, even though the cosmos remains? And is it really possible to interpret the *whole* of the Apocalyptic Discourse (in Mark 13 or Matt. 24) as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem?

These arguments will continue, but it is fair to say that Wright has succeeded in forcing us to re-think through our understanding of apocalyptic language; we may have interpreted metaphors too literally. Wright himself believes in the future *parousia* (or 'personal royal presence') of Jesus, but simply argues that this must be established on other texts in the NT: a primary focus must be given to 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 8. Yet the question still presses: how did Paul and the apostles so quickly come to believe in Jesus' personal return (e.g. in 1 Thess. 4-5)?<sup>2</sup> On other topics this form of argument is often used by Wright to argue that the original momentum derives from Jesus' own teaching. Not so here, apparently – though in personal conversation the intriguing possibility that this formed part of Jesus' post-Resurrection teaching (Acts 1:3) was not ruled out. Now that the Resurrection had occurred, perhaps the time was ripe to convey the next instalment in the divine plan?

## Concluding remarks

All of these are important subsidiary questions to raise in response to Wright's work; no doubt they will be keenly debated in the coming years. *Anvil* readers, however, may find themselves in broader sympathy with other, more central, aspects of Wright's work, where his position has been forged through endless debate with other 'historical Jesus' scholars.

By way of summary it may be useful to list some of Wright's conclusions on these central issues:

- the emphasis on Jesus as a thoroughly Jewish eschatological prophet (not just a Hellenistic Jew or even a merely 'charismatic' Jew who taught exclusively about either ethics or the spiritual life);
- the reminder that in Jesus' day there was no easy split between religion and politics, so his message was inescapably *both* 'religious' (he was no mere 'social revolutionary') and 'political'; he was proclaiming God's kingly rule over *all* of life;

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2 Wright explores some of these issues in his recent *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (SPCK 2002).

- the need to work with the 'big picture' hypothesis (rather than getting bogged down in endless authenticity debates), taking note of all available sources and using, where possible, a double criterion of similarity and dissimilarity (to discover a Jesus located within Judaism but distinctive within it who is also the Jesus who gives rise to Christian faith but yet is also distinct from the early Church in his own context);
- the affirmation that historical 'science' should not be totally bound by the deistic denial of divine activity in this world but occasionally needs to recognize factors beyond its normal remit;
- the conclusion that the later Christian doctrines concerning Jesus' divine identity and substitutionary death have their origin in the teaching of Jesus himself and are not simply the ideas of the Early Church.

The 'historical Jesus' debate is certainly alive and well. Schweitzer sounded its death knell nearly a hundred years ago, but there has evidently been a resurrection of some kind! Evangelical Christians would do well to keep this debate in their sights, to learn from it and play their part in it. It would be good to see scholars emerging, especially on this side of the Atlantic, who will take up the mantle left by Tom Wright as he moves into other areas of NT study. One key area would be the re-integration of John's Gospel into this debate, which till now has been largely side-lined (in his work Wright has accepted the current terms of the debate and done his work by almost exclusive reference to the Synoptics).

It would also be good to see preachers up and down the land speaking with new confidence about the Jesus of history and sharing their excitement as to the new facets of Jesus' ministry that come to light when it is set within its rightful context. This Jesus is certainly never dull and still has the power after all these years to call people into his life-changing service. And in looking more closely at this Jesus, and in following him, we find that we are being drawn into the very character of God. For, as Paul said soon after the event, 'in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form' (Col. 2:9).

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### Some recommended books

- C. C. Newman (ed.) *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel* (IVP, Downers Grove 1998)
- M. A. Powell *Jesus as a Figure in History* (Westminster John Knox, Louisville 1998)
- P. W. L. Walker *Jesus and his World* (Lion, 2003)
- P. W. L. Walker & P. S. Johnston (eds.) *The Land of Promise* (IVP, Leicester and Downers Grove 2000), esp. chs. 3A & 3B.
- N. T. Wright 'Jesus, Israel, and the Cross', *SBL Seminar Papers* (1985)
- Jesus and the Victory of God* (SPCK, London 1996)
- The Way of the Lord* (SPCK, London 1998)
- The Challenge of Jesus* (SPCK, London 2000)
- The Resurrection of the Son of God* (SPCK, London 2003)