Wilkins, Michael J. and J. P. Moreland, eds.

Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus

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Jesus Under Fire is a collection of essays from some of the top evangelical scholars that we've come to know and love over the years. Some of my favorites include Craig Evans, Gary Habermas, Craig Blomberg, William Lane Craig, and Darrell Bock, among others. While this book is no doubt an apologetic aimed primarily against the Jesus Seminar it doesn't take an overly-polemical tone in the various essays presented. These scholars are simply happy to challenge the Seminar's presuppositions and methodology and undermine their conclusions with facts.

My first thought when I received this book was that it was going to be outdated and pretty much useless, but I was pleasantly surprised and somewhat shocked by what I found when reading through this volume. I was pleasantly surprised because the information contained within this book is remarkably relevant for today. Gary Habermas' defense of miracles and William Lane Craig's defense of the resurrection of Jesus are as poignant now as they were in 1996 when this book was originally published. But I was shocked to see that there haven't been great apologetic advances in the last dozen years. Most of the contributors have written book-length treatments of the topics covered in this volume (although not necessarily on the topic they addressed) since its publication in 1996 and shockingly, they haven't advanced their position much, if at all.

For example, in Gary Habermas' book *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* [2004] co-authored with Mike Licona, he did little to advance beyond Craig's chapter in this volume "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" (141-76). They both relied heavily on Paul (esp. 1Cor. 15), used the criteria of authenticity (e.g., multiple attestation, dissimilarity, embarrassment, etc.), and advanced the New Testament resurrection accounts as that with the best explanatory power. The same can be said of books like *Dethroning Jesus* [2007] or *Reinventing Jesus* [2006] which mount strong arguments for the reliability of the New Testament documents based on the oral culture of the first century authors. In doing so they haven't really advanced much from Darrell Bock's chapter "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" (73-99). Even in Bock's *Studying the Historical*

Jesus [2002], he hasn't gone far beyond Edwin Yamauchi's "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?" (207-29).

Now I don't say this to impugn the character of these later works–in fact they are all very good books that cover a multitude of topics and address a multitude of arguments, and reading them has helped me very much over the last couple of years–but I think that this speaks to just how strong of a book this must have been when it was first published. In 1996 my mind was far from Jesus and even farther from Christian apologetics, but I imagine that this book was a force to be reckoned with at the time. I can't really imagine those who buy into the Jesus Seminar rhetoric having much of a response for this book now-a-days, let alone having much to say back then.

However, I can't say that I learned a great deal from this book, but I admit that's only because I've read *Fabricating Jesus*, *The Missing Gospels*, and all of those other works mentioned above prior to receiving this volume. I don't know that I'd recommend this volume to the newcomer though, and that's only because I don't believe that anyone really takes the Jesus Seminar seriously anymore and this volume obviously didn't deal prophetically with some of the concerns of today such as the Talpiot Tomb nonsense, or the Gospel of Judas discovery. I would say this, if you are interested in Christian Apologetics, especially a defense of the historical Jesus, then this volume would be a welcome, even if superfluous addition to your library.