JESUS DECODED

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Category: Reviews

Wide Margin are an independent publishing company who aim to publish Christian books that the more established publishing houses might ignore. They look for work by new authors and, in particular, for work by authors in the majority Christian world. This is an excellent aim and Wide Margin deserves to be far more widely known.

That being said, when the publishers sent me a copy of Jesus Decoded by Les Marsh, I found myself being far from impressed. Essentially, the book is aÂ modern retelling of Luke's Gospel. There is nothing particularly remarkable about it and nothing particularly original. Personally, I found some of the attempts at making things sound modern to be rather irksome. Why rename John the Baptist as John-the-Immerser? It doesn't add anything to the story and if you want a modern name, John-the-Dunker would be far more appropriate in my estimation. However, these things are a matter of taste and not everyone would agree with me; fair enough.

Where I take strong exception to the book is in the way it describes itself:

> *"It is the first historical translation of Luke" (back cover)*
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> *"A historical translation solves the puzzles for us. It translates the whole story. It goes through Luke's Greek text, into the life-story of first-century Hebrew-Aramaic Jews. It uncovers hidden subtext, and reveals the forces Luke's hero faced. It empowers us to read Luke's story as his first readers might have read it."*

I was rather amused by the claim to translate the whole story, given that the first chapter brings a rather simplistic overview of the Old Testament into the opening chapter of Luke and the second chapter cuts short the narrative about Simeon and erases Anna from the story all-together. Whatever this book claims for itself, it is not a translation. Translators do not have the liberty to add or remove bits from the story as they choose. There were other examples of this sort of cavalier attitude to the text, but I decided not to list them all.

Another rather strange aspect of the book is the way that all of the people opposing Jesus (scribes, pharisees, etc) seem to be lumped together under one heading as the VRIN (violent, revolutionary, idolatrous, nationalists). These groups were far too disparate to all be grouped together in this way. Not only that, but some of them weren't violent, some weren't revolutionary and the term idolatrous certainly doesn't fit in the context and probably none of them were nationalists in the modern understanding of the term.

The book is a valiant effort, but it doesn't live up to its own billing. If you want a simple background to the history of Luke, you would do far better to read Luke for Everyone (New Testament Guides for Everyone) by Tom Wright and if you want a serious introduction, then Wright's Christian Origins series would be my suggested starting place.