

Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels

Preface

We live in the Age of Information. This is no less true today for students of the New Testament who are inundated with a virtual flood of research on Jesus and the Gospels. How can those in professional ministry, leaders in local churches and other Christian organizations, seminarians, even academic scholars, stay abreast of fresh studies of Jesus and the Gospels?

In the last thirty years new methodologies and approaches have been championed, some becoming commonplace. Older viewpoints have been transformed, some overturned, others confirmed. Unfortunately, while these new studies have helped us appreciate better the perspectives of the Gospel Evangelists and brought into sharper relief the challenge of the life and message of Jesus, they have also grown more numerous and technical. How can the fruit of vital study of Jesus and the Gospels in recent years reach the front lines of ministry and life together in our communities of faith?

At the same time, New Testament scholarship informed by classical Christian faith has more and more entered the discourse on Jesus and the Gospels. A growing body of evangelical scholars have begun engaging the academic community in stimulating ways. Regrettably, while the general populace on both sides of the Atlantic have been exposed to the sensationalism of such projects as the Jesus Seminar and *Jesus: The Evidence*, no major undertaking has made available to the larger church the representative scholarship of students of Jesus and the Gospels which is both critically responsible and theologically evangelical.

The *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* has been prepared to meet such needs as these. For students it provides

introductory discussions and comprehensive surveys. For pastors and teachers it provides reliable and readable information. For theologians and biblical scholars it provides up-to-date reviews.

Because of its narrow focus on Jesus and the Gospels, the *Dictionary* consists of fewer entries than other one-volume dictionaries. In selecting topics it was decided that subjects that would be handled adequately in a one-volume Bible dictionary would not be included in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. The goal was to provide greater depth of coverage and concentration than would normally be available.

Articles in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* treat questions arising from the Gospels themselves, longstanding traditions of interpretation of Jesus and the Gospels, significant background issues, and the range of methodological approaches used in Gospels study today. These essays concentrate on Jesus and the Gospels, limiting their discussions to the needs of those who study, teach and expound the Gospels. To be both evangelical and critical at the same time has been the object of the *Dictionary*. Its contributors, all representative of contemporary evangelicalism, have attempted to portray a range of interpretive alternatives in their discussions as well as to be faithful to the Gospels as Scripture.

We pray that the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* will be found useful to those preparing for and engaged in Christian ministry in all its forms—from the small group to the lecture hall, from the marketplace to the seminary, from the local church to the department of religious studies, and beyond.

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