

Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,
Second Edition

Preface

Today New Testament students are inundated with a virtual flood of research on Jesus and the Gospels. What does it mean for Jesus to be called God's Son? Why did Jesus have to die? Did Jesus have female followers; if he did, what is their significance? What is a "Gospel"? Was Jesus a Cynic? (What is a Cynic?) How can we make sense of Jesus' parables? Given the need for so much specialized background and knowledge, how do students and pastors even begin to tackle these questions, and others besides?

In recent decades some traditional viewpoints have been transformed, some overturned, others confirmed. New methodologies and approaches have been championed, some becoming commonplace. New studies have helped us to appreciate better the perspectives of the Gospel writers, and they have brought into sharper relief the challenge of Jesus' life and message. Those studies have also grown more numerous and, in many cases, more technical.

How can undergraduate students, seminarians, people in professional ministry, leaders in local churches and other Christian organizations, even academic scholars, stay abreast of the range of contemporary study of Jesus and the Gospels? How can the fruit of vital study of Jesus and the Gospels in recent years help to animate our reading of and interaction with the Gospels?

When it first appeared some twenty years ago, the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* was concerned to address exactly these kinds of needs. This revision of the *Dictionary* follows the same path, though now with new content and

up-to-date bibliographies, as well as a host of new contributors. Some ninety percent of the original material has been replaced, with most previous entries assigned to a fresh list of scholars. A number of new articles have been introduced, and a handful of articles from the first edition have been updated in light of ongoing research.

Like its predecessor, this revision of the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* provides students with introductory discussions, comprehensive surveys and convenient bibliographies. For pastors and teachers it provides reliable and readable information. For theologians and biblical scholars it provides up-to-date reviews. People interested in Jesus and the Gospels can start here—and from here they will be led back with new insights and questions to the biblical texts themselves. And they may find themselves turning from one article to the next, and on to further studies, as they pursue their questions.

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. Because of its narrow focus, the *Dictionary* consists of fewer entries than other one-volume dictionaries. This allows for greater depth of coverage and concentration than would normally be available.

When work began in the late 1980s on the first edition of the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, New Testament scholarship informed by classical Christian faith was on the rise and had begun to make significant contributions to the discourse on Jesus and the Gospels. The landscape has

changed since those days. In the intervening years, evangelical study spanning three generations of scholars has contributed to historical inquiry, to explorations of the particular contributions of each of the Gospel writers, and to reflection on the theological and ethical consequences of the fourfold Gospel. If interest in the historical Jesus in the popular media has waned somewhat since the 1990s, it remains no less crucial that critically responsible and theologically evangelical scholarship be placed in the hands of the larger church. In fact, to be evangelical and critical at the same time has been the object of the *Dictionary*.

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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