

Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus

Tom Holmen and Stanley E. Porter, eds. *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. Leiden: Brill, 2011. 4 vols.: 3652 pp. \$1329.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9789004163720 (set).

The *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* is a fascinating work on the development of the study of the historical Jesus. *HSHJ*'s distinctiveness is the variety of topics it covers related to the historical Jesus and the profundity of each article. The mixture of depth and breadth is unparalleled by other resources.

One work that may be considered similar is *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (DJG)*. However, with a quick glance, the similarity of these two works quickly fades. *DJG* is a dictionary and is encyclopedic in nature; its articles are relatively short and the *HSHJ* provides greater depth. There are also several individual works on the study of the historical Jesus. However, these tend to cover specific aspects. For example, Darrell Bock's *Studying the Historical Jesus* covers two facets of the study of the historical Jesus: the historical context of first-century Israel, and methods for studying the gospels. *HSHJ* covers both of these components (in volumes 1 and 3, respectively), but provides more depth and breadth. Another work dealing with the studies of the historical Jesus is John P. Meier's classic *A Marginal Jew*. The difference between *HSHJ* and Meier's work is breadth. While reading Meier's work, one gets Meier's perspective of the historical Jesus, a narrow representation of the scholarly work done on the historical Jesus.

Although *HSHJ* never explicitly states an intended audience, the breadth and depth of the content clearly points to an audience of scholars, or potential scholars, interested in understanding the multiple paths of research that have led the study of the historical Jesus to its current state.

The first sign of *HSHJ*'s breadth is its purpose. *HSHJ* intends to be a means by which the increasing diversity and abundance of Jesus scholarship can be demonstrated (xvi). In four volumes, the editors compile works related to methodology (volume 1), the history and future of research related to the historical Jesus (volume 2), the historical Jesus (volume 3), and a collection of individual studies related to the historical Jesus (volume 4).

The range of contributing scholarship also reflects the breadth of *HSHJ* by being international in scope. They admit that scholarship on the historical Jesus has been, in large part, linked to "white male western Europeans and European-Americans" (xviii). In spite of this, they have made efforts to include contributors who are minorities. Unfortunately, the editors do not provide a list of the contributors and their credentials, which would verify this claim. Nevertheless, from a little investigation, their effort to get a diverse scope is obvious. Their inclusion of contributors such as Eve-Marie Becker, a scholar in Germany; Teresa Okure, a scholar in Africa; and Petr Pokorny, a scholar in the Czech Republic; is a small sample of the diversity of scholarship they seek.

The breadth is also evident when looking at the individual essays. The variety of notable scholars who contributed to this work is commendable: John Dominic Crossan, James D. G. Dunn, Colin Brown, Scot McKnight, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Craig Evans. This diversity of scholarship is an excellent representation of the girth of research regarding the historical Jesus. It is notable that two major scholars in the study of the historical Jesus are

not contributors: Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright. It is difficult to say why this is the case. However, in spite of this deficiency, *HSHJ* remains an incredible work.

One particular example of breadth is the inclusion of James D.G. Dunn's essay entitled "Remembering Jesus: How the Quest of Jesus Lost its Way" (1:183-206). Dunn starkly disagrees with the presuppositions set forth by the study of the historical Jesus. He sets forth three proposals that clarify his opposition. First, the mission of Jesus had an impact, and this impact is a clear indication of the historical reality of the gospel (1:187). Secondly, Dunn argues, in opposition to a majority of scholars, that the oral phase of the history of Jesus should be taken seriously (1:193). Thirdly, Dunn opposes the concept, often expressed by Jesus scholars, that one must look for a Jesus who was distinctive or different from his environment (1:198). In spite of Dunn's opposition to the premises of the study of the historical Jesus, the editors included his essay, an example of the editors' efforts to be thorough and inclusive in selecting contributors.

While the breadth of articles is notable, depth is critical if this work is to meet the objectives set by Holmen and Porter. An excellent example of this is Eve-Marie Becker's article entitled "Historiographical Literature in the New Testament Period" (2:1787-1817). Becker assumes the reader has a certain level of background knowledge when it comes to historiography. If, by chance, this is not the case, Becker provides extensive footnotes, providing references to resources providing historiographical foundations. After providing a brief overview and definition of terms, Becker shows how historiography applies to the writings of the New Testament, and adds light to understanding the New Testament.

Another article displaying the depth of *HSHJ* is "The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of Mark" by Joanna Dewey (3:1821-1852). At first glance, the article appears to apply what has already been discussed in the prior volumes to the Gospel of Mark. While Dewey does exactly this, it only takes a quick peek to understand that the depth of this article is in the footnotes. While she provides a broad brush stroke of the historical Jesus and its application to the gospel of Mark, however, as Dewey paints this broad brush stroke, she repeatedly refers to resources that would take the reader deeper and further into each topic. For example, the first portion of this essay looks at how Mark is interpreted through a variety of critical lenses: source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism, to name a few. In each section, Dewey provides a brief history and description of the criticism, but in the footnotes, Dewey consistently provides points of access to resources that provide more depth to that criticism.

HSHJ is a commendable work. It touches upon Jesus scholarship in a single work like no other. The diversity of scholarship represented, the variety of topics, issues, and perspectives discussed, and the years of scholarship each article represents makes it invaluable for many library patrons.

Because of its depth, this work would gather dust at a traditional undergraduate library. The contributors of *HSHJ* aim to contribute to the scholarly conversation that has been going on for many years. In order to understand this dialogue, background knowledge is needed. However, it would be welcome at a graduate school, particularly one that has an intensive research program. As *HSHJ* shows, the study of the historical Jesus has impacted a wide variety of scholarship. Because of this, any faculty teaching New Testament studies would welcome *HSHJ* to a library's collection.

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