

Book Review

Bock, Darrell L.

2012 *Who is Jesus?: Linking the Historical Jesus with the Christ of Faith*. New York: Howard Books.
256 pages.

Who is Jesus? This is not just a question that people who are not familiar with Jesus ask. It is a question that has created a chasm between scholars who study Jesus as simply a historical figure and those who see him as the Christ of faith. For many years scholars who have studied Jesus have grappled with the question of whether the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith is one and the same person. While skeptical scholars would say they are different, those who are of the Christian faith say the opposite. Is it possible to link the historical Jesus with the Christ of faith?

Who Is Jesus? says yes. In fact, it claims that a person of faith can have a conversation with those who are skeptics and still move toward a better historical understanding of Jesus. It does not claim to prove who Jesus was in an absolute manner. However, it does argue that a strong case can be made for appreciating who Jesus was through the available sources of the events in the life of Jesus (9).

Who Is Jesus? is a result of a long, strenuous project of more than a dozen scholars who are known as the IBR (Institute for Biblical Research) Jesus Group. Each participant is considered a specialist in his own area of Jesus study. The initial result of the study was put together in a more than 800 pages long document of highly technical language. This book, however, was written with lay readers in mind. It is meant to be an accessible treatment of the results of the technical study.

Who Is Jesus? examines twelve core events in the life of Jesus by using rules that were not made by the church, nor for the church, but ones that are rooted in a much more skeptical approach to Jesus (3, 11). What this means is that no one can speak about Jesus without corroboration. In other words, in order to validate a claim about Jesus, it has to be supported by many attested materials and evidences. The rules—as used by most historical Jesus scholars—are multiple attestation of sources, multiple attestation of forms, various forms of dissimilarity, embarrassment, criterion of rejection and execution, coherence, Aramaic or Hebrew traces, Palestinian environment, inherent ambiguity, and historical-cultural plausibility. The first five rules are the key rules and the last five supplement them. The study notes that the more rules that apply to a saying or event, the stronger the case for corroboration (24).

The twelve events include John the Baptist, the choosing of the twelve, Jesus' associations with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus and the Sabbath, Jesus and exorcism, Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus' triumphal entry, Jesus' temple act, the last supper, the examination by the Jewish leadership, the examination by Pilate and crucifixion, and the women discovering an empty tomb. Each event takes one chapter of discussion, following a pattern that begins with a consideration of any rule that would authenticate the core of the event, followed by an examination of the common objections raised about the event, and ends with a consideration of what it means for understanding Jesus (26).

At the conclusion of the book, the author makes this statement: "These twelve events belong together. They tell us of a figure who mixed authority and humility. They reveal a power that invites and inspires. They affirm to us that the Jesus of history links to and discloses the Christ of faith. Jesus Christ was sent to reveal the living God and point us into the way of life. That is who Jesus was—and is" (214). Undeniably, this statement reflects the conclusion and the stand the participants of the IBR Jesus Group have after a long serious study about Jesus.

Using rules set by an opponent in order to make a case for something that we believe in is an excellent strategy. This puts the scholars of the Christ of faith on the same ground as their opponents, yet are not intimidated by them or by their rules. It is quite ridiculous to turn against one's own rules just because they seem to give ground for the opponents. The arguments that are built upon this strategy would be much stronger. More than that though, it opens the door for a deeper exploration and understanding of who Jesus

really was. This, I think, is the strength of the study presented in *Who Is Jesus?*

The book is a collective work of twelve scholars who are specialist in the study of Jesus. This certainly is another strength of the book. Distinguished Professor of the New Testament at Denver Seminary, Craig Blomberg, puts it succinctly in his review: “Take a dozen scholars who have all written books on some aspect of the life of the historical Jesus. Have them meet annually for a decade poring over articles that each one writes on his area of specialty, looking for any possible flaws. Publish the revised results on both sides of the Atlantic in a major monograph and receive wider scholarly feedback. Then commission the co-chair to write a succinct, readable digest of the results, and the result is Darrell Bock’s *Who Is Jesus?*” (back cover).

Yet another point would make its strength complete. It is the heavy duty and the thoroughness of study that stands behind this simple, readable and understandable book. This provides assurance to readers that this is no ordinary study of Jesus. There is more to it than what was presented in the book. Those who are interested may read the full 800 pages long study of Jesus.

There are questions, however, that remain to be answered. Does this issue about the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith reflect the way Asians look at Jesus? Could it ever be a problem in the Asian mindset? Looking at pluralism in Asia, and how Christianity has struggled to make ground in countries where the big majority is non-Christian, could it be that this issue about historical Jesus and the Christ of faith takes on a different angle? These questions are certainly not within the scope of the book, and therefore may not be considered its weakness. However, it raises the question of whether the discussions in the book are relevant for many Asians. Understandably, some Asians would certainly be interested with the issue about Jesus. They may find the discussions in the book to be helpful in their understanding about Jesus.

Because of the value of the content of the book, this is one book worth having. I would strongly recommend it for reading to those who are interested in Christian apologetics. The information found in the book would enhance their understanding and ground for defending the truth about the Christ of faith. It is also a must reading for pastors and lay leaders who teach the Scripture. The part in every chapter of the book where the meaning of each event is presented is particularly helpful for this group of readers. It provides important information about what it means to know Jesus.

Those who are interested to have the book may purchase it from any major bookstore with a reasonable price. One can certainly find it in most Christian bookstores.

Gerard Bernard
Lecturer, Faculty of Religious Studies
Asia-Pacific International University