

# CHOICE

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HUMANITIES

Religion

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**Handbook for the study of the historical Jesus: v.1: How to study the historical Jesus; v.2: The study of Jesus; v.3: The historical Jesus; v.4: Individual studies**, ed. by Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter. Brill Academic, 2011. 4v indexes afp ISBN 9789004163720, \$1,329.00

This magnificent collection will be invaluable to scholars in history, biblical studies, theology, and literary theory/practice. Despite its cost, devoted research scholars and academic libraries will greatly benefit from the discussion of issues in the interpretation of early Christianity that have preoccupied scholars for some 300 years. For much of Christianity's history, Christians read both straightforwardly and allegorically the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as direct testimonies to Jesus's words, deeds, and teachings. In this traditional view, the Jesus who lived and died in an ancient Palestine ruled by Rome was also the Messiah or the Christ. During the Enlightenment, a new problem came to the fore, particularly with such English deists as John Locke and Matthew Tindal, and the German scholar D. F. Strauss: a quest for reliable knowledge of Jesus as distinct from the ecclesiastical accretions that subsequent generations of clerics and scholars blended into the historical figure of Jesus. Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906) used historical methods rather than religious doctrines to portray Jesus's life and teachings. Despite considerable doubt about achieving trustworthy results, scholars continued to engage in Jesus research. In this handbook, leading experts rigorously examine the history of this research, both implying and offering prospects for future research. These contributors' excellent, original essays are inclusive, international, and diverse. This set incorporates a vast range of methods, hypotheses, and proposals. To deal with the diversity of materials that characterizes inquiry into Jesus's life and times, volume 1 is devoted to methodological approaches, discussing the validity of criteria for distinguishing the historical Jesus from later followers' and writers' testimonies, historical skepticism, relations between texts and contexts, and recent use of social science methods for historical investigations. Volume 2 concerns the many quests that have led scholars to offer portrayals of Jesus and indicates how earlier studies are used in current inquiry. In volume 3, Jesus himself comes into purview, both as he appears in ancient texts and as a historical figure in the geographical/social context wherein Israel's legacy and Rome's imperial rule shaped him and those who study him. Volume 4 is given to individual studies on particular issues, e.g., Jesus in film, and Jesus and Paul. Issues pervading all four volumes are the sources for the study of Jesus; standards for determining Jesus's authentic sayings; Jesus's teaching(s); the Jewish, Greek, and Roman matrix in which Jesus lived; the role apocalyptic or eschatological expectations played in the minds of Jesus and his followers; and Jesus's identity as a Greco-Roman sage or a figure shaped by his Jewish environment. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. Upper-level undergraduates and above; general readers. -- *L. J. Alderink, emeritus, Concordia College*