

Introduction of the IBR Jesus Group

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The IBR Jesus Group is a working group drawn from members of IBR to explore the historicity and significance of key events in the life of Jesus. This essay explains the intent of the group and the distinctive "team" approach that it takes to the project.

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The Institute for Biblical Research (IBR) is an organization of evangelical Christian scholars with specialties in Old and New Testament and in ancillary disciplines. Its vision is to foster excellence in the pursuit of Biblical Studies within a faith environment. With the continued growth of IBR, there are now sufficient members to launch specialized group research projects. The IBR Jesus Group is the first of what is hoped to be many others within IBR. This first group was started by Darrell Bock and Robert Webb, who now function as its co-convenors. The group comprises IBR members whose principal academic work has been in Gospel studies.

The intent of the IBR Jesus Group is to engage in a fresh assessment of the historicity and significance of ten key events in the life of Jesus and to do so in a group environment. Unlike the Jesus Seminar, the Jesus Group does not vote on the specific sayings or events from the life of Jesus. Rather, each event is assessed as a complete unit. It is examined to determine the evidence for the event in question, as well as the elements that make up this event. Then, given these results, the examiner develops the event's significance for understanding Jesus' life and ministry. Sometimes ratings assessing the possibility or probability of an event or a detail within it are used as a way of expressing what can be demonstrated historically. In other cases, alternative configurations of the sequencing of events are assessed. Judgments like these belong to the author of the article, not necessarily to the entire group, but they are made after interaction with the group.

A distinctive element of the IBR Jesus Group's functioning is its "team approach." It is intended to bring together a wide range of expertise on the issues at hand. Initially, the key event is assigned to a member of the group. In many cases, the person selected to write on a given event has already done technical work on the event before being selected to expand on it for the group. This individual submits an essay for review and interaction within the group. Discussion and interaction take place via e-mail. Then the group meets over an entire weekend in the summer to discuss and respond to the paper. The author then reworks the draft in light of the entire group's feedback. The essay that appears in BBR each year is the fruit of this process. The article remains the author's work, but it has been reshaped and enhanced by the extensive nature of the group interaction.

It is our intent to present each year in the BBR a comprehensive article on the event treated during the preceding year. The initial essay from the group concerns the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist and has been written by Robert Webb. It is the result of work that culminated in the first group meeting in Chicago, June 12-13, 1999. The next event, currently under consideration by the group, is Jesus' choosing of the Twelve, and it is being presented by Scot McKnight.

It is our goal to make an informal and helpful contribution to the important subject of the historical Jesus. We look forward to the interaction and response of our colleagues.