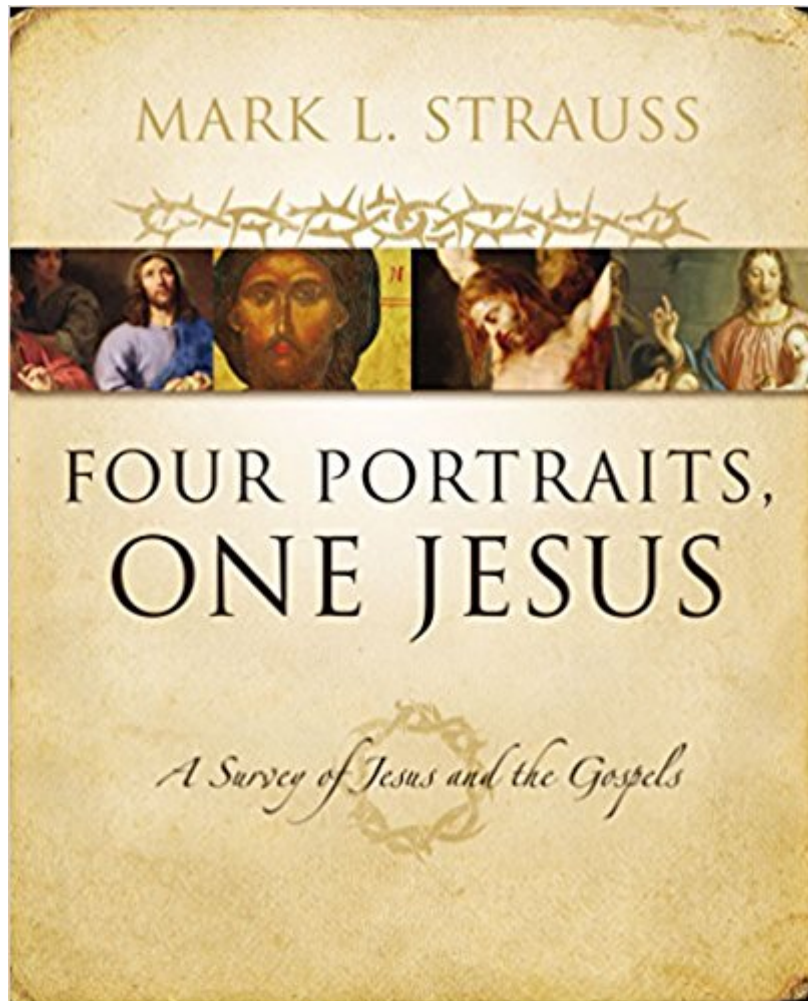


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Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey Of Jesus And The Gospels



Synopsis

To Christians worldwide, the man Jesus of Nazareth is the centerpiece of history, the object of faith, hope, and worship. Even those who do not follow him admit the vast influence of his life. For anyone interested in knowing more about Jesus, study of the four biblical Gospels is essential. *Four Portraits, One Jesus* is a thorough yet accessible introduction to these documents and their subject, the life and person of Jesus. Like different artists rendering the same subject using different styles and points of view, the Gospels paint four highly distinctive portraits of the same remarkable Jesus. With clarity and insight, Mark Strauss illuminates these four books, first addressing their nature, origin, methods for study, and historical, religious, and cultural backgrounds. He then moves on to closer study of each narrative and its contribution to our understanding of Jesus, investigating things such as plot, characters, and theme. Finally, he pulls it all together with a detailed examination of what the Gospels teach about Jesus' ministry, message, death, and resurrection, with excursions into the quest for the historical Jesus and the historical reliability of the Gospels.

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Customer Reviews

Having personally taught the Gospels at the Christian college level, I obviously have had to look over a number of appropriate texts before choosing only one to assign my students. Well, starting with the next time I teach the Gospels, I now have a new book to assign. Mark Strauss does an excellent job in *Four Portraits*, covering the important issues related to the Gospels. His writing style is smooth, lacking an "Ivory Tower" feel that could easily alienate potential learners, yet it is obvious

throughout that Dr. Strauss is no academic slouch. Definitions are readily provided to new terms that are bold-faced, as he assumes nothing when it comes to the language of the New Testament. Even lay-learners outside the classroom setting would benefit greatly from this book--of course, an educational institution is not a requirement for reading and learning! One thing that will be enjoyable for the reader is that this is a user-friendly book; it has plenty of fascinating pictures, charts, and short blurbs that will help keep the interest of even the most disinterested person. His charts (labeled "figures" in the book) are outstanding; he and the publisher worked very well together to produce some visual-learner tools that will be meaningful, even when the text hasn't been fully read or comprehended. While Strauss obviously comes from an Evangelical position and shares his opinions throughout, there is not a feel that he is being overly dogmatic. He presents all sides of the issues in a very objective way. Several times I would have liked him to have been more opinionated. (For instance, he declines to give his final opinion for the dating of the individual gospels.) But perhaps this aspect should be considered a strength.

In conjunction with reading *Jesus and the Gospels* by Craig Blomberg I have also been reading this Christological gem of a book in parallel with it. These two books combined are the best evangelical treatment of Christ's life that I have come across. It will suffice to say that I have read many and these are broad spectrum and good overall treatments of Jesus Christ's life on Earth. The only book I have read that trumps these two is John R Stott's: *The Cross of Christ*. The thing is though that Stott's treatment deals only with the redemption and salvational aspects of the Crucifixion and Resurrection and their affects on man. This book from Strauss coupled with Blomberg's is an exhaustive treatment that covers all possible angles of Jesus' life, ministry, Crucifixion and Resurrection. This book in particular is extremely well organized and leaves few stones unturned. It even refutes (rebukes) some of the wacky liberal theology theories that do not adhere to sound reasoning or sound hermeneutics. Especially the ones that have surfaced over the last 100 years to diminish or deny the deity of Jesus and the fact He is the Son of God. (*Cough*Bultmann*Cough*) It dissects and dismantles the goofy theories that come from our deconstructionist and postmodern theological brethren. I wouldn't be surprised if many of the Emergent and TBN brethren have not taken the time to read books like this and plumb the depths of the Gospels in this detail. Where this book fails to pick the liberal turkey bones clean, its partner on my desk *Jesus and the Gospels* will finish cleaning the meat off the spiritually dead carcass. To top all of this off it has high quality graphics and charts to aid in understanding. Go pay the fifty bucks and get them both.

I always wondered how the gospel writers could remember as many details they actually wrote their gospels after 20 years. I should have gotten a clue from the Gospel of Luke. Luke started his gospel by addressing his patron, Theophilus. He begins his gospel addressing Theophilus, explaining to him what he did to prepare his text. "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4, NASB95) Luke looked at others' notes and oral accounts of what happened during the ministry of Jesus. I always assumed the New Testament writers were guided by the Holy Spirit who reminded them of events and sayings of Jesus. Mark Strauss explains in many satisfying details how the gospels were probably written. For example, Luke clearly explains that he used many eyewitness sources to compile his gospel in an orderly manner. Luke also wrote Acts, which is a continuation of what he had written in his gospel. The book is well illustrated and Strauss does a great job explain the pros and cons of the understanding how the gospels were developed. One chapter is devoted to explaining what liberal theologians have done in the Jesus Seminar, and earlier quests to discover the historical Jesus. It's hard to distinguish liberal theologians from skeptics, since they reject the possibility of miracles, and some seem to be atheists.

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