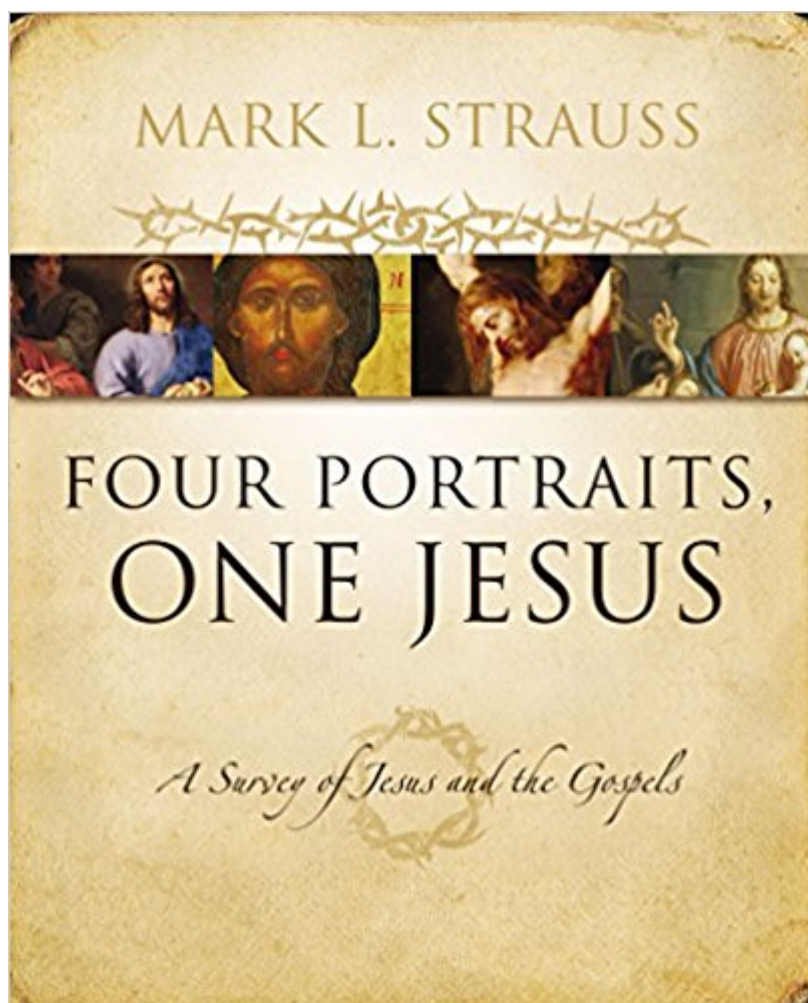


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# Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey Of Jesus And The Gospels



## 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's 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

"This is the best textbook available for a course on Jesus and the Gospels. Rarely do both the instructor and the students rave about a textbook." • Palm Beach Atlantic University -- E. Randolph Richards  
Hands down, the best textbook I've found for my "Life of Jesus" classes. It is superbly organized and very student-friendly with its many illuminating charts, sidebar discussions, chapter summaries of key points, study questions, and glossary of key terms. It's a very

aesthetically-pleasing layout with numerous pictures that help the text to come alive. Fair, even-handed treatment of divergent scholarly views while offering solidly reasoned conclusions grounded in careful scholarship. My students routinely comment on how well-written, interesting and accessible his explanations are. An engaging resource for introducing a scholarly study of the Gospels that doesn't overwhelm the neophyte. Highly recommended!' George Fox University -- Jeannine Graham

Mark Strauss's Four Portraits, One Jesus is certainly one of the best Gospel textbook resources I have found to date. The unique articles in the introduction section alone are worth the publication, and to these are added important historical information that is passed over in some surveys. The book itself is a pleasure to read both textually and visually---the quality of the written content only being enhanced by that of its printing and helpful graphics, charts, etc. Overall, it is an excellent resource for both professor and student---one that will actually be read!

Southern Evangelical Seminary -- Douglas M. Beaumont

Mark Strauss's engagingly written Four Portraits, One Jesus is an outstanding textbook choice for introductory courses on the canonical Gospels. Countering the common myth held by students that the four Gospels are in effect "all the same," its simple yet effective organization treats the unique features and contributions of each Gospel while upholding their essential unity. From its attractive cover to stunning photographs to informative sidebars, the text reflects a top notch production effort on the part of Zondervan that makes Jesus and his first century world come alive. I used Four Portraits, One Jesus as a required resource for a graduate course I taught in Israel entitled, "Jesus and the Holy Land." Students raved about the book!

Urshan Graduate School of Theology -- Jeffrey Brickle

This textbook for studying the Gospels and the historical Jesus presents various views evenhandedly and consistently comes to careful and balanced conclusions. It introduces both older and newer approaches and treats all the major topics.' -- Craig Keener, Professor

Extraordinarily well written and thoughtfully organized. This book will be useful to anyone in need of a concise, clear, and knowledgeable guide through the four Gospels.' -- Frank Thielman, Professor

Strauss guides the nonspecialist gently through the maze of academic jargon and esoteric debate. The treatment is fair and responsible, based on sound scholarship but not over burdened with footnotes.'

-- R.T. France, Principal Emeritus

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.

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. Strauss compares the synoptic gospels and then examines the gospel of John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain similar material, and sometimes the same phrases, while John diverges in many ways. Mark is accepted by some scholars as the first written gospel, and Matthew and Luke borrowed from Mark. Matthew tended to write shorter versions of Mark's description of events even though Matthew's gospel is much larger than Mark's. Here's an excerpt from the book that explains what I meant by the gospels recording the words of Jesus: "New Testament scholars have long

recognized that in most cases we have not the exact words (*ipsissima verba*) of Jesus but rather his authentic voice (*ipsissima vox*). The essential meaning is communicated using different words. In one sense this is obvious, since Jesus normally spoke Aramaic but the Gospels are in Greek. Almost all of his words are translations, hence interpretations. (All translation involves interpretation, since a translator must determine what the Aramaic means in order to provide an equivalent word or phrase in Greek.) Many differences in wording or idiom may be attributed to differences in translation and style."Strauss, Mark L. (2011-03-01). *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Kindle Locations 8982-8987). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. We used this book for a class in our congregation's Bible Training Center, which is geared to teach people interested in pastoring and mission work. Whether or not the student decides to go further, this book has a great deal to offer to anyone interested in the development of the gospels and how they compare to one another. An excellent companion to this book would be the second half of "I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist" by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek. They take on the criticisms of biblical skeptics and answer them thoroughly. Strauss' book is not an apologetic. Rather it lays a sweeping foundations that gives the reader a broad view of the gospels' dynamics.

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. Too often writers of overview books share too much of their opinions and end up creating straw men fallacies and biased information when they explain the viewpoints contrary to their own. In addition, it is apparent that Dr. Strauss is a good educator, as he uses educational tools to make sure the reader understands each chapter. There are overviews and objectives at the beginning of each chapter, and he concludes with summary bullet points, key terms (maybe definitions for these terms could be included in future editions?--though I can see value in assigning students to write out the definitions themselves), and discussion and study questions. (The questions would make for an easy-to-assign task, especially if the professor is assigning two chapters a week for a quarter, as there are 20 total chapters--very convenient!) Each chapter also includes a bibliography of layperson's sources as well as more scholarly sources. Whether a reader is liberal or conservative, there would be great benefit in using this book to overview the gospels. I encourage college and seminary professors to consider using this text for their classrooms, as I believe the students will learn to love this text. And, finally, I conclude by saying that Dr. Strauss should continue his good work and produce a similar book on the rest of the New Testament, because what he has done here will be useful for many years to come!

Anyone of religion or non-believer should read this book. There is a section for disbelievers. Have your Bible and highlighter pens ready. References to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts puts things in proper perspective and makes the Bible writings more clear and logical.

This book has really given me a grander view of Jesus and his life from the perspective of the four Gospels. I bought this for a class that I am taking. I usually sell my books as soon as the class is over. However, I'll be definitely keeping this book for a very long time!

For students of the four-fold Gospel, this is an excellent introductory textbook, giving the necessary outlines, backgrounds, and themes of the Gospels. I would highly recommend it for those who are sincerely interested in what the Gospels are all about and for those who seek to take their understanding of Jesus and the gospel writers to a slightly deeper level of understanding.

If you want to look at the gospels in context, this is the book for you. It has great theological implications, and I read it cover to cover. It was very informative and a great resource in my studies, but is also a good book for anyone who just wants to know more about Jesus. I would consider it

necessary supplemental material for novice Bible scholars who want to get to know the historical Jesus better.

really helped with my bible study.

I just love this book.

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