



Volume 63 | Issue 2

Article 19

12-2020

Strauss's "Four portraits, one Jesus: A survey of Jesus and the gospels" (book review)

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Recommended Citation

Richardson, Samuel S. (2020) "Strauss's "Four portraits, one Jesus: A survey of Jesus and the gospels" (book review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 63: Iss. 2, Article 19.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.2230>

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Book Reviews



Strauss, M. L. (2020) *Four portraits, one Jesus: A survey of Jesus and the gospels*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. 656 pp. \$59.99 ISBN 9780310109761

Four Portraits, One Jesus, is the second edition of Mark L. Strauss' textbook. It introduces the Gospels and their collective portrayal of the historical Jesus. Strauss is a Professor of New Testament at Bethel Seminary in San Diego and serves as Vice Chair of the Committee on Bible Translation for the New International Version translation. In the introduction, Strauss unapologetically makes it clear that he is coming to this historical subject with the bias of a confessional evangelical and with the belief that the Gospels "are not just human documents but the inspired and authoritative Word of God." (p. 26) However, he produced a balanced and well-informed study of the origin, content, and purpose of each Gospel and their distinct approaches to the life of Jesus.

Strauss begins the textbook with an extensive table of contents that allows the reader to use the volume as a reference tool. The textbook is broken down into four parts with each part having multiple sections making the book very user friendly. Part One introduces the Gospels to the reader by covering topics, such as what the Gospels are, the differences between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John, and why there are only four. He also looks at their origins and nature and the methods that researchers developed for their study. Part Two of *Four Gospels one Jesus* analyzes the period in which the Gospels were written by covering their historical, social and cultural context. Strauss believes that the life of Jesus can only be understood if one understands the world that he inhabited.

In Part Three, Strauss takes each Gospel and examines them as literature. He studies each Gospel's distinct story and their unique theological themes and narrative purpose. Strauss believes that if we adopt the same mindset of those who wrote the Gospels, we will more fully understand their world and will hear the gospel story as it was intended to be heard. Part Four is a survey of the historical Jesus. Strauss covers the modern scholarship on the historical Jesus, the evidence and reliability of the Gospels, and a description of Jesus' life. He discusses the different positions that scholars hold on the Gospels and the historical Jesus. At the same time, he puts forth a defense of the traditional view.

In the *Four Portraits, One Jesus*, Strauss produced a comprehensive, well-informed and balanced account of the Gospels and the historical Jesus. To assist students in use of the textbook, he provided richly illustrated graphs, maps, and full-color photos, as well as a comprehensive glossary of terms and index. *Four Portraits, One Jesus* will provide those teaching the New Testament at the college level an important addition to their reading list.

Reviewer

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