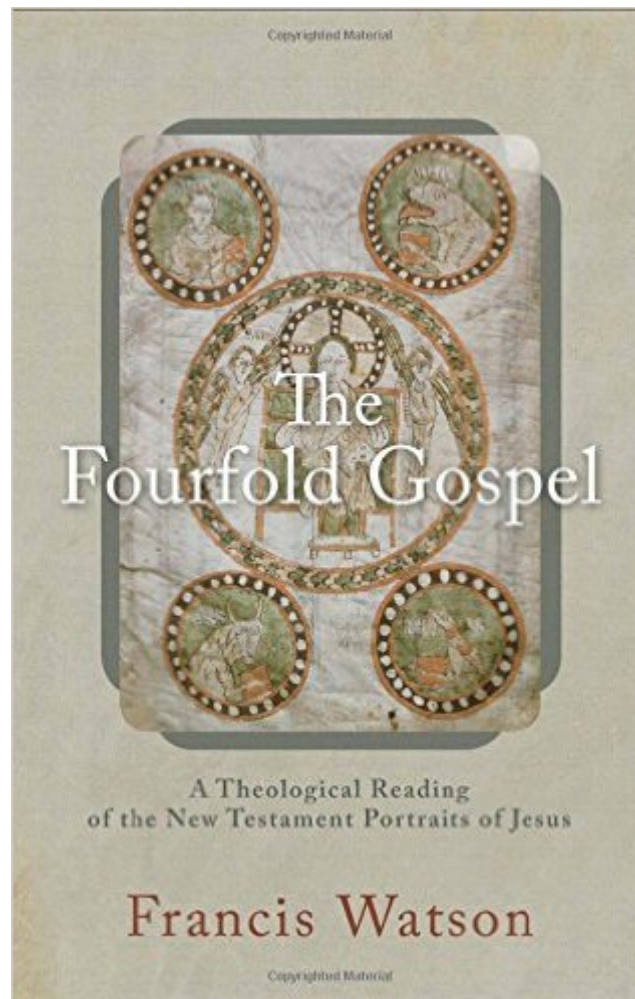


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The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading Of The New Testament Portraits Of Jesus



Synopsis

This groundbreaking approach to the study of the fourfold gospel offers a challenging alternative to prevailing assumptions about the creation of the gospels and their portraits of Jesus. How and why does it matter that we have these four gospels? Why were they placed alongside one another as four parallel yet diverse retellings of the same story? Francis Watson, widely regarded as one of the foremost New Testament scholars of our time, explains that the four gospels were chosen to give a portrait of Jesus. He explores the significance of the fourfold gospel's plural form for those who constructed it and for later Christian communities, showing that in its plurality it bears definitive witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ. Watson focuses on reading the gospels as a group rather than in isolation and explains that the fourfold gospel is greater than, and other than, the sum of its individual parts. Interweaving historical, exegetical, and theological perspectives, this book is accessibly written for students and pastors but is also of interest to professors and scholars.

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Customer Reviews

The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus by Francis Watson is a similarly exciting, and yet abbreviated exploration of Watson's previous tome, Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective (Eerdmans, 2013). According to Watson, "The present attempt at a theological reading focuses throughout on the texts within that boundary [previously established in Gospel Writing] and on the theological questions they put to their interpreter, both individually and in their relation to one another" • (p. viii). Much of this groundwork is established

and revisited in the Prolegomena section that opens the book. It is here that the reader becomes thoroughly equipped for the fascinating journey ahead. The Fourfold Gospel is divided into two major sections. The initial section seeks to establish each of the four Gospel accounts within the portrait of Jesus offered by the author. These turn out to be perspectives that are not only different in nature, but also complementary. Watson's care and attentiveness to the overall framework of each Gospel is admirable, and without losing focus of the whole, Watson is able to seamlessly equip readers with the proper lenses needed to observe the major convergences discussed in the second section. It is here that Watson applauds the formative work of Eusebius's Canon Tables in the establishment of a fourfold Gospel book and further delineates his thesis by examining the shared narrative across all four Gospels. Overall, I found Watson's work to be extremely beneficial and informative for reading and understanding the canonical gospels.

A few years ago, Francis Watson penned *Gospel Writing*, a mammoth-sized piece of scholarship that investigated the origins of how the canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) became a fourfold collection placed at the head of the New Testament. In *The Fourfold Gospel*, therefore, Watson chooses to dwell not so much on the origin of the fourfold gospel as on its theological form and significance (p.viii). The gospel narratives have long been considered by Christians to be both four individually distinctive accounts and yet also one unified whole. In other words, Watson explains, Christians can both speak of four gospel accounts and of a singular gospel according to Jesus in four different versions (p.vii). What is the significance of this? And what, theologically, does it mean to affirm that these gospels speak most truly of Jesus when read canonically, in conversation with each other? These are the kinds of questions Watson explores throughout *The Fourfold Gospel*. Even though the story of the fourfold gospel's formation isn't the main subject of the book, Watson begins by briefly summarizing how he thinks these texts came to form the foundation stone of the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were gathered together into a canonical collection through a process of ecclesial judgment that wasn't spontaneous. Some figures wanted to include more than four texts. These other documents, often termed apocryphal gospels, included texts like the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Nicodemus (p.3). On the other end of the spectrum, there were also those who didn't think that it was really necessary to preserve four distinct narrative accounts.

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