

Preface

This book is an introduction to the Gospels in the New Testament and to some of the diverse critical methods by which they have been studied. Chapter 1 considers the genre of the Gospels. Chapter 2 looks at two ways scholars have described how traditions about Jesus were transmitted in the time between Jesus' crucifixion and the writing of the first Gospel, namely, through activities in particular community life settings that shaped individual units of tradition—a process described by form criticism—and through the oral performance of more extended speeches.

Then in chapters 3–10, I discuss each of the four Gospels, devoting two chapters to each Gospel: Mark (chapters 3–4), Matthew (chapters 5–6), Luke (chapters 7–8), and John (chapters 9–10). The first chapter of each pair adopts a narrative approach to outline the tale of Jesus that each Gospel narrates. The second chapter of each pair uses a critical method to discuss an aspect of how that particular Gospel makes meaning of the tale of Jesus in relation to a particular context. Utilizing sociohistorical approaches, I think about how folks living in difficult circumstances such as those experienced in imperial Rome might have engaged the Gospel of Mark (chapter 4). Using redaction criticism, I show how Matthew's Gospel edited traditions about Jesus to address folks defining their identity and way of life in competition with synagogue communities in the troubled and challenging post-70 circumstances (chapter 6). Taking a literary-thematic approach, I argue that Luke's Gospel addresses a context of uncertainty to offer

assurance and security to followers of Jesus concerning God's workings or "kingdom" that embrace Jews and Gentiles, women and men, Roman power and the non-human world (chapter 8). Employing an intertextual approach, I propose that John's Gospel employed wisdom traditions to present Jesus as the definitive revealer of God's presence and purposes, and that he did so to provide a way ahead in the quest for divine knowledge in the post-70 world (chapter 10).

In the concluding chapter 11, I briefly take up two matters, one concerning how these four Gospels came into the New Testament canon, and the second concerning the relationships between the Gospels and the historical Jesus.

I am aware that any book on the Gospels could be many times longer than this volume given the complexity of the Gospels themselves and the fecundity of critical study on the Gospels by various methods. I have made choices that I hope will be helpful to students in experiencing some of the richness of the Gospels themselves as well as something of the valuable contributions various approaches make to their reading.

Finally, I express my appreciation to Neil Elliott at Fortress Press and his editorial team for the opportunity to write this book and for their skilled work in its production.

The book is dedicated to its readers.