

Book Review

The Four in One Gospel of Jesus: Chronologically Integrated According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Second Edition, Nikola Dimitrov, Ventura, California: Nordskog, 2017. 280 pages.

Reviewed by Dr. Roland Cap Ehlke

Putting the four Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus together is not new. The publisher of *The Four in One Gospel* points out, for instance, that a nineteenth century edition of the well-known Bible commentary by Matthew Henry (1662-1714) had contained a harmony of the Gospels (276). More recently, William F. Beck compiled the four Gospels in his own translation (1959): *The Christ of the Gospels: The life and work of Jesus as told by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, presented as one complete story in the language of today*. Others—such as J. Dwight Pentecost (1981), *A Harmony of the Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, and Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry (2003), *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels* (an update of an earlier harmony)—have set the gospels in parallel columns, rather than in a single narrative.

What, then, sets this latest version apart? In his introduction to *The Four in One Gospel*, Nikola Dimitrov explains what is unique about this single-narrative harmony: “The uniqueness of this material is the chronological mixing and blending of the four Gospels” (1). Dimitrov proceeds to give the following example:

The Gospel of Matthew says that Jesus touched the hand of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, and the fever left her (8:15). In Mark’s Gospel, it is written that Jesus took Simon Peter’s mother-in-law by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her (1:31). Luke says that Jesus stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her (4:39). See how the fact that the fever left Peter’s mother-in-law is the same, while each Gospel writer adds a new element to the “process” of her healing and thus, to the whole picture?

In this four-in-one Gospel of Jesus, this passage would look like this: “Jesus came, stood over her, rebuked the fever, took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her” . . . (1)

In setting up his harmony, Dimitrov has used the Gospel of Mark “as a base Gospel, since it recounts events virtually in chronological order” (3). When a story is found in other Gospels, but not in Mark, then another Gospel is used as “the base.” In every case, each account indicates which Gospel or Gospels are beings used.

Dimitrov enlists for the narrative the venerable King James Version of the Bible, with certain updates for contemporary readers (simplifying verbs with “est” and “eth” endings, updating “thee” and “thou” to “you,” modernizing spellings of proper nouns, such as “Messias” to “Messiah,” “Noe” to “Noah”). He divides the life of Christ into thirty-one chapters, each with a number of subsections.

In addition to the Gospel narrative, the book contains several appendices, including one with a listing of Old Testament messianic prophecies and their fulfillment in the Gospels. Interestingly, rather than include the genealogies of Jesus (from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke) in the narrative itself, Dimitrov has set them as an appendix to the life of Christ, preceded by an introductory paragraph.

The book is a work of love and includes a section especially directed “To You Who Do Not Know the Lord,” with a brief presentation of Christ’s saving work—“He died for you. . . . He came to give meaning to your life”—followed by an invitation to “surrender your life to Him” (243).

For future editions of the book, this reviewer suggests abbreviating the names of the four Gospels when given as references within the narrative. Even though they are in small type and raised like verse numbers or footnote/endnote numbers, it can be distracting for readers when the text is broken up with numerous such references. Another suggestion is to give titles to the thirty-one chapters. The subsections are entitled, and it would be helpful to have a title for the entire chapter, such as “The Beginning of Jesus’ Ministry,” and so on.

Dimitrov points out, “This book is in no way meant to be a substitute for the four Gospels, since each Gospel has its own style and context, and is serving the fulfillment of a definite purpose of God” (1). Yet the harmony also serves a “definite purpose.” It is a valuable way in which we can study the one Person, the one life, to which all four Gospels bear witness. *The Four in One Gospel of Jesus* is a helpful tool in learning more about the Gospel, the Good News, of Jesus Christ: “But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name” (John 21:25, 240).