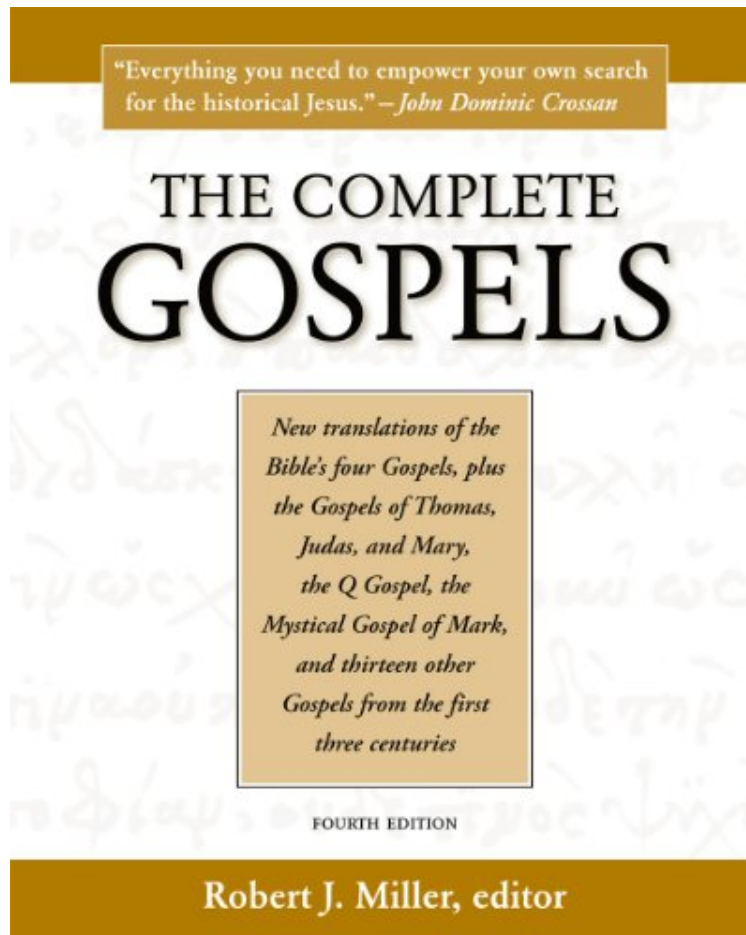


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The Complete Gospels, 4th Edition

Robert J. Miller

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Robert J. Miller : The Complete Gospels, 4th Edition before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Complete Gospels, 4th Edition:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Useful Reference Tool and Fresh Translations in Modern English By Ansen Plopbundle The Complete Gospels is a collection of the four gospels of the New Testament and other (what I would call) protognostic texts, perhaps including books with which we're so unfamiliar with their origin, composition, date etc. that we are unsure how to categorize. The editors of this work, the Jesus Seminar, would not quite define this work in those terms. In their own words they agree this book is "the first publication to include both the canonical gospels and their principal extracanonical counterparts under one cover" (3). While I think this rather begs the question, I will mention this briefly later in my critique. The works themselves met three requirements. First, the books chosen were to have dates from the first and second centuries (however, we don't know the dates of any of the writings. While estimation for some is better than others, some are almost pure guesswork and rely on certain presuppositions about what is considered a 'Jesus tradition' cf. the dating of the Gospel of Thomas). Second, the editors

wanted the selected works to be "more or less independent" of the canonical gospels and also to contain much material not gotten from them. Third, works were selected which "significantly" contributes to the understanding of precanonical Jesus traditions before and after the canonical gospels. Also included are works for which we have no empirical evidence for, including the Signs Gospel and Q. These writings also stem from Jesus Seminar presuppositions - being that rather extensive written material would have had to exist to form the canonical gospels. Of course this leads to the question of the dating of the gospels themselves and we also find that naturalistic presuppositions lie behind the dating of a gospel. Rather blatantly stated, for example, in the writers introduction to Matthew one finds that "Since the Gospel of Matthew refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in the parable of the banquet, . . . it must have been composed after 70 CE" (62). My point isn't to deride the presuppositions of the editors, just to let any reader of my review know the perspective of book's creators. Anyway, there is no empirical evidence for the Signs Gospel or Q, but all of these presuppositions sort of 'go together,' if you will. I am not saying, however, that these presuppositions are wholly unreasonable. I would prefer someone a bit more open minded about the texts, but that's just a personal preference. The translations are lively and readable. In fact, I really enjoyed reading them. No translations are perfect. Often, one would like to have both examples of wooden translations and loose, more modern translations such as this one. Updated translations put into everyday language like the SV is very helpful to read and gives the text a fresh environment within which to engage yourself. The downside is that one often misses idioms, certain minutiae of grammar or tense. However, the SV is also rather accurate in presenting the tense as it is rendered into the text and not as it is often smoothed out in modern translations. This becomes very noticeable, for example, in Mark, where tense shifts are frequent and rough. So, I think most people will in many ways like reading most of the books in this work. Some other reviewers have given examples of translation comparisons, so I won't include any. Just note that it's written in everyday English. I think this is a definite must-have if one wants to familiarize themselves with early Christian and non-Christian writings and how various groups might have perceived Jesus and/or the different 'sayings' recorded, noted and emphasized by various groups. It's new updating offers the freshest insights into translational nuances and now that the Gospel of Judas has been produced and made public, this work also adds that to the other writings. If you're wondering what other works are in this book, I would suggest looking at the previous edition page, where the 'Look Inside' option is offered. As I just noted, I think the only difference might be that this one has the Gospel of Judas (aside from some translation nuances). So, I think this is well worth the money. It should also be noted that on each page of the individual books are a copious amount of notes dedicated to showing parallels in other books, cross references, quotes, allusions, etc. Many pages also note when significant differences in MS traditions occur, including their other referents. I do have a few small critiques to mention. First, as mentioned before - the presuppositions of the editors is the biggest concern for myself. I think even the title of the book is a bit troubling - "The *Complete* Gospels - as if somehow we are lacking authentic Christian witness. This snowballs into the bigger issue of what should be defined as 'Christian' in the ancient world. Should every book and/or MS be labeled Christian which simply uses the 'words' of Jesus? Are those whose views 'won' centuries later to be viewed as happening by sheer luck, as Baur's work might also have us suppose over against these "oppressed" and/or "suppressed" groups? The JS takes a very wide birth of what can be labeled 'Christian.' So, they note in the introduction that the book is intended to "include both the canonical gospels and their principal extracononical counterparts under one cover" (3). Of course, this is putting the cart before the horse, imho. But, I do understand this isn't the purpose of the editors (to address this question). At other times, I think their comments on certain passages are often simplistic. To be noted, there's only so much room on the page, but often it feels like verses are interpreted purposefully against traditional understandings. Is the past 2,000 years of Christian scholarship so pathetic we needed the Jesus Seminar to come along and offer their corrections? This appearance at hubris can also be seen in the name of their version - the *Scholars* Version?! As if other versions aren't scholarly? I see someone looking over someone's head with a pipe in their mouth saying "Mmmmm...Scholars Version." Two quick examples. First, just asserting that the two feedings in the gospels are doublets doesn't do justice to the texts. Second, Mk 12:35-37, where the editors conclude that Mark doesn't agree with the 'tradition' that Jesus was David's son, "since otherwise Jesus' words mean that he is denying his own legitimacy to be considered God's anointed" is a simplistic reading, and misses the bigger, nuanced emphasis of Jesus' question. At times, they pull out incredible nuances in texts in their comments, but at other times, I'm left shaking my head because it seems they can't see the forest for the trees. Finally, their presuppositions often control their translations. On the one hand, they argue Matthew doesn't argue for a virgin birth, and render 'virgin' as 'young woman' even when there are very good reasons to argue for the traditional reading. And yet, later, in the introduction to the Gospel of the Ebionites they assert Matthew's Gospel indeed does argue for a virgin birth: "Irenaeus . . . reports that the Ebionites used only Matthew's gospel, but also that they deny the virgin birth. This means that they must have been using their own gospel and not canonical Matthew, which attests to this belief" (444). Political presuppositions also drive some wordings. What the authors perceive to be 'sexist' language is changed (which is a mistake imho). This choice doesn't allow the reader to really delve into the ancient world as some of their other language choices do (for example, their decision to render money in its ancient terms does this well, cf. 12-13). The term "Jews" as used in John is also substituted for "Judeans," which is noted in John's introduction, to which I am a bit more ambivalent about. All in all, though I have

said many negative things about this book, I still enjoyed reading it and will be more than happy to keep this translation of these works on my shelf. Though I share many disagreements with the beliefs of the Jesus Seminar members, I would still recommend this if you want to read some of the early Christian/non-Christian texts associated with the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. 34 of 34 people found the following review helpful. Worth it as a scholarly translation. By GEORGE E. NEWMANI understand the editor's attempt to put quotes in modern English. Since the object of the work is to get the true message across, I have no issues others have had. In fact, since on some pages, the footnotes are longer than the text; it is clear the authors took great care in deciding the most accurate translation. If the authors are correct, many of Jesus' words are finally translated to their true meaning. Oft quoted translations have new and make more Christian sense. This is a tough study, but reading the introduction alone can give one a sense that the contributors know their stuff. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. People I'm telling you, when Jesus sounds like a regular guy you pay more attention. By Anders Benson Perhaps I'm not being fair for giving this book 4 instead of 5 stars, because the info that's missing is lost to humanity rather than simply not included in this book. Despite my frustration, there are several things I enjoy about the book: -It humanizes Jesus and shows how language was used to make him more divine. A good example is the use of "People, I'm telling you..." rather than "Truly, truly I say to you..." -Key linguistic/translation debates are presented in simple language addressing such issues as if Mary was a virgin or a maiden. -The authors of the gospels are described as unique individuals with separate personalities and both unifying and differing theologies. In traditional translations they often come across sounding like stupid morons (who need some pious guy to say "truly, truly" to them). In my own spiritual journey, I feel a benefit to have a little more Thomas and a little less Paul to inform my theology, so as a curious layman, this has been a good book for me.

The Complete Gospels is the first publication ever to collect the canonical gospels and their extracanonical counterpoints under one cover. The selected extracanonical gospels date from the first and second centuries, are independent of the canonical gospels, and significantly contribute to our understanding of the developments in the Jesus tradition leading up to and surrounding the New Testament gospels. Two additional texts, the Gospel of Judas and the Gospel of the Savior, and a new text of Q are found in this fourth edition. Each gospel begins with an introduction that sets the text in its ancient and historical contexts and discusses the overall structure and central themes. Cross references point out the numerous parallel passages, intratextual indicators, and thematic parallels so the reader can see how the individual passages of a gospel fit into the rich tapestry of Jewish and early Christian texts. Notes explain important translation issues, supply necessary background information, offer guidance to difficult passages, and honestly indicate problems in the text or in our understanding of them. This volume is the premier publication of the Scholars Version translation of the gospels a fresh translation from the original languages into living American English that is entirely free of ecclesiastical control. The Scholars Version intentionally drops the pretense that academics have all the answers. It strives to avoid both talking down, and over the heads of readers. The goal is to make these fascinating texts intelligible and inviting to all who want to study them.

Before it released its provocative *The Five Gospels* through a commercial publisher (Macmillan) last year, The Jesus Seminar in 1992 published through its own house, Polebridge Press, *The Complete Gospels*, a more encompassing, collaborative effort providing fresh translations of the canonical Gospels, the non-canonical Gospels and the Sayings sources. This new revised and commercially published edition of *The Complete Gospels* moves this prior effort out of the academy and into the hands of a general readership interested in the ancient texts that have motivated the recent quests of scholars like Meier (*A Marginal Jew*), Crossan (*The Historical Jesus*) and Sanders (*The Historical Figure of Jesus*). In addition to the canonical Gospels, this work contains translations of Sayings Gospels like Q, the Gospel of Mary, the infancy Gospels of Thomas and James, fragmentary Gospels like the Egerton and the Secret Gospel of Mark. Here, accompanying the lively translations of each text, are incisive introductions and notes that provide glimpses of the social, historical and literary world occupied by Jesus and the early Christian writers. The dependence of one text upon another is demonstrated through the numerous cross-references. An in-depth glossary and brief essays elaborating key issues of scholarship, e.g., synoptic puzzles, etc., round out the collection. Combining an engaging commentary, lucid and energetic translation and accessible scholarship, this *Complete Gospels* equips any interested reader to join Meier, Crossan and Sanders in their quest for the historical Jesus. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate --Publisher's Weekly