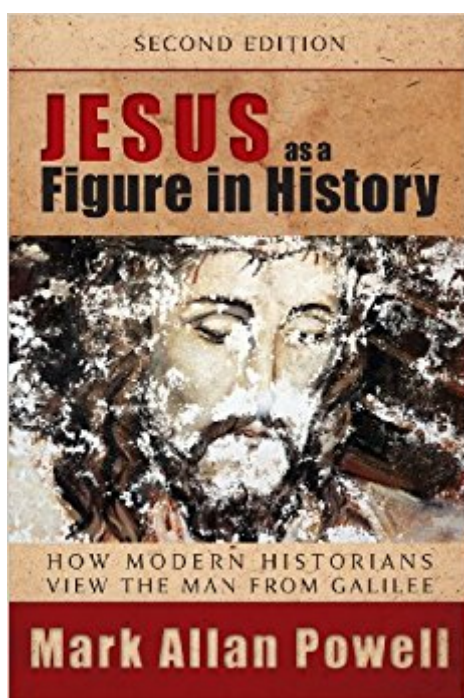


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Jesus As A Figure In History, Second Edition: How Modern Historians View The Man From Galilee



Synopsis

This thoroughly revised edition of the best-selling textbook provides an in-depth survey of current historical Jesus studies. Beginning with a brief discussion of early Jesus-quest research and methodologies, Mark Allan Powell develops insightful overviews of some of the most influential participants in the field today, including Marcus Borg, Jon Dominic Crossan, John Meier, E. P. Sanders, and N. T. Wright. Powell has expanded his original work with completely new material to reflect the latest scholarship.

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Customer Reviews

Mark Allan Powell is Robert and Phyllis Leatherman Professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. He is the Chair of the Historical Jesus section of the Society of Biblical Literature and the author of many books on the New Testament.

I just don't know why it was published with such a small font. The book is interesting but the font makes reading a challenge.

The author is thorough and fair in his handling of the various writings by scholars about the historical Jesus. The book makes for a stimulating read. However, I could only read it in small doses because of the very small print in which it is written.

If you want to read one book on the historical Jesus written in the last five years, buy this one. The writer, a former journalist, summarizes and explains the historical issues and the view of half a dozen major historians and comments on the work of others. It is fair, balanced and interesting.

This book brings back the balance between literalism and contextual reading of the Bible. Author succeeded in maintaining an objective assessment. A must read for all Bible scholars.

In *Jesus as a Figure in History*, Mark Allan Powell provides a very accessible introduction to the field of historical Jesus research from the perspective of a journalist researching an academic movement. Though Powell is a confessing evangelical Christian and has chaired the Historical Jesus Section of the Society of Biblical Literature and was a founding editor of the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, he aimed to be descriptive in this book rather than argumentative, writing in an unbiased way with an ideologically neutral tone. Chapter 1 sets the stage for the rest of the book (which focuses on the scholarship of the past three decades) by providing a brief survey of historical Jesus studies that demonstrates how we got to where we are. Key figures and their contributions to the discipline are introduced, and the various quests for the historical Jesus are defined and explained. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the data and sources historians use to study Jesus (archeology, Roman literature, Jewish literature, New Testament epistles, Synoptic Gospels, Gospel of John, noncanonical gospels, *agrapha*) as well as a survey of nine key criteria of authenticity that are applied to these sources in historical Jesus research. Though different scholars have different approaches, the sources and methods outlined in this chapter are basic and generally employed by all. Chapter 3 examines a few snapshots of certain aspects of who Jesus was that have been suggested by modern scholars: Jesus the social prophet (Richard Horsley), Jesus the charismatic Jew (Geza Vermes), Jesus the magician (Morton Smith), Jesus the sage (Ben Witherington III), Jesus the Cynic philosopher (F. Gerald Downing), Jesus the itinerant radical (Gerd Theissen), Jesus the millenarian prophet (Dale Allison), Jesus the *mamzer* rabbi (Bruce Chilton), and Jesus the purported Messiah (Paula Fredriksen). Chapters 4-9 provide a more in-depth treatment of the work of the "big six" historical Jesus scholars: Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, E.P. Sanders, John Meier, and N.T. Wright. In contrast to the snapshots of chapter three, these scholars have all more or less tried to produce comprehensive portraits of Jesus. Each of these six chapters follows a similar structure: overview of the scholar, his method for studying Jesus, resulting portrait of Jesus, and criticisms from the guild. The concluding chapter provides a summary of key issues in which there continues to

be disagreement. Powell addresses the disagreements in method (sources, criteria, approach) as well as disagreements over Jesus's relationship to Judaism, eschatology, politics, and the supernatural. Whereas Schweitzer sounded a death knell for historical Jesus studies a century ago, today the field is alive and well. The appendices look at the work of scholars who claim Jesus never existed, the relationship between historical Jesus studies and Christian apologetics, and scholars who try to develop a psychological profile for Jesus. I found appendix two particularly interesting as a Christian and as someone who was at one time very engaged in apologetics. Powell takes a look at how Christian scholars engage in this discipline and the challenges therein, focusing unsurprisingly on Darrell Bock and Craig Keener. He notes the unfortunate yet unsurprising marginalization of Christian scholars in this field, and also points out some reasons why Christian apologetics has an uneasy relationship with historical Jesus studies. *Jesus as a Figure in History* is a phenomenal introduction to historical Jesus research. This kind of descriptive introduction to the field is uncommon; most of the literature is that of a particular scholar sketching his particular portrait of Jesus or writing from his particular perspective. Powell truly does write in an unbiased way. When he presents criticism of a scholar's work from the guild, he also points out strengths and contributions. This book is also very accessible and doesn't require any prior knowledge in the field. Powell explains everything very clearly. This is definitely a must-read for anyone with an interest in historical Jesus research that is seeking an overview of the field and the contemporary issues. And though Powell points out an uneasy relationship between historical Jesus research and apologetics, I actually feel that any Christian with a passion for apologetics and evangelism should be acquainted with the field of historical Jesus research. Some non-Christians are very knowledgeable about the work of scholars like Crossan and Ehrman, and it would be a challenge to engage in dialogue without some familiarity with this kind of critical scholarship. A free electronic copy was provided by the publisher in exchange for an unbiased review.

Mark Allan Powell is Robert and Phyllis Leatherman Professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio. Powell has a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary and is the Chair of the Historical Jesus division of the Society of Biblical Literature. Powell is the author of numerous books related to New Testament and Historical Jesus studies, including *Introduction to the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2008) and the well-received survey, and focus of the present review, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*, second edition (WJK Books, 2013). *Jesus as a Figure in History* has been long praised for its balanced and unbiased approach to the study of the Historical Jesus. Now thoroughly revised and expanded, the

second edition of this best-selling textbook brings the conversation up-to-date with the current trends within Historical Jesus scholarship. The book opens with a brief exploration of the conversation up to the present and provides strategic focus on some of the key players, contributions, criteria, and sources that have largely defined the discipline. For those unfamiliar with the issues and individuals surrounding the quest for the Historical Jesus, Powell has provided an excellent entry point into the conversation, and function as a type of prerequisite for the remaining chapters. The substance of the book is spent unpacking (1) the method and approach used, (2) summary of the results, and (3) criticisms therein of major players in Historical Jesus studies. These players include Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, E.P. Sanders, John Meier, and N.T. Wright. However, before these in-depth treatments, Powell provides what he calls "snapshots" of some of the more peripheral players and the images of Jesus that have arose therein, including, Jesus the social prophet (Richard Horsley), Jesus the charismatic Jew (Geza Vermes), Jesus the magician (Morton Smith), Jesus the sage (Ben Witherington III), Jesus the Cynic philosopher (F. Gerald Downing), Jesus the itinerant radical (Gerd Theissen), Jesus the millenarian prophet (Dale Allison), Jesus the mamzer rabbi (Bruce Chilton), and Jesus the purported Messiah (Paula Fredriksen). The book concludes with summary and cross-referencing of key issues that remain within the scholarly conversation, both agreements and disagreements concerning method and context. Finally, Powell has included additional appendix material not found in the first edition, including, Did Jesus Exist?, Historical Jesus Studies and Christian Apologetics, and Psychological Studies of the Historical Jesus. Each of the appendixes are a welcomed addition to Powell's overall treatment, especially the attention given to the marginalization of Christian apologists within the conversation, namely Darrel Bock and Craig Keener. Jesus as a Figure in History is skilled in its investigation and presentation of the Historical Jesus material, and it remains surprisingly unbiased throughout. The reader will find that the content and organization of the volume is well oriented and intentionally curated for all background types and interest levels. In other words, Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee by Mark Allan Powell has provided nearly everything the interested reader would need to enter into or keep current on the developments of the discipline both past and present, and for this reason it comes highly recommended! I received a review copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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