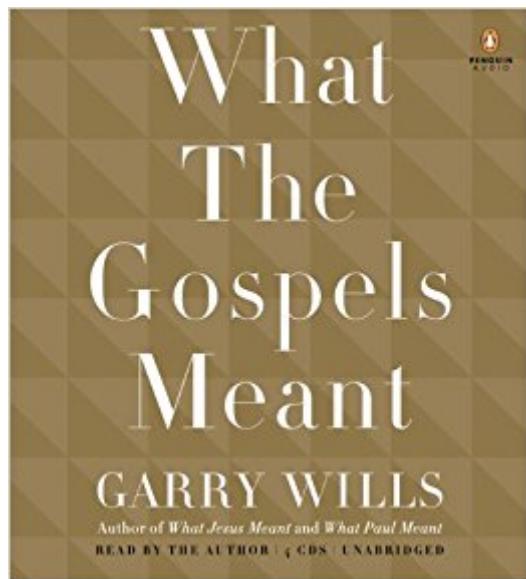


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# What The Gospels Meant



## **Synopsis**

New York Times-bestselling author and Pulitzer Prize winner Garry Wills interprets the four Gospels.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Wills's follow-up to his bestselling works, *What Jesus Meant* and *What Paul Meant*, sheds new light on the four books of the Bible best known to most Christians. In taking the gospels apart, Wills helps readers see the oft-read stories from the life of Christ in a new way. As a former teacher of ancient and New Testament Greek, he provides his own translations of the texts, accompanied by incisive analysis that incorporates the work of other scholars. Although some Christians remain uncomfortable with the use of biblical scholarship to expand upon Christianity's scriptures, Wills is obviously convinced of its value and holds that it need not weaken one's faith. In his epilogue, for instance, he notes how scholar Raymond Brown, whom he quotes extensively, remained a devout believer even as he plumbed the depths of biblical scholarship. Wills explains that the gospels are not historically true as that term would be understood today, adding that they were composed several decades after Christ's resurrection and are the culmination of an oral preaching process. Rather than historical accounts, he considers them to be a form of prayer: a meditation on the meaning of Jesus in the light of Sacred History as recorded in the Sacred Writings. Readers willing to have their impressions about these texts challenged by an erudite scholar will find this to be fascinating and worthwhile reading. (Feb. 18) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Praise for What the Gospels Meant: "Full of riches . . . Wills brings to bear the skills that have justly brought him renown as America's greatest public intellectual: encyclopedic erudition, concise prose and a polyglot's gift for ancient languages. . . . This introduces . . . biblical scholarship as a whole to a wide audience of readers hungry for a sophisticated account of those eternally curious texts."

•Chicago Tribune "What readers will find here is an engaging look at the Gospels, informed by the best biblical scholarship, as well as by Wills' own faith. . . . This eminently readable volume . . . underscores the attributes of each narrative to highlight truths more crucial than whether there were four discrete Evangelists."

•The New York Times Book Review "Wills' scholarship . . . is impeccable, placing the gospels within their original cultural and religious context . . . A book that offers profound spiritual and historical insight in an accessible and intriguing format."

•BookPage "Poetic, penetrating, and moving. General readers and scholars alike will profit from Mr. Wills' basic contention, that reason and faith are not antinomies."

•The New York Sun "An engrossingly concise sequel to his Paul book. Wills . . . shows that [the Gospels are] theological statements, applying Jesus to the different situations confronting each writer's community."

•The Boston Globe "Readers willing to have their impressions about these texts challenged by an erudite scholar will find this to be fascinating and worthwhile reading."

•Publishers Weekly "A remarkable achievement . . . a learned yet eminently readable and provocative exploration of the four small books that reveal most of what's known about the life and death of Jesus."

•Los Angeles Times --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

My husband and I have been reading Garry Willis' "What..." series. Myself, being raised Roman Catholic, appreciate his frankness in the spiritual foibles of the "Roman Catholic" history and off target practices over the years. My continuing feeling of paralyzingly guilt over the years was finally overcome by extensive reading of scripture, extensive personal confession on a snowy 'patio' night and extensive forgiveness from a God who wants a relationship with us. I have one comment upon reading this book and Mr. Willis' insights into the Beatitudes, pg 77-85. The 5th beatitude has translations, such as, merciful, care of others and Mr. Willis uses "pity" on others. I feel the word, pity, is standoffish. It denotes looking down on others from our self satisfied lofty position. Many people in our world pity others, feel sorry for them and then go on their merry way. I believe that

empathetic is a better word by putting yourself in their place, insightful understanding of how did they get there, and how do they feel--good or bad about their situation. Then an empathetic person digs in with understanding, prayer, comfort, help or assistance with the subtraction of enabling. Most certainly our Lord Jesus did all of this, when He placed himself in harms' way, was tortured, belittled, suffered, died and was buried for us. Our plight was His empathy. Thank you, Lord Jesus, we love You!

I got the audiobook, narrated by the author. Garry Wills is a top scholar, having also mastered ancient Greek. He goes step by step through the Gospels and explains them historically and linguistically. This is the type of book that can be listened to multiple times, and I'll definitely keep it. The scholarly approach to understanding the Gospels is just incredible. I really appreciated Wills' attention to detail and tone. At the risk of sounding absurd, I felt that I truly got my money's worth.

I found myself pondering Jesus's messages and meaning while doing mundane tasks and as I fell asleep and woke up. The book helped me to be among the disciples as they pondered and meditated on Jesus's mission. The author uses great thinkers as references. His own translations of key passages from the Greek gave me fresh perspective on what I know in the King James verses. I underlined much and will return again in my study to this book.

I read *What Jesus Meant* and was captivated by Gary Wills insight and wonderful writing. I especially like his translations of the Greek text as they were, not the "prettied up" version other translators have put forth. That said, I had a much harder time with this book than WJM in that I had difficulty understanding exactly what Wills was trying to get across. I don't know if it's all the antihistamines I've been taking, but I hung in there and about halfway through the book, I started to absorb more. I plan on reading the Gospels again one at a time while referencing the chapters in this book that pertain to each to get more insight. Wills is such a voice of reason in contrast with the rigid world of fundamentalist evangelical Christian thinking I was raised with. Another book to read is Catholic theologian Adolph Holl's *"Jesus in Bad Company."* Small but intense book that is definitely worth a read.

Current theology is explained in relation to historical thought as well as the culture of the Jewish people at the time of Christ. While he relies heavily on Fr. Raymond Brown, Mr. Wills compresses volumes of Brown's scholarship into 209 very readable pages. He shows the similarities of the four

gospels while also detailing their uniqueness. This book would be a good discussion group choice, either taken as a whole or gospel by gospel. If you are interested in trying to understand what the gospels are all about, I recommend this book. (It is shorter and not as detailed as Pope Benedict XVI's "Jesus of Nazareth" which was also surprisingly readable!)

This was an excellent book for bible study I attended last year, the facilitator was Henry Fliegel, conversant in several ancient languages, who helped explain much of the meaning of the original NT Greek that we would have overlooked. A link to his recorded lectures is at <http://bit.ly/HF-studies> and they are very helpful!

If, like me, you do not want an approach that tacitly assumes that the styles of writing, the apparent discrepancies, additions, redactions, figures and imaginative tropes of the gospels mean that the central figure in them is somehow diminished, you will appreciate Wills's approach. He avoids the anachronism of deducing too much from features of the way the evangelists wrote, as you might legitimately do if the writings were modern. In this way he avoids diminishing the central figure in them, and understands the writers attitudes and purposes.

I'm the sort of Christian who casts a skeptical eye on just about every doctrine there is. I chose this book -- one for myself, one as a gift -- because I wanted to learn more about the "story behind the story" of the various episodes recounted in various ways by the four principal Gospel authors. Wills explains the social and historical conditions in which each of the Gospel-writers operated, and how their writings spoke to their particular time and audience. I found it very helpful in understanding why the Gospels read as they do, and have used it as a jumping-off point for further learning.

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