

David Flusser with **R. Steven Notley**, with Introduction by **James H. Charlesworth**, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*, 2007 Pp. 216. Price \$15.81. ISBN 978-0802825872

This new edition of David Flusser's classic study of the historical Jesus was made to be published in English through the Magness Press. It proved to be a great success for Magness Press, as it was one of their top-selling books. According to the Foreword, Steven Notley discovered quickly that the passage written 30 years ago would need to be rewritten in order to note new discoveries and thoughts, as well as recent additions to the New Testament. In David Flusser's and R. Steven Notley's *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*, there are twelve chapters, a chronological table, bibliography, as well as an index of subjects and index of scripture references. James H. Charlesworth is responsible for the introduction.

In the first chapter, we are informed of how the only important Christian sources concerning Jesus are the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. (pg. 1) These tell us the most about the life and occurrences of Jesus. Jesus is the only Jew after the Old Testament times that we know the most about. The first three gospels also represent Jesus speaking about the Savior in the third person. The chapter ends with talking about the "Synoptic Problem" and how this book is not able to explain it in depth. (pg. 3)

Chapter 2 explains the ancestry of Jesus and how he came to be. "Jesus" was a common Jewish name as found in ancient Jewish literature. Jesus had four brothers: James, Joses, Judah, and Simon. His mother and father were Joseph and Mary and in ancient times it was common for a Jew to be named after their father, as seen by Joses. (pg. 7) Jesus was most likely born in Nazareth and resided there for about thirty years until he was baptized by John. It is unclear how many sisters Jesus had or where exactly he ministered. It is clear that Jesus' father died before his baptism. The chapter ends with explaining what happened to Jesus' family after his death. It is said that his mother, Mary, and his brethren joined the apostles in Jerusalem. His brother James became a believer when he witnessed a resurrection and then he was murdered for his beliefs. His other brothers eventually began to have faith as well. (pg 16)

Chapter 3 helps us to understand baptism and the influence of John the Baptist. John practiced preaching and the forgiveness of sins. He followed the prophecy of Isaiah, which for the Essenes were writings discovered that represented the departing of sin and the preparation for the way of the Lord. (pg. 18) Jesus came to John to get baptized and John became known as the forerunner of Jesus. (pg. 23) John was supported by his disciples and stayed firm in his beliefs even until his execution by Herod Antipas. The chapter concludes by saying that John was Elijah come again. It was said in the Old Testament that Elijah was never dead but was in heaven. Others had believed John rose from the dead and thought he was represented through Jesus. (pg. 32)

In the fourth chapter, we are made aware of the concept of law and how if Christianity would have spread to the eastern Asiatic regions first, then it would have been made into a certain practice based on Jewish law so that it would become an actual religion in that region.

(pg. 34) Jesus was not the best at following all of the laws and could have a temper at times, like in our previous reading where Jesus became angered and flipped the tables of the sellers. Jesus learned to use the criticism of others for his teachings. (pg. 39) I think many of us can learn how to use the criticism of others as a way of growth. The chapter continues by mentioning the Pharisees and the Sadducees. To end, we learn that Jesus did not heal non-Jews, except for in two cases. (pg. 52) Jesus continued to say, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (pg. 53).

Chapter 5 represents the symbol of love and the concept that love does conquer all. God’s love was limitless and extended to all. God shared the message that we must love both righteous and wicked. By doing this. We imitate God himself. (pg. 57) By being mirror-images of God, we are being our best selves. Jesus taught us to love our neighbor for both his good and his evil characteristics. (pg. 60) The chapter ends with Jesus preaching about adultery and saying that it is better to pluck out your eyes than to lose your whole body in hell.

Chapter 6 changes directions by talking about ethics. Jesus explains how possessions are an obstacle to virtue. (pg 69) This means that all the riches in the world will not get you on to the path of God or into heaven. Materialistic things should not be praised. One main concept learned is “evil can be overcome with good” and “that an enemy can be overcome by goodness, even if one does not love him”(pg. 71). Simply, if you give more than you receive in terms of anything in life, you will be better off. The chapter ends by discussing the paradox of Jesus.

Chapter 7 discusses the kingdom of heaven and how the Jews disputed with the Romans. The main reason for their dispute was because of how much power the Romans had. Despite this, Jesus was still not in favor of revolt because of his moral beliefs. (pg. 76) We learn about the Zealots and their demand for the sole rule of God. In regard to Jesus and the rabbis, they both had belief in God and the future but they had a difference in perspectives. (pg. 80) Jesus believed there are those already in the kingdom of heaven and the rabbis believed the kingdom was an unchanging reality. For Jewish people, it has always been a belief that the kingship of God is both present and future and has existed since the creation of the world. (pg. 89) This chapter ends with explaining the Bipartite System, Jesus, and the Tripartite System. One thing that all three include is the Last Judgement.

In Chapter 8, we learn how Jesus is the son of God and how he is known in the Gospels as a miracle-worker. The chapter mainly discusses the rabbinic literature of Abba Hilкия and Hanina ben Dosa. Hanina was addressed as “My son.” (pg. 97) Hanan is the only ancient pious man that children were able to access easier than the rabbis. It is unknown if the positives of Jesus and his disciples reflected the attitudes of the entire group, but I truly hope they were the same. (pg. 100) One part of this chapter I could not really understand was on page 102 and stated, “Through me Thou has illuminated the face of many,/ and hast shown Thy infinite power./ For Thou has given me knowledge...” I did not understand the correlation that was being said in this passage. The chapter ends by explaining how Jesus’ sonship ends into death that prophets prior to him had suffered. (pg. 105)

Chapter 9 discusses how Jesus was thought of as a prophet and one of the central doctrines of the Jewish Christian sect of the Ebionites. (pg. 108) Jesus mentions the handing over of the “son of man” twice. The first is stated in Luke 9:44 which says Jesus will be delivered into the hands of men and the second is stated in Luke 22:21-22, which says that man shall hand him over. (108) The short chapter ends by discussing how there is a belief that the “connection between Jesus’ prophetic task, his sacrifice, and the final tragedy originated in Jesus’s own intuition” (pg. 116).

In Chapter 10 we learn how Herod Antipas believed Jesus was Paul reincarnated and wanted him dead. Jesus refused to die unless he was in Jerusalem. He also wished to celebrate Passover. He made it to Jerusalem and started to teach, which made the priests sought to destroy him afraid. (pg. 121) During Jesus’ final steps he was torn down by the future tragedy of Jerusalem. All he wanted were the best for his people. The chapter ends by discussing the Last Supper. After the meal, Jesus and his disciples left to the Mount of Olives where he made his disciples wait and watch him pray.

Chapter 11 discusses Jesus’s death and what led up to it. It is not clear on some details so it is slightly confusing. A piece of evidence that proved that it was not Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to death was that he was not buried in either of the graves dedicated to the order of the supreme council. (pg. 139) The governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate was an evil man who was said to have a connection with Jesus’ crucifixion. He disliked Jews and Judaism. (pg. 150) He was a brutal man but was also very weak. Jesus was taken into custody but was handed over to Pilate without a verdict. Soldiers degraded Jesus and took him to be crucified. Three men were crucified together, consisting of two brigands on each side of Jesus. Having Jesus in the middle position was their cruel way of celebrating the “King of Jews”. (pg. 158)

In the final chapter, we get a summary of Jesus’ accomplishments and legacy and the movement of Christianity. The two revolutionary trends that brought a change in the structure of the Christian faith are the cognitive dissonance from the crucifixion and the second was when Paul continued to preach and teach about the new faith. (pg 163)

I really enjoyed taking the time to read and dissect this book. I definitely learned many new things and I feel like I can understand God a bit more, which is significant for me. Much of this was new to me and I can’t say I understood it all, but I really tried. I can see David Flusser had so much to share and I am grateful that Professor Notley was able to rewrite/finish this for him. In my opinion, this would be a good read for someone like me who is trying to learn more about the Gospels. Overall, the book is simply put but not lacking complexity. I would definitely read it again and be interested in reading similar pieces.

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