

David Flusser with **R. Steven Notley** and Introduction by **James H. Charlesworth**,
The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius, 2007 ISBN 978-0-8028-2587

The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius was initially inspired by David Flusser's 1968 edition of his book entitled *Jesus*. In the forward of *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*, R. Steven Notley, a Professor of biblical studies at Nyack College, an Author and one of Flusser's old student and colleague informs the reader that he thought the book would be a republication of Flusser's book *Jesus* but he quickly realized the book would not be a republication it would require a total deconstruction of *Jesus* as tones of information regarding the life of Jesus had come to light since the publication of *Jesus*. Likewise, Flusser's own viewpoints on had also grown. The purpose of recreation but very new text is to give the reader a lesson on the "biographical portrait of Jesus in the context of Jewish faith and life in his day. *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* covers the time period of 330 B.C. through A.D. 70, has twenty-eight illustrations, is David Flusser's last publication which was published in 2007 after his death. Flusser's knowledge of Jewish authorities on the New Testament and early Christianity spans nearly six decades and this text illustrates the life of Jesus in the context of Judaism and Christianity.

The Chapter of 1 of, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* entitled "The Sources", enlightens the reader of the sources used to tell the life of Jesus. Flusser, states the only necessary Christian sources concerning Jesus' life are four Gospels which can be found in the New Testament. Those four Gospels are entitled Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three Gospels are considering synoptic because they include many of the same stories often told in similar order. The first three Gospels can be distinguished from the fourth Gospel John, whose text is distinct because it's text illustrates theological perspective the historical Jesus and his teachings. Nonetheless, Flusser declares the Gospel of Luke and Matthew demonstrate the most genuine depiction of Jesus. Chapter 2, entitled "Ancestry", informs the reader of Jesus' genealogical history- the history and context behind his name, where he was born, who his parents were, from the lineage he came from and even the lineage where many believed he did not come from. Flusser educates the reader that the name Jesus is the Greek translation for the name Joshua. He name is actually pronounced "Yeshua" (pg 6). The irony that is mentioned in this chapter is that Joshua in the bible is Moses replacement and he helped the Jewish people reach the Holy land. Both Matthew and Luke give the account of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and as raised in Nazareth. He was born to Joseph and Mary and was considered to be Jesus Christ which means "Jesus the Messiah". Back in that time, Jewish teaching strongly believed that the Messiah was from the lineage of the infamous King David. The text suggest that in those time it was believed that Jesus' father Joseph belong to King David's lineage. Flusser warns against this belief as he strongly informs the reader that one cannot there is no historical evidence that traces Jesus back to King David (pg 8). The chapter goes on to inform the reader of Jesus' baptism and crucifixion- it is noted that it is a short time between the two events. We learn of Jesus' educational background. He was scholar and wise man; he knew both Holy Scripture and oral tradition.

Chapter 3, entitled “*Baptism*”, explores John the Baptist, the significance of being baptized. John’s message was God’s Judgment on the world was imminent and that in order to prepare for Judgment day the Jewish people must repent for their sins, be baptized and bear the appropriate fruit from their repentance. The purpose of baptism was to cleanse the body both physically and spiritually and to be born again- to be made new. John went into the wilderness preaching about Baptism and the Gospel. He preached the Baptism for the repentance for forgiveness of sins- “By the spirit of holiness... a man is cleansed from all sins.” (pg 21). After confessing their sins, one only needed to wait on the Holy Spirit to rid their body of sin. This bears significance to Jesus because in today’s society one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit from Jesus Christ. The chapter further explores John’s arrest and how Jesus essentially picked up where John left off and began preaching the Gospel in Galilee. John was eventually executed for preaching the Gospel. Some believed that after John the Baptist died he was resurrected and came back as Jesus.

Chapter 4, entitled “*Law*”, explores Paul mission, the creation of Christianity being a framework based upon the concept of freedom and law. It also explores the tension of Jewish law- the law given by Moses and Christianity. We also get a perspective of how Jesus treated the laws and that sometimes his practices and teachings were not in total alignment with the law. Because Jesus was preaching and teaching in the time of Judaism and early Christianity Flusser, illustrates the conflicts held between the two religions which believed some of the same principles but not all. The irony of it all is Jesus was Jewish but sometimes even he did not believe in some of the traditions and law of Judaism or exercise the faith. Jesus was a teacher by nature and often found clever ways to teaching his followers and his opposition. Chapter 5, entitled “*Love*”, explores God’s compassion and love for the world and his people. Flusser states that Judaism was ethical and bears many principles which deemed justice as indispensable. Meaning that you goodness or badness was tied directly to how well the Jewish people adhered to the law- that their reward from God or punishment from God was tied to their righteousness. (pg 56). However, Jesus introduced this concept of love, compassion and mercy to the world that had not been seen before. Jesus provided a bit of flexibility within the his teaching of Christianity. Although, God is a just and righteous God he exudes compassion and love for his people. He believed in forgiveness- one was able to redeem themselves of bad actions or going against the law, it did not automatically condemn a person to hell. Flusser, concludes that one cannot think of Jesus and not see his expression of love for his people and Jesus greatest commandant was to love thy neighbor as yourself.

Chapter 6, entitled “*Ethics*”, explores the moral principles that govern a person’s behavior and conduct. Jesus is often seen challenging different peoples belief in this chapter. Flusser depicts Jesus as being told to separate himself from sinners and all people who were not like him. The irony is that Jesus was both Jewish and Christian and his identity was complex. Jesus believed that he was sent to rescue the souls of he lost sheep, thus it would seem impossible for him to complete his life’s purpose and spread the Gospel if he separate himself from those who were not like him. In fact, he had to do the exact opposite. Jesus was ethical and did not subscribe to the law of “an eye for an eye” he believed that sometimes man was called to restrain himself and turn the other cheek. The text gives an important expression of God ethical nature, “the good man has

not an eye that cannot see; for he shows mercy to all men, sinners though they may be, and though they plot his ruin. This man, by doing good, overcomes evil, since he is protected by the good..." (pg 72). Chapter 7, entitled "*The Kingdom of Heaven*", explores the actions necessary of man in order to enter into heaven. In order to make it into heaven one must participate in righteous, must walk and talk the principles of God, must live right according to Gods word. One cannot expect to engaged in unlawful behavior and expect to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Flusser, informs the reader the Jesus is the first person to bring up the realm of the Kingdom of heaven and that is was not a futurist place. But in fact the Kingdom of heaven is live and well at the that time period and whether a person entered into the Kingdom of Heaven was based on their deeds while on earth. Jesus even convinced John that the Kingdom of Heaven was real. The chapter ends with a quote that I thought summed up and embodied a person gets into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus says in Matthew 12:30, " he who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters". (pg 96). In other words, if you do not follow the teaching and principles of Jesus and you don't acknowledge him on earth then you are not a believer. Therefore, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Chapter 8, entitled "*Son*", illustrates how Jesus was the son of God not literally but in his willingness to obey the father and parallels Jesus to a Hanan which means son. The chapter starts off Flusser informing the reader that Jesus was a miracle-worker according to the Gospel. It goes on to say that the "miracle-worker is closer to God than other men". To me that reminded me of a relationship between a father and son. Flusser, goes on to explore the miracles Jesus performed- the healing of the sick and how he often received confirmation that he was suppose to keep his healing powers secret. After he would heal a person, Jesus would advised them not make mention of his deeds but let their healing be the physically manifestation of what Jesus- the father can do. The chapter talks about Jesus' sonship with God which was created when Jesus was baptized. (pg 101). Jesus recognized his heavenly father God and his earthly father. Although Jesus knew that the he was created to save the world, he did not necessarily know that his life was a living sacrifice for his people. He knew that even though he was the son of God, that he would still face evil and could and would be persecuted for his teachings. Flusser, concludes the chapter with Jesus forethought before he arrived in Jerusalem, that Jesus knew his life would come to an unfortunate end. Jesus' death transitioned him into being a spiritual father and now he has earthly sons and daughter.

Chapter 9, entitled "*The Son of Man*", defines the son of man as having "superhuman, heavenly sublimity. He is the cosmic judge at the end of time. Sitting upon the throne of God, judging the entire human race with the aid of heavenly host, he will consign the just to blessedness and the wicked to the pit of hell". (pg 112). Flusser, definition of the son of man is equivalent to the Messiah and it is believed by Christians that Jesus is the Messiah. Thus, we are introduced to Jesus being the son of man. The chapter ends with Flusser informing the reader that the New Testament links Jesus' demise with Messiahship but suggest that Jesus connected his death to sonship to God and being the son of man. It seems even God believed Jesus was his son as he stated, " he gave his only begotten son" which was Jesus. Chapter 10, entitled "*Jerusalem*", explores Jesus' life right before his untimely death. Jesus loved Jerusalem with all his heart. It was his desire

to see the people of Jerusalem flourish but they disrespected God, they didn't listen, they were a culture of full of sin. As Jesus entered into Jerusalem he wanted the people to repent for their sins and wanted them to make a mends with God and be faithful to Gods word so that they didn't perish and so their city would not destroyed. But the people in Jerusalem failed to take heed to Jesus' teaching as such, the city would be destroyed and the Temple of Jerusalem was eventually destroyed. Jesus warned the people that their enemies would encamp them and destroy them. He taught the people who were willing to listen that when they saw the enemies coming that Jerusalem's time was limited. This chapter also explores Jesus being in his final hours, he knew his death was near and he warned his disciples that someone close would betray him. Jesus is arrested and this is when Judas kissed him and then realized the one who had betrayed him.

Chapter 11, entitled "*Death*", speaks for itself. This chapter explores Jesus' death and who may have potentially be responsible for it according the New Testament. After Jesus is arrested according to Luke's gospel Jesus is taken to the Sanhedrin to be tried for his alleged crimes. The authors infer by historical evidence that Jesus was not killed by the Sanhedrin because he was not buried in the graves reserved for the executed by the order of the supreme council. (pg 139). Instead, Jesus was wrapped up in linen and was placed in tomb. This suggest that Gospels as written is somehow not accurate because there is the position that two people from Jerusalem –councilors performed the final act of charity for Jesus and that contradicts the conclusion given by the Sanhedrin who stated that Jesus had been delivered up to the Romans. (pg 141). Jesus was tried for his crime's, he was brought to the Temple so a final verdict could be given. They thought he was falsely spreading rumors of being the Messiah and that the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. His judge and jury didn't believe Jesus. They thought he was a false prophet because they believed that the Messiah was the King of the Jews. His accusers required him to prove he was the Messiah and although he tried to they did not believe him. He told them, "from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God- Luke 22:69. (pg 144). However, his accusers saw this kind of talk as blasphemy. The Jews were ultimately responsible for Jesus' death by the government. Jesus was placed on a cross and then crucified by his very own people who did not believe who he was- the Messiah. The chapter ends with Jesus crying out while being crucified on the cross.

Chapter 12, entitled "*Epilouge*", finishes with the authors not examining Jesus death on the cross but the broader representation of who Jesus is in today's world. Moreover, how his life and death are significant to Christianity and the Christian Faith. His life, his death and his resurrection. Additionally, it explores how Jesus saw himself and what his purpose was in spreading the gospel to the people. Jesus knew that no matter what his followers or his opposition thought about his place in the world that he was the Messiah and he was sent to save the world. The quotation sums his beliefs up perfectly- " the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone" - Psalm 118:22. (pg 162). The authors also referenced Jesus' Jewishness and doesn't give a clear answer about it, other than to say the history and studies about it are sometimes distorted and that the purpose of the book as to give a scholarly account of Jesus' life. Hence, the reason only the four Gospels that account for the living Jesus was used to create the book.

This book can be compared to Flusser's original book entitled *Jesus*, which was originally published in 1968. I believe this book and *Jesus*, are similar works but slightly different. The purpose of the first book was to give an historical account of Jesus' life which the book achieved. However, Flusser knowledge of Jesus was not fully developed when he wrote that book. He learned more things about the historical Jesus between 1968 and 2000 and also his views and scholarly analysis of Jesus also changed. Hence, the reason he wanted to recreate and republish *Jesus*. He did not republish the book but instead created a more profound book with Notley entitled- *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*.

I would recommend this book to someone if they wanted an authentic, critical historical context of Jesus, how he lived his life and his teachings. Each chapter explores Jesus full embodiment and wholeness from beginning to end. I also think the book does an excellent job at only utilizing the Gospels that talk about the living Jesus- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The book is also critical of other works that contradict what is known to be true of about Jesus, Flusser and Notley to do shy away from colorful language the exaggerates the essence and nature of God either. I would not recommended this book to someone who is not truly open to learning about new concepts and ideas about Jesus. I believe the authors of this book are critical of works that do not truly speak to the nature of Jesus so someone who had tunnel vision of Jesus may not be open to the criticalness.