

David Flusser with R. Steven Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*. Grand Rapids (MI) and Cambridge: William Eerdmans, 2007. 221 pp. 191. Paperback.

The book under review is a biography about Jesus, written based on Flusser's study of the life and teachings of Jesus Nazareth. David Flusser is one of the first Jewish authorities focusing on the understanding of the passages within the New Testament and early Christianity. Being Jewish, provides the author a unique perspective in grasping the essence of Jesus' words and acts. Like most Jesus research, it is impossible for Flusser to not impose his own view on Jesus. Nevertheless, the relevance of the book especially for Synoptic Gospels researchers is emphasized as Flusser followed the synoptic theory.

*The Sage of Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* is composed of a foreword, a preface, an introduction, and eleven chapters with an epilogue. 'Sources', the first chapter of the book describes the method and foundation that Flusser used in plotting Jesus' biographical journey. He indicated that the Synoptic Gospels are based on older documents in Hebrew, hence the author drawing from Hebrew on his discussion of Jesus' teachings (p. 3). He prioritizes Luke as the basis instead of Mark and Matthew, for the former presents the most primitive tradition that the latter two derive from. Chapter two, Ancestry, focuses on Jesus' birth, family, ministry, and religious and sociological background. Jesus being in the line of David's ancestry is contestable since being the Messiah which is translated to 'Son of David', is insufficient to indicate his direct ancestry to David. The following several chapters apply the context of Second Temple Judaism in interpreting Jesus' teaching and ministry. The third chapter, 'Baptism', includes the interpersonal relationships between Jesus and John, their common beliefs and how these beliefs correlate. An example is in Chapter 7, 'The Kingdom of Heaven', both cousins believed the beginning of a new era; John implying the end of humanity and the judgment day, while Jesus emphasizing the transitional age before the last judgment.

The balance between Flusser's Jewish foundations and the direction he took using such foundations is evident in chapters like 'Love'. In this chapter, three points were highlighted, the call of new morality, concept of the kingdom of heaven and interpretation of mutual love. These three main points are established even in early Judaism. In the chapter 'Son', Jesus as the Son of God is not interpreted narrow-mindedly as Him being an all-powerful offspring of a divine being, but as a miracle worker with higher self-awareness. During that time, God's miracle workers are 'described as that of a son to his father'(p.100). The chapter on 'Jerusalem' describes Jesus' celebration of the Passover in the holy city as a display of His willingness to face death in connection to Herod's threat. The next chapters include the discussion of Jesus' death, in which Jesus was brought to the home of the high priest, to the Temple elders and was handed over to the Romans. The crucifixion was detailed with supplementary information on Jewish crucifixion.

Flusser's image of Jesus is distinguishable as he is not confined with the historical research on Jesus. He provides a refreshing view on Christian literature and effectively applies his learnings

from classical Jewish materials in his interpretations. This creates a certain appeal to his impression of Jesus in his Second Temple milieu. Thus, his work plays a significant role in understanding Jesus in the realms of thoughts, practices and expectations of groups included in the Second Temple Judaism.

Despite the fresh perspective, the book is not without its flaws in terms of his justifications of his conclusions or ideas. This is evident in his prioritization of the Lukan materials over Matthew and other gospels, and the Hebrew translation of Gospels. It was indicated that Lukan materials are older and should be prioritized, but it leaves questions like the basis of this and whether the older text is more reliable. In addition, there are instances in which the basis of whether certain parts of the Gospel are historical or not isn't properly elaborated. Some passages are described as having an "authentic ring about it" (p.109), but is usually not supported by a rationale. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was deemed unhistorical and is often left out of the discussion, but explanation as to why is not indicated.

The Sage from Galilee still provides a unique perspective that may serve as supplementary material to other related studies. However, flaws may be too important not to mention for future studies. Thus, it is important for a researcher using this book to conduct a critical and analytical study to support holes in this book. Nonetheless, this book will be helpful as a refreshing perspective when studying any topic of the theological spectrum.