

Fabian Overkamp

Steven Notley

New Testament Literature

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Book Review

“The Sage from Galilee: Discovering Jesus’ Genius” by Flusser

D. Flusser and R. S. Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Discovering Jesus’ Genius* (Eerdmans, 2007). 221 pp. Price \$24.99. ISBN: 9780802825872

David Flusser, born in 1917 and passing away in 2000, was a distinguished Jewish scholar and a professor specializing in Early Christianity and Judaism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Flusser was an influential figure in the arena of Jewish-Christian dialogue, and was dedicated to fostering mutual understanding and esteem between the two religions. He produced extensive literature on various topics concerning Judaism and Christianity, including several books focusing on the life and teachings of Jesus.

In collaboration with his student, R. Steven Notley, he authored "The Sage from Galilee," which presents Flusser's lifetime of research on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The book's value lies in its adherence to the synoptic theory of the late Robert Lindsey, which is particularly significant for researchers of the Synoptic Gospels. Flusser and Lindsey's work laid the foundation for a school of New Testament research known today as the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research. The book is the subject of the following book review.

The first chapter of the book is about a broad outline of the life and teachings of Jesus, with a particular emphasis on his proclamation of the kingdom of God and his exceptional position as a Jewish sage. Flusser posits that comprehending Jesus' teachings necessitates an understanding of the societal and cultural norms of first-century Judaism.

Chapter two of Flusser's work delves into Jesus' teachings concerning the kingdom of God, positing that Jesus considered himself to be initiating a novel era in which the kingdom of God would be completely actualized. Flusser closely scrutinizes the diverse parables and statements in which Jesus discusses the kingdom of God, and demonstrates how they mirror the Jewish apocalyptic anticipations prevalent during that era.

Chapter three of the book scrutinizes the Beatitudes, and Flusser posits that they epitomize Jesus' revolutionary message of social justice and nonviolence. Additionally, he investigates the Lord's Prayer, elucidating how it embodies Jesus' perception of God as a compassionate father who cares for his children's needs.

Chapter four presents an argument that Jesus perceived himself as a reformer of Jewish law rather than an annihilator of it. The author analyzes different sayings and teachings of Jesus that demonstrate his distinctive approach to the law, including his prioritization of the spirit of the law over its literal interpretation.

Chapter five of the book focuses on the parables of Jesus and the author's argument that they represent his singular message regarding the kingdom of God. Through analyzing these parables, the author demonstrates how they utilize striking imagery and relatable scenarios to convey profound spiritual insights.

Chapter six presents an argument that Jesus employed paradoxical statements as a means of challenging his audience and stimulating deeper contemplation. The author provides an analysis of diverse instances of paradoxical statements in the Gospels.

Chapter seven of the book delves into Jesus' perception of himself, contending that he regarded himself as a prophet and a sage, rather than a divine entity. The author scrutinizes several teachings and sayings of Jesus that mirror his self-understanding, including his assertion of being the Son of Man.

Chapter eight scrutinizes the miracles performed by Jesus, contending that they embody his exclusive message concerning the kingdom of God. The author illustrates how these miracles were not simply demonstrations of power, but were intended to communicate profound spiritual insights about the love and compassion of God.

In Chapter nine he examines the crucifixion of Jesus, arguing that it was a tragedy that resulted from the clash between Jesus message of the kingdom of God and the political and religious authorities of his time.

The final chapter of the book investigates the resurrection of Jesus, maintaining that it was a factual occurrence that had significant theological ramifications. The author illustrates how the resurrection validated Jesus' message of the kingdom of God and instilled hope among his disciples.

One book that can be compared to Flusser's "The Sage of Galilee" is Witherington's "Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom". They share the theme of exploring Jesus as a Jewish sage and both emphasize Jesus' teachings on ethics, spirituality, and social justice, as well as the importance of parables. However, they differ in their authors' backgrounds and

perspectives, with Flusser emphasizing Jesus as a reformer of Jewish law and Witherington highlighting Jesus as a teacher of wisdom.

Another difference between the two books is their emphasis on different aspects of Jesus' teachings. Flusser places more emphasis on Jesus as a reformer of Jewish law, whereas Witherington emphasizes Jesus as a teacher of wisdom and the importance of his teachings for Christian spirituality. Despite their differences, both books offer valuable insights into Jesus' teachings and their implications for Jewish and Christian spirituality.

One of the strengths of Flusser's book is his thorough analysis of Jesus as a Jewish sage and the cultural and historical context in which he lived. Flusser draws on his extensive knowledge of Judaism to provide valuable insights into Jesus' teachings and their relationship to Jewish religious practices. His emphasis on the importance of parables and their interpretation is particularly noteworthy.

However, you can criticize Flusser for his use of technical language and his dense writing style, which can make the book challenging to read for those without a strong background in Jewish studies.

Overall, I would recommend Flusser's "The Sage from Galilee" to readers who are interested in exploring Jesus' teachings within their Jewish cultural and historical context. While it may be a challenging read for some, the insights and analysis provided by Flusser make it a valuable resource for understanding the life and teachings of Jesus.