

BOOK REVIEW

David Flusser with R. Steven Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). 221 pp. US\$20.00. ISBN 0802825877

This work is a revised and newly updated versions of David Flusser's *Jesus* written in 1968, this being the German version of *The Sage from Galilee*. That was later translated to English and edited in 2007. The Sage of Galilee is a rewritten version of its German forerunner written in 1968. It is said to not be identical and is better than its German sister. David Flusser's student R. Steven Notley expanded and revised this new work. This book consists of 11 Chapter and an epilogue. Different aspects of this book are broken into "The Sources", "Ancestry", "Baptism", "Law", "Love", "Ethics", "The Kingdom of Heaven", "The Son", "The Son of Man", "Jerusalem", "Death", and the "Epilogue". Outlining the different aspect of Christianity through the life of Jesus.

Chapter One of "The Sage from Galilee", Flusser and Notley explain the main point of their book. Jesus' life, and impact on people are examined in the first chapter "The Sources". Flusser states in his first sentence, "The main purpose of this book is to show that it is possible to write the story of Jesus' life." (Flusser 1) The Gospels Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke write of Jesus' life and bring in several important factuality of His life.

The second chapter, "Ancestry", highlights Jesus' family origins, giving details of his birth and genealogy. "Both Matthew (1:2-16) and Luke (3:23-38) provide a genealogical tree for Jesus leading back to David." (Flusser 7) Flusser points out that Joseph is the one who was a descendent to King David rather than Mary. (Flusser 7) This chapter utilizes Jesus own family dynamics and Jewish family customs to explain certain aspect of His ministry. The chapter ends with an account of what happens to Jesus' family after his death.

The topic of, "Baptism", is the central theme of chapter three. The author highlights John the Baptist and his role and relationship to Jesus in the Gospels. The chapter discusses Jesus' personal baptism and relation to his own ministry. In the conclusion of the Chapter the author compares the similar nature in which both John the Baptist and Jesus were viewed. That they were crazy or evil.

The fourth chapter, "Law", gives its readers different views of the Jewish law throughout the New Testament. It focuses on Jesus' relationship with different keepers of the Law like the Pharisees and Jewish customs like the Sabbath. The author spends a great deal of time discussing the conflict between Jesus, the religious leaders, false teaching, and the law which led to His death. The chapter also sheds light on the fact that Jesus did not come to uproot the Law, but perfect it.

Flusser's focus in chapter 5 is "Love". He states, "Judaism is an ethical religion in which the principle of justice is indispensable; that is why the division of mankind into the righteous and the sinners is so important" (Flusser 56). This point is the launchpad for discussing God's love and mercy. The chapter discusses that out of God's love and holiness, we should love other's and so seek to be like Him. The culmination of this chapter on love is the commandments that Jesus gives in Matthew to "love God" and "love your neighbor as yourself".

In chapter 6, the author analyzes the role of ethics in the life and ministry of Jesus. This focus reveals how different Jesus was from much of the culture around Him. The chapter states that,

“According to Jesus, possessions are an obstacle to virtue” (Flusser 69). Jesus’ ministry was about getting priorities straight. The life of Jesus points to clinging to the Kingdom of God and not to things of this world. Chapter 6 is an overflow of chapter 5’s theme of love regarding living in humility and putting others before oneself.

The theme in, “Kingdom of Heaven”, As Jesus taught the masses from all over, he and the rabbis had a similar thought about the kingdom of heaven as Flusser says. “The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:20-21) Flusser discusses the differences of Jesus’ beliefs and the rabbis, Judaism, and Jewish people. Jesus introduces the kingdom of heaven and the different messianic views. Lastly Flusser points out that with Jesus did not create a new concept of heaven but rather adapted it from rabbinic teaching.

In the following chapter, “The Son”, we take a deeper look into how Jesus was portrayed. Jesus was the only son of God. The Gospel’s have mentioned in Luke 9:28-36 Jesus is addressed as the “Son”. In Gen 22:2 Jesus is referred to as the “only Son”, these verses are giving its reader the indication of what was to come, Jesus being a martyr. Chapter 8 concludes with leading up to Jesus’ death and his struggle with it even to the end.

Chapter 9 is titled “The Son of Man” and it comes on the heels of the previous chapter defining Jesus as the Son of God. These two chapters seek to explain how the deity of Jesus (the Son of God) and the humanity of Jesus (the Son of man) come together in the person of Jesus. The chapter investigates both the Old and New Testament to define the term Son of Man and how it relates to Jesus. It goes into how Jesus as the “Son of man” fulfills prophecies of the Old Testament and how he uses this terminology to describe himself in the New Testament.

In the next chapter “Jerusalem”, the explanation of Jesus’ travels to the holy city to celebrate the Passover but he is also faced with a threat from Herod. Jesus was the one who initiated conflict with the high priests but in the process the crowd was won over. Jesus predicted the fall of the Temple. Ending the chapter with the betrayal and arresting of Jesus. Luke 22:48

The last chapter of the book “The Sage from Galilee” is “Death”. The author dives into the events leading up to the death of Jesus. It is the historical account from the Gospels of Jesus being brought to the high priests, the temple elders and lastly the Romans. There are both Jewish religious leaders as well as Roman governments officials named and historical evidence to prove their role in the prosecution and death of Jesus.

Flusser describes in the “Epilogue”, the Christian faith’s structure being changed into two revolutionary ways (Flusser 162). First being the change of attitude after the tragedy of Jesus’ crucifixion. The second being the revolution when Paul kept teaching “the new faith.” The author reflects on his journey to view the historical facts that make up the life of Jesus and how Jesus’ Jewish heritage played a role in the Gospels.

It is difficult to compare “The Sage of Galilee” to another book as I have not read anything similar. In my background research I came across a book titles “Luke: Illuminating the Sage of Galilee” by Kenneth L. Hanson. This Book seems to highlight the life teaching and death of Jesus specifically in the Gospel of Luke. Similarly to Flusser, Hanson focuses on the Hebrew culture and Jewishness of Jesus and its role in his life and ministry.

The Sage from Galilee is a beautiful portrait of the life of Jesus and all of the aspects from “Ancestry” to “Death” are full of such rich detail. As someone who is seeking to learn more about the bible this was very helpful and insightful. I would recommend this book to anyone

who is looking to take a deeper dive into Jesus' life and ministry. Flusser had an intriguing way of using historical facts and scriptural facts to explain the topics.

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Work Cited

Flusser, David. *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*. 4th ed., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.