

# **Book Review - The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius by David Flusser**

David Flusser's outstanding book "The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius" explores the historical and cultural background of Jesus Christ in order to provide a new perspective on his teachings and their ramifications. This book, which was released by Eerdmans in 2007 and has received widespread acclaim as a significant contribution to the study of the New Testament. In this review, I'll outline the book's structure and substance, analyze three key chapters, and evaluate the book's overall argument.

There are 14 chapters in the book, each of which focuses on a different aspect of Jesus' life, teachings, and historical background. Readers benefit from the layout since it makes it simple for them to access the content and select the areas of study that they are most interested in learning more about. As stated in the Preface (p. xvii), Flusser's main purpose in creating this book is to offer a fresh interpretation of Jesus as a Jewish sage, thoroughly rooted in his own cultural and religious environment, as opposed to a divine figure removed from his historical background. Flusser hopes to accomplish this through bridging the gap between Jewish and Christian study and advancing a more precise and thorough comprehension of Jesus' teachings.

## **Chapter 4: Jesus the Apocalyptic Prophet**

By analyzing numerous facets of Jesus' teachings and deeds, Flusser gives a more thorough understanding of him as an apocalyptic prophet in this chapter. He draws attention to the frequent use of eschatological language and imagery by Jesus, including references to the Son of Man coming in clouds of heaven (Mark 14:62) and the resurrection of the dead (John 5:28–29). Flusser also addresses Jesus' function as a healer and exorcist, suggesting that these feats were

closely related to his prophecy; by banishing demons and curing the ill, Jesus was displaying his dominance over evil and hinting at the ultimate success of God's kingdom. Flusser looks at the larger cultural and historical setting in which Jesus lived in order to support his claim. He argues that the prospect of an impending divine intervention was shared by many groups, including the Essenes and John the Baptist's followers, and that apocalypticism was a prevalent view in Second Temple Judaism. Flusser contends that in light of this setting, Jesus' apocalyptic teachings weren't unusual or abnormal but rather reflected the culture of his time.

#### Chapter 7: The Parables

Flusser emphasizes the rhetorical and educational purposes of Jesus' parables as he delves deeper into their exegesis in this chapter. He contends that Jesus challenged his listeners' preconceptions and provoked critical thought by using parables. Flusser examines a number of parables, notably the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1–20) and the Parable of the Vineyard Workers (Matthew 20:1–16), in great depth to demonstrate this idea. Flusser also explores the historical and literary background of Jesus' parables, pointing out how they resemble other genres of Jewish wisdom literature like rabbinic sayings and prophetic end-of-the-world visions. He makes the point that Jesus frequently incorporated contradictory and sarcastic elements into his parables, causing his audience to wrestle with the unexpected and reevaluate their beliefs about the reign of God. Although Flusser's interpretation of the parables is thorough and thought-provoking, some readers might still wonder if it truly captures Jesus' original intent. It's possible that the parables were meant to impart a clearer moral lesson or that translations and reinterpretations in the past have clouded their original intent.

## Chapter 12: Jesus and the Gentiles

Flusser explores the different ways that Jesus engaged with non-Jewish people and societies in this chapter as he digs deeper into his relationship with the Gentiles. He starts by looking at the geographic setting of Jesus' mission, noting that he frequently passed through areas with sizable populations of Gentiles, like the Decapolis and Tyre and Sidon.

Flusser then goes over a number of specific New Testament incidents that highlight Jesus' treatment of Gentiles. In addition to the healing of the Roman centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13) and the conversation with the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), he also examines Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) and his commission to the disciples to preach the gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

Flusser shows that Jesus was not a strict ethnocentrist by carefully examining these instances, arguing that instead, he saw the spiritual potential in the Gentiles and invited them into God's kingdom. Flusser argues that Jesus' relationships with Gentiles should be viewed in the context of his primary purpose, which was to the Jewish people.

Flusser also examines the Gentiles' place in Jesus' eschatological outlook. He observes that parables like the Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) show that Jesus frequently spoke of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the growing kingdom of God. Flusser also emphasizes Jesus' assertion that "many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11), which serves as an illustration of the universality of God's love and kindness.

In his examination of Jesus and the Gentiles, Flusser offers a fair and nuanced viewpoint that recognizes both the importance of the Jewish people in Jesus' mission and his openness to the rest of the world. With this strategy, it is possible to comprehend Jesus' teachings and their consequences for both Jewish and Gentile Christians more accurately.

In conclusion, David Flusser's book "The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius" is enlightening and incisive. It presents a novel interpretation of Jesus as a Jewish wisdom who was firmly embedded in his historical and cultural milieu. Flusser emphasizes the significance of comprehending Jesus within the context of Second Temple Judaism by concentrating on his apocalyptic message, his use of parables, and his interaction with the Gentiles. Although there may be room for disagreement in some areas of Flusser's argument, his overall methodology makes a significant contribution to the study of the New Testament and fosters a more nuanced understanding of Jesus' life and teachings.