

The Sage from Galilee Book Report

Bethany Mullins

Alliance University

New Testament Literature

May 2, 2023

In the book titled *The Sage from Galilee*, David Flusser and R. Steven Notley worked together to edit and revamp Flusser's much older book *Jesus*. David Flusser was an Israeli professor of early Judaism and Christianity and his works will forever hold esteemed value in the Biblical studies field. Flusser's goal in his rewrite of *Jesus* was not only to reorganize and clarify things, but change many of the thoughts, add more evidence, subtract what he deemed unnecessary, and restructure the book. He organized this book into 12 chapters addressing major themes in the life of Jesus and his teachings such as Jewish Law, Ethics, Baptism, Death, and many other topics Jesus addressed countless times in his ministry. Flusser starts with the first chapter introducing the sources we have that detail the life of Jesus, such as the gospels and external historical sources. He concludes the book with a chapter titled "Epilogue" which details his thoughts on the evidence he has presented in the book and summarizes his thoughts.

With a strong opening chapter to focus the mindset of the reader and a closing chapter that thoroughly summarizes the evidence presented, this book's structure is clear and logical. Since each chapter is labeled to discuss one particular topic and is not necessarily a continuation of the preceding chapters, I think this book is an efficient reference material for readers looking to supplement their study of Judaism, the life of Jesus, and early Christianity. In the preface, Flusser clearly states the purpose of his book to show how Jesus was a Jew who wanted to follow the Jewish faith and that this faith is crucial to his teachings (Flusser & Notley, 2007). After reading the text, I support the idea that Jesus was Jewish and never renounced his heritage, beliefs, or practices, but instead taught these Jewish concepts as the center of the gospel he delivered to the early church.

In chapter one, David Flusser introduces many of the sources used to tell and interpret the life and teachings of Jesus. Out of all the sources, Flusser says "The only important sources

concerning Jesus are the four gospels" (Flusser & Notley, 2007, p. 1). Flusser points out how the gospels, specifically the synoptic gospels are purely historical texts. If they were meant for theological use, they would focus on the aftermath of the coming of Christ and what it meant for the world; however, the synoptic gospels simply end at the resurrection of Jesus. Flusser also points out how many scholars have concluded that the synoptic gospels were likely based on one or more texts that predate the Bible which were written by Jesus and his disciples (Flusser & Notley, 2007). This argument is convincing because there is concrete historical evidence of pre-dating texts that inspired the gospels, which supports their reliability as a historical source.

David Flusser begins to introduce and debate Jewish law in chapter four. His main argument is that Jesus was a law-abiding Jew and how the spread of Christianity to western society has shifted the focus from old practices; however, if it had spread to other regions such as eastern Asiatic areas, it would likely reflect older Jewish practices (Flusser & Notley, 2007). People tend to argue over Jesus's adherence to the law and will argue that many times during his ministry, particularly when it came to the Sabbath, Jesus broke this law. However, when studying Jewish Sabbath laws, while Jesus worked on the Sabbath, it was always in a way that honored and upheld the law. If Jesus fully intended to stay a law-abiding Jew, why do we not follow many of these laws today? Flusser argues that this is because of the spread of Christianity to the God-fearers, who were non-Jewish people that believed in God but did not follow Jewish law (Flusser & Notley, 2007). Jesus and Paul both agreed that the most important aspect that made someone a Christian was not adherence to the law but a belief in God that led to following His instruction. However, Paul emphasized the faith aspect over the law and because his ministry was pointed towards non-Jewish people, the law became de-emphasized over time. Flusser's argument here is convincing because when looking at Jesus's life, he never broke the law but as

Christianity has spread to varying societies and people groups, the application of the Gospel to everyday life has adapted to the cultures and surroundings of these people.

The third chapter I evaluated was on love. Flusser's main argument on the topic is that Jesus's teaching of love, which is the core of his gospel, can be traced back to older Jewish teachings in Jesus's time. Written by a scribe educated in Jewish law around 180-175 BCE, Ecclesiasticus talked about the application of Jewish moral law, which placed heavy emphasis on love and forgiveness (Lotha & Duigan, 1998). In this text, we see the concept of reconciliation between believers before one can receive forgiveness from God. This parallels the teachings of Jesus in Luke 6 when he instructs believers to forgive one another and God will forgive you (Flusser & Notley, 2007). The book of Luke was written roughly 265 years after Ecclesiasticus, pre-dating this concept before Jesus' time (Lotha & Duigan, 1998; Berzon, n.d.). The ancient Jews as a religious group focused heavily on service to God and they teach that we serve God out of love for him, not fear of consequences. This teaching can be found in Jewish culture before Jesus's time but is also found in his teachings and that of modern-day gospel. Flusser's argument appears valid because there is historical evidence such as the Ecclesiasticus that dates some of Jesus's teachings back in Jewish culture. Also, if our savior was Jewish, he was raised up in Jewish teaching and instruction, so it is inevitable that his upbringing would influence his teachings.

The purpose of David Flusser's book was to show how Jesus was a Jew who wanted to remain in the Jewish faith and that Jewish faith is critical to his teachings. He accomplishes this by breaking down the teachings and life of Jesus and tracing these things back in Jewish culture and religion. Flusser brings in many historical artifacts that provide concrete evidence for his claim. He states that the best sources to tell of the life of Jesus are the synoptic gospels, how

Jesus was a law-abiding Jew, and that many teachings in Jesus's gospel such as love can be traced to old Jewish teachings. I believe the majority of Flusser's arguments are sound and backed by solid evidence and agree with his overall claim that Jesus was a Jew who never renounced his Jewish heritage, beliefs, or practices, but instead taught it as the foundation of his gospel. His book sparked my contemplation of how Christianity might look if it spread to different regions first and also what criticisms Jesus might have about the way we preach the gospel and minister today.

References

- Berzon, T. (n.d.). *Historical context for Luke/John*. Columbia College. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/node/1754#:~:text=The%20Gospel%20According%20to%20Luke,middle%20of%20the%20third%20century.>
- Flusser, D., & Notley, R. S. (2007). *The sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' genius*. William B. Eerdmans.
- Lotha, G., & Duignan, B. (Eds.). (1998, July 20). *Ecclesiasticus*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ecclesiasticus>