



Shadow of the Galilean

Gerd Theißen , John Bowden (Translator)

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An achievement in 'narrative theology, ' illuminating the social world of Jesus from rich sources and imaginative reconstruction, this book combines scholarship and story.

Shadow of the Galilean Details

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From Reader Review Shadow of the Galilean for online ebook

Jordan Tomeš says

Vyprávění z doby Ježíšova působení v Palestině. Autor vše poctivě komentuje poznámkami pod čarou, takže aťkoli je hlavní dějová linka příběhu fiktivní, zdála se mi vřehodná a ještě jsem se toho nenásilnou formou spoustu dozvěděl o tehdejších reáliích. Závěr knihy mě dostal. Pro mě jakožto studenta teologie byla četba těchto knížky zážitek; "normální" čtenář by však narativ mohl označit za ne moc poutavý či příliš uměle vytvořený. Za mě ale: vřele doporučuji!

Gary Cummings says

The book did an excellent job of describing the political and eco/socio environmental time of Christ. The trials that the followers went through as a result of the Roman occupation of the Middle East were eye opening and provocative, promoting the realization of just how extraordinary their everyday existence and challenges were, but yet how devout they were to continue their cause.

Jayci Givens says

In *The Shadow of Galilean*, Gerd Theissen depicts the story of Andreas, a Galilean merchant, who becomes involved with Roman officials and ultimately collects information for them about Jesus of Nazareth.

A key aspect of this narrative is the contemplation of the protagonist Andreas. Throughout the story, his reflections give insight to the reader not only on his perspective as a Jew, but also on the perspectives of the Romans, Zealots, and women such as Joanna, among others. Theissen remarks in a letter that "the narrative has been structured deliberately so that no one could come to the conclusion that this is another picture of Jesus as he was. It is Jesus from the perspective of particular social experiences" (147). In addition, as the reader follows Andreas' conversion to Christianity, demonstrated in the way he "defended [Jesus's] gentle way of rebellion" (170) in the face of Pilate, the influences upon him are clear. One example includes Andreas' relationships with others who do not believe Jesus, such as Barabbas who asserts "this Jesus is crazy" (84). This influence relates to modern readers of faith as they face criticism in relationships with those who do not adhere to Christianity.

Distinctions of social class and reciprocity permeate the story. For example, as Andreas and Metilius ponder culprits implicated in the death of Jesus, he cites: "the tensions between the aristocracy and the ordinary people... the aristocracy want to maintain their power" (165). These social class distinctions create tension in light of Jesus' teachings. Andreas himself is conflicted, as he comes from a "well to do family" (73) and Jesus speaks of the difficulties the rich find getting to the kingdom of God.

Reciprocity is seen through Andreas' relationship with Barabbas. Barabbas helps Andreas when he is kidnapped, then when Barabbas is arrested, Andreas' first thought is "I had to help him; I owed my life to him" (138). In addition, reciprocal honor is seen in Pilate's viewpoint: "every child... knows that a virtuous man does good to his friends and harm to his enemies" (151). Jesus's Christianity flips this notion, teaching instead to "love one's enemies" (151) and this creates fear for Pilate of the danger that these new ideas may bring to his power. Andreas, having decided to protect Jesus, responds: "Jesus teaches a new doctrine. Is it impossible because it's new?" (151). This indicates to the reader how difficult it may have been for many to accept the radical changes to their way of life that Jesus brought.

Overall, this narrative was an enjoyable read. I especially enjoyed the interspersed commentary by the author, which aided in my understanding of his intention and development of the story within a scholarly

historical context. The only improvement that I would suggest for this book is further expansion within these sections; they truly enlightened my understanding. I would rate the book overall a 4. The separation of Andreas' account from the story of Jesus helps to avoid mistaking the author's interpretations and creative liberties from the history (157). These two storylines, that of Jesus and of Andreas, are aligned as part of a successful narrative approach, and help to provoke thoughtfulness and attention in the reader about the way of life during Jesus' time, and the numerous factors that influenced and continue to influence our understanding of his teachings. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in engaging with an excellent interpretation of how Jesus may have been viewed through the lens of people with various political, social, and economic perspectives.

Lazar Stanojkovi? says

Ovo je prva knjiga o ranom hriš?anstvu koju sam pro?itao pa je moja ocena možda prevelika za ?itaoce sa veteranskim stažom ali sam uveren da svako treba da je pro?ita. Profesor Tajszen kroz lik mladog trgovca Andreja približava život u Jerusalimu i Judeji u godinama pre Hristovog ubistva kroz razgovore sa likovima koji približavaju zajednicu Esena, Jevreja, Rimljana, Sirijaca i Grka ?itaocu i te?no ga uvla?i u filozofske rasprave i moralne dileme u kojima se Andrej nalazi. Zastupaju?i objektivno svaku stranu preko likova koje Andrej sre?e, otvara se nova perspektiva na ulogu Hrista iz Nazareta, Pontija Pilata, razbojništvo Esena, antisemitizam sirijskih Grka i nastajanja prve hriš?anske zajednice. Gde su sli?nosti jevreja i hriš?ana, kako je nastao mit o Hristovom hlebu i zašto su rimski oficiri prelazili u Judaizam su po meni teme koje nude najviše novih saznanja. Preporu?ujem svakom koga zanima razdvojena istorijska i pripoveda?ka perspektiva nastajanja hriš?anstva.

Chris says

I'm not sure what to say about this book. I read it for a class and found it interesting but also rather uninspiring. On the plus side, I appreciated Theissen's efforts to render historical information in the form of a novel. It was certainly a nice alternative to the usual class reading. On the negative side, Theissen is not a great fiction writer; rather than feeling immersed in the time period, I was often all-too-aware of the author's efforts and intentions. The historical information frequently felt unnatural to the context, with characters giving facts to each other that seemed taken out of a classroom lecture.

Theissen's letters between chapters, written to a fictional Dr. Kratzinger, provided a useful way to discuss the methodology of the author without interrupting the story, but they too felt a bit contrived. My reaction to most of the letters was, "Wow, Dr. Kratzinger is a critical jerk. Does he really have something negative to say about every chapter?"

Finally, I would say that the biases involved in writing about the "historical Jesus" put me off a bit. Thiessen includes huge amounts of Jesus' sayings, quoted word for word from the gospels, but then down-plays, ignores, or explains away the miracle accounts. Apparently he thinks the gospels are highly accurate regarding Jesus' speech and "non-miraculous" action, but unreliable about the miracles. I'm not sure it makes sense to take one without the other, but then again I have a lot to learn about this "historical Jesus" research stuff.

Kelly Mebar says

Interesting read

I like how one sees the religious and economic environment surrounding Jesus time. I dislike the fact that it was little too factual and lost human touch to it...but that's just my opinion

wes Goertzen says

N.T. Wright called it "brilliant" in NTPG and since i'm a bit of a Wright lackey I decided to read it. Theissen won't be winning an literature prizes any time soon; his prose is a bit, um forced and simplistic but he's a scholar. In his defense he was dealing with alot of historical and biblical information that he had to fit his narrative into...a really gutsy, laudable effort! If you're reading for the pure fun of it then you might want a different book by a different author (Tom Clancey maybe-he worked for me back in the day)!

On the other hand, tSofG is really a good way to read historical context after having read other more scholarly (dry and clever alike) books. Even if the prose isn't great, it's still a great way to think of the events and times surrounding Jesus' life in real-live narrative form. It really put "flesh" (for me anyways) on the writings of the period and highlights the tensions within 1st century Judaism and also "fleshes" out rather sympathetically (something i'm not at all used to) the tension between the Jews and the Romans (or their cohorts).

Also each chapter ends with a letter to a colleague in which he discusses his method. These are a bit repetitive but also helpful if you're reading for understanding (as opposed to some other pleasure).

Cliff says

The story and prose are weak, but the book offers insights into the life of Jesus in a creative and accessible way. I'm convinced that "narrative criticism" is a worthy pursuit for experts in biblical studies (see also Bruce Longenecker's Lost Letters of Pergamum, which I like better), but I'm still looking for a biblical scholar who can write a compelling extended narrative.

Mitchell Ebbott says

Spoilers included

Originally prompted by rationalism and rising questions of Biblical authority, the "Quest of the Historical Jesus" brings the field of historiography to bear on the identity, actions, and surroundings of Jesus. The quest rose in the 18th century with scholars who sought to obtain a more accurate picture of Jesus than what we have in the Gospels. Others followed this endeavor with a new look at doctrinal questions in light of historical research. The "third quest," emboldened by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, sought to bring fresh rigor to Jesus studies by placing him solidly within his first-century Jewish contexts.

It is within this "third quest" that we find our present work. Written in 1987 by Gerd Theissen, a professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg, The Shadow of the Galilean places contemporary scholarship on the life and times of Jesus within a narrative framework. His approach takes cues from

historical fiction, but adds scholarly rigor through citation of primary sources and through discussions of methodology at the end of each chapter, couched as fictitious letters to a colleague. Theissen's goal is to illustrate, in an accessible format, the ways in which knowledge of Jewish religion and Palestinian social conflict can shape our picture of Jesus.

The *Shadow of the Galilean* follows the journeys of Andreas, a wealthy Jewish grain merchant who finds himself unwittingly caught up in the political and social conflicts surrounding Jesus' ministry. The story begins in Jerusalem, where Roman forces arrest Andreas in connection with a political protest and Pilate blackmails him into service as an informant on movements in the region. This mission turns Andreas into a sort of historical investigator in his own right, through whom we are invited to explore the world of first-century Judaism. Throughout the following chapters, Andreas meets representative characters from the major religious and political factions of the time, and we hear the situation and events of the time discussed from their perspective.

In Andreas' first mission, he befriends an exiled Essene. Drawing heavily on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus, Theissen describes a community dedicated to purity and asceticism in expectation of God's immanent reordering of the world. The execution of John the Baptist then brings Andreas to Chuza, a member of Herod Antipas' court. Through Chuza, we discover the political history of Galilee and the Herodian dynasty, along with a second Jewish sect: the Sadducees, an upper-class movement of non-supernaturalists. Andreas' friend Barabbas represents the ideological side of the Zealot resistance movement, balanced by others who joined simply to escape the oppressive economic system. Through Andreas, we explore many others peoples and customs of the day – toll collectors, fishermen, beggars, slaves, and more. Theissen makes a special point to refute stereotypes of the Pharisees as strict legalists. He states that “scholars have a great duty to restore the reputation of the Pharisees,” and does his part by portraying his representative Pharisee, Gamaliel, alongside an Essene foil. Though Gamaliel is concerned with purity laws, he is perfectly willing to make exceptions for practicality, while his less moderate Essene counterpart demands strict obedience. Theissen uses the Roman commander Metilius to similar ends, inviting readers to view Roman occupiers, even Pilate, as more misguided than malicious. Metilius sees himself as a peacemaker, not an occupier, and is genuinely interested in respectful and friendly relations between Rome and its Jewish subjects.

The story of Jesus weaves through these encounters, and each group has their own take on his life and teachings. Theissen takes advantage of the format here to show a diversity of views. Depending on who is speaking, Jesus is variously described as a populist hero, an inciter of unrest, an itinerant philosopher, a miracle-worker, and the coming Messiah. As the time of the crucifixion draws near, Andreas finds himself increasingly implicated in Jesus' story and convicted by his message.

LESSONS FROM HISTORICAL STUDY

The *Shadow of the Galilean* has much to commend it, alongside the wider genre of historical Jesus studies. A working knowledge of Palestinian people groups can help the acute Bible student draw formerly hidden connections. For example, Metilius informs Andreas (and us) that most Roman soldiers in Judea came from the surrounding Greek and Syrian cities, which had been recently subjugated by Israel. This history of conflict lent itself to anti-Semitic attitudes, to which Theissen attributes the beating and mocking of Jesus by the Romans. First, this knowledge underscores the complicity of all nations in the death of Jesus and allows us to connect that theologically with the universal efficacy of Christ's death. Second, it directly implicates anti-Semitism in Jesus' death. As Andreas observes, “that means that hatred of the Jews is also behind the execution of Jesus.” One wonders if some of Christendom's crimes could have been avoided were this more widely known.

Eschatological expectations take priority in Theissen's descriptions of the Jewish factions, and this knowledge helps us place messianic claims about Jesus within their proper context. Jewish expectations of the Messiah, by Theissen's presentation, have little or nothing to do with personal forgiveness of sins. To the contrary, a claim to bring about God's reordering of the Cosmos would have been explicitly social, economic, and political. With the exception of the Sadducees, who held no hopes for the future, all major Jewish factions expected God to bring the rich and powerful to justice, institute perfectly-ordered divine rule, and free the oppressed. Learning about these sects also alerts us to the ways in which the Gospel of Jesus

frustrates their expectations of the end times. Against the Essenes, for example, the new age is for all nations, not just a “community of light” separated from the world. Against the Zealots (and the Romans, for that matter), peace cannot be obtained through violence, but only through nonviolence, even weakness.

Perhaps the greatest value of *The Shadow of the Galilean* is the humanizing effect it has on people and groups that are otherwise easy to categorize and dismiss. The narrative format shines here. By adding names, stories, families, hopes, and troubles to labels like “Pharisee” or “tax collector,” Theissen forces the reader to think twice before making sweeping generalizations or condemnations of an entire class of people. The characters aren’t beyond all criticism, but by seeing the human elements behind the belief systems in the Bible we can sympathize with them, rather than seeing them as odd and alien.

Though helpful in these areas, the historical approach to Jesus falls short when treated as an end in itself. Chief among the problems is that it treats the Gospels as just another source by which we can get to the “actual” Jesus who lived and died in 1st Century Palestine. Theissen himself admits to the impossibility of this task, saying, “historical sources cannot give us the actual person but only a shadow of the historical reality.” When the Gospels are read with the primary intent of getting to a “historical Jesus” that we can never truly know, theological interpretation gets pushed aside and we can miss the wider message. For example, when confronted with the Matthean ending to the parable of the banquet, he dismisses it as a later addition that contradicts the message of the original parable. Closer attention to the text as it stands could find a critique on the Temple cult’s handling of the covenant, but Theissen misses that by treating Matthew as a means to a historical end. He similarly doesn’t address the structural contribution of the two multiplications of bread in Mark, instead dismissing them as the same event expanded by an ahistorical “growth of the miraculous.”

Theissen’s treatment of the feedings illustrates another liability of his approach, namely the imposition of one’s own epistemological assumptions into historical interpretation. The narrative at several points offers physicalist explanations for Jesus’ deeds of power. The feeding of the multitudes is explained with donations from rich supporters of Jesus, whose contributions were mistaken by the crowd for miraculous multiplication of bread. Later a disciple of Jesus reports that Ananias and Sapphira died not by the hand of God, but because “the verdict came as a shock to them.” Medical probability aside, the idea that the disciples would have interpreted these deaths as anything other than divine intervention is incredible. Theissen’s notes, usually quite thorough, offer no source to support either of these reductions.

Studies of the historical Jesus are prone to forget that the Christian faith is concerned primarily with the Jesus proclaimed by the Evangelists. Dangerous as it is to divorce this proclamation from historical reality, historical studies must remain secondary to the proclaimed word, helping us understand it but never replacing it. Viewed in this light, however, *The Shadow of the Galilean* provides valuable insights and perspectives on the sociopolitical world of Jesus’ day.

Nick says

I'm sure someone out there will get a lot out of this book, but I for one don't have time to fool with stilted dialogue and forced prose. This is a case in point of academia lacking in artistic sensibilities. I applaud Theissen's effort, but I think he should have invested some time and effort in learning the finer details of fiction writing before setting out to cross-breed genres.

Mary_Ann says

This creative story has the benefit of scholarly research driving its narrative forward in such a way that has a similar effect of more and more light being shed in a dark room. Readers are brought to a better

understanding about the tension between the Israelites and the Romans. There is a vivid depiction of the personal challenges for a Jew during those confusing times to maintain ritual purity and follow the Lord with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength. The reader is given a better picture of certain religious groups of Jesus' day and a better perception of how the people of the time viewed John the Baptist's call to repentance as well as the reason for the Zealots' desire to take Israel back from the Romans by force. In addition to all of this, the greatest strength of this novel is the knowledge the readers gain of how the people of first century Palestine may have perceived Jesus – from the time He first came on the scene to the end of His life on the cross. It was enlightening for me to walk with several individuals, in the perspective of their varying backgrounds, as they analyzed Jesus' words and deeds. This is the strength of Theissen's chosen structure of narrative exegesis.

However, while the use of a narrative style to bring a reader into first century Palestine was certainly an inspired idea, the writing was far less compelling than would be desired. For such a narrative, I would imagine that Theissen would really bring me there, to walk right alongside Andreas on the grounds of Galilee so that the dust would get between my sandaled toes. However, too often, the stilted writing brought me back to the reality of sitting in a 21st century living room. The frequent interruption with the letters between the author and Dr. Kratzinger also causes an unnatural suspension of the "suspension of disbelief" required in reading a novel and serves as further reminders that this is indeed a work of fiction. Conversations are also unnatural. Good fiction requires good writing with realistic dialogue. With this book, however, the reader is naturally led to ask whether it was really possible for the characters to memorize and quote Jesus verbatim. Perhaps this is a characteristic strength of an oral culture, but one couldn't help but wonder whether these conversations were realistic or not. Did the people of the time truly sit around in this manner, quoting Jesus and analyzing him? This is something readers will never know definitively, of course, but it certainly presents itself as a hitch to the success of a work that is intended to be story narrative.

In the end, I would recommend this book -- but only for those who seek a scholarly take of what life was like during Jesus' day. There are other historical fiction out there ("Echo in the Darkness", by Francine Rivers, for example) written by more gripping storytellers, though their historical accuracy is less certain.

Shaaraniwaleedyahoo.Com says

The Shadow of the Galilean by Gerd Theissen is a narrative that remarkably subsumes non-fictional and fictional events at the time of Jesus Christ. The story is based on a fictional Jewish character by the name of Andreas. The book gradually leads up to the development of Jesus's teachings and ministries that bring a change to all of the factors in Andreas's life and others.

Andreas's world is different from the world we know today. In his society, distinctions in social class and the pursuit of honor, patronage, and reciprocity affected daily life. The social class hierarchy was present and exemplified through the couple in Nazareth, Tholomaeus and Susanna who were oppressed by the rich. The recurring idea of honor throughout the book was demonstrated when the Romans would constantly claim to honor the Jewish faith by letting Jews practice their religion. Similarly, the patronage of Roman officials with groups like the Sadducees served only the interests of those specific groups. Such practices in that society were all supported under the ideology of reciprocity, in other words, "quid pro quo". This was seen twice in the book when the Roman officials would grant Andreas amnesty in return for spying on potential threats to the Roman kingdom. These factors allowed the Romans to ensure tranquility and to stay in power. Jesus coming and correcting the practices of the society disturbed this tranquility.

Jesus practiced counter-cultural ideas that eliminated barriers of social class by being around tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners, and the poor. He taught it was honorable under the kingdom of God to be a poor spirit, a

sinner who repents, and a peacemaker. During his ministries, Jesus would preach that God was the ultimate patron for those in need. The book shows that Jesus eliminated the societal norm of “quid pro quo” when he would say not to invite your friends or brothers for dinner but to invite the poor, lame, and blind that owe you nothing. It was sayings by Jesus like, “Freely you have received; freely give” that eliminated that idea of reciprocity.

These teachings made people from numerous groups in Andreas’s society feel equal, honored, and loved. This new cultural movement of Christian theology posed a huge threat to the Roman government which led to the investigation of Jesus. The words of God enabled Jesus to correct people and turn a society that was upside down, right side up. In the end, Jesus left a big impact on that society as a whole, which eventually led to leaving the ways of conventional thinking and adopting the ways of Jesus Christ. Overall, I would give this book a 4 out of 5 and would recommend it to everyone; religious and non-religious individuals. The literary work is outstanding and the narrative approach engages the reader in a contextual way. Gerd Theissen transports the reader on a journey to the prevalent environment of the times before, during, and after Jesus. Understanding the time, place, and people of that particular society introduced me to a captivating side of Jesus that many people are unaware of. In today’s society, many people picture Jesus like a peaceful hippie of the 1960s. This book eliminates that stereotype by realistically showing how Jesus spoke prophetically and authoritatively while being peaceful and compassionate in his manners. Therefore, the theme of the book offers a glimpse into the society at Jesus’s time and to his teachings enabling the reader to accurately form a different perspective on who Jesus was.

Paul says

Surprisingly good read. The author adds a little speculation and embellishment to create a story in 1st century Palestine. The strength of the book is that makes the reader aware of the context of Second Temple Judian under Roman occupation and the various Jewish groups that have developed: Essenes, Zealots and Pharisees. The biggest surprise for me was that there were Greek cities in Palestine at that point.

Shawn says

Fascinating work of historical fiction about Jesus

A lot can be learned about the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth from this interesting work of historical fiction. It reminds me Jesuit meditation techniques in which you imagine yourself in the middle of a Gospel story and experience all of the moments described yourself. Like me, many will find some of the directions this author takes a little odd, but altogether it’s an enjoyable ride, nonetheless.

Jonkitley says

This is an academic's novel and as such is more of an extended narrative exercise than a real novel. It's emphasis is to educate the reader and explain to them the theological concept of "the Historical Jesus" rather than really to tell a good story. Or in layman's terms, it's trying to show us how the real historical person of Jesus might in some way relate to the biblical narratives which we now have about him and how one thing lead to the other. As such the narrative is not as flowing as would be expected from a professional novelist, but I think that's OK, provided the reader's prepared for this. One reason that the narrative is clunky is that

Theissen includes a fictional letter at the end of every chapter from himself, the author, to an imaginary friend who is "proofreading" his work for him. In this letter he justifies all the editorial decision's he's made in the previous chapter, engaging with his own handling of historical sources and choices of focus. I personally found this interesting but I could readily see someone else finding them tiresome instead. In general though, I thought that this book was thought provoking, interesting and well worth a read (especially if you have an interest in the life of Christ), provided you don't come to it looking for a smooth page-turner.
