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FOREWORD

The present volume marks the culmination of David Flusser's lifelong interest in and study of the historical Jesus. His unwelcome death on his 83rd birthday, September 15, 2000, has brought to a close a legacy of erudition that will not soon be seen again in Israel. This third edition of his biography of Jesus includes Flusser's final corrections and additions to the previous versions. In addition, there appears a new appended chapter, "A New Portrait of Salome."

The recent discovery of the face of the daughter of Herodias on a coin provided Flusser with the impetus to give fresh attention to the young girl who played such a pivotal role in the death of John the Baptist. The result is a correction to the distorted picture given to her by scholarship over the last 150 years. Flusser's study once again demonstrates his unique integration of multiple disciplines — archaeology, history and philology — to the study of the New Testament.

My collaborative effort with Professor Flusser has been for me one of the most stimulating and fulfilling experiences during my years of research in Jerusalem.

I came here in 1983 to study with him at the Hebrew University under the notion that the issues of language, culture, history and physical setting make a difference in how we read the Gospels. I have not been disappointed. Often, we Christians read the stories and sayings of Jesus with little knowledge of the contemporary issues, personages and nuances of language that provide such an important element in molding our understanding of his life and teachings.

When first asked to assist in the re-publication of the 1968 English edition of Flusser's Jesus, I assumed that the task would merely involve improving and correcting the language problems in the previous English translation. However, we soon realized that with the passage of almost 30 years it would be necessary to rewrite the

book, in effect, creating a new book. Not only has there been a wealth of new data, but Flusser's own thinking has evolved in light of this information. Thus, those who are acquainted with the 1968 book will find the present volume a new work.

One novel contribution is Flusser's personal sketch of Pontius Pilate (pp. 151–158). He pieces together the fragmentary evidence, mention of Pilate on the dedicatory inscription found at Caesarea and the scant references to the prefect in the literary sources. The result is a compelling psychological portrait of one of the central figures responsible for the death of Jesus. Flusser's study helps us to understand how Pilate's personal weaknesses played into the tragic chain of events and contributed to Jesus' eventual execution.

The 1968 English translation, now out of print, represented the beginnings of Flusser's investigation into the historical Jesus, whereas the present volume is its culmination. Rarely does one encounter a scholar with such a passion to understand Jesus and his message. Nor are there many who have such a mastery of the classical sources and the ability to use them in such a way that the person and message of Jesus find fresh and simple clarity.

Flusser's philological-historical approach calls for a reconsideration of how we read the literary sources. He brings to bear the wealth of new information concerning the first-century setting in the light of the Dead Sea Scrolls, historical inquiry, and recent archaeological discoveries. What results from his biographical study is a portrait of Jesus which gains additional depth because it is viewed within the context of Jewish thought and life of the first century.

Jesus was comfortable with the warp and woof of Jewish dialectic. Flusser demonstrates that he was familiar with—and even skilled at—the sometimes intricate nature of Jewish hermeneutic. Yet, while Jesus echoes many of the sentiments of his contemporaries, it would be a distortion to ignore his distinctive contributions to the landscape of first-century Jewish ideas. Nevertheless, what Flusser has advanced in this volume is a claim that even Jesus' most radical conclusions would have been unthinkable without the innovations of those in the generations before him and the nurturing environment of contemporary Jewish thought.

Much has been written in recent years about the reclamation of Jesus by Jewish scholarship. It is difficult, however, to explain to those who do not know Flusser what it is about him that makes his work so distinctive. One feature which sets him apart is that while he understands Jesus to belong fully to the diverse and competing streams of Jewish thinking of the first century, Flusser feels no need to deny Jesus his high self-awareness. In his understanding, the historical Jesus was both identified with his people and the cornerstone of the faith of the early Christian community.

Flusser also has no hesitation to question the assumptions which are foundational to many contemporary New Testament scholars. He is an original thinker who is willing to give fresh consideration to the evidence—even if it means challenging long-held opinions, sometimes even his own. I have little doubt that both Jewish and Christian readers will be challenged by the results of Flusser's study.

Another characteristic of Flusser is his profound appreciation for "the historical Jesus." As Israel's foremost scholar on Jesus and nascent Christianity, he is often asked to give comment on "the Jewishness of Jesus" or to provide the "Jewish perspective." Few requests irritate him more. Flusser's close attention to philology and textual analysis cuts against the grain of New Testament scholarship's penchant for "trendiness," in which Jesus is recreated in the mold of whichever psychological or political trend is in vogue. He reminds his students that his is not the study of "the Jewish Jesus" but the Jesus of history. That Jesus was Jewish is a matter of historical record. His optimism that careful philological-historical research can produce fruitful results will surprise some skeptics.

Finally, whether reading the Greek philosophers, medieval theologians or the words of Jesus, Flusser does not work as a detached historian. He works as a man of faith who sees his scholarship as having relevance to the complex challenges of the present age. This facet of Flusser's character was illustrated by an incident which was related to me by Brad Young, who studied with Flusser for a number of years in Jerusalem.

Flusser had a student who went to study at the University of Zürich.

When a professor there discovered that he was Flusser's student, he failed him without warrant. The failing mark ruined the student's academic career. A few years later, a student of that same professor was studying in Flusser's class. He turned in a paper, the content of which was mediocre. Flusser instructed Brad, who was his teaching assistant at the time, to give the student an "A." When Brad inquired why, he related the story of his own student and then repeated his instruction, "Give the student an 'A.' This I have learned from Jesus."

During my years of study and work with Professor Flusser, I have observed his desire not only to understand the teachings of Jesus, but to see their relevancy in difficult circumstances. This was best illustrated to me on the eve of the Gulf War. On January 15, 1991, the streets of Jerusalem were virtually empty in anticipation of the outbreak of war and the consequent launching of scud missiles on the civilian Israeli population. I went to Flusser's home needing to discuss my dissertation. Upon opening the door, he pondered aloud, "Interesting days we are living in. What would Jesus say? Let's go and find out." Without further explanation we proceeded to his study and he invited me to open the New Testament to the passage of the "Two Swords" (Luke 22:35–38). He began to explain the words of Jesus, as if by understanding the relevant texts we could gain a glimpse of what Jesus might have thought — and by extension what we should think — about the current crisis. Flusser explained Jesus' delicate balance between pacifism — the avoidance of conflict — and the right to defend oneself. His exposition was concise, original and pertinent to the current situation.

What has struck me about Flusser is not simply his insights into Jesus' teaching, but his assumption that the study of the words of Jesus should make a difference in how we conduct our lives. Of course, most Christians will find nothing remarkable in that notion, but many students will testify how exceptional it is to find a scholar whose research has relevance for life. I hope that my own contribution to this book has made it more accessible to the readers and strengthened Professor Flusser's desire that this biography "serve as a mouthpiece for Jesus' message today."

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PREFACE

The present volume not only reflects the truism that Jesus was a Jew and wanted to remain within the Jewish faith but argues that, without the long preparatory work of contemporaneous Jewish faith, the teaching of Jesus would be unthinkable. This biography of Jesus has grown out of my earlier book also entitled *Jesus*, written in German, and first published in May of 1968 by Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag. The new book is a completely rewritten, up-to-date expansion of the earlier work. When writing the German edition of *Jesus*, I stood more or less at the threshold of my research into the origins of Christianity. Since that time I have learned a great deal and have written extensively on the New Testament, especially on Jesus. Thus, the present biography is far from being identical with the original book. I believe that my new, English edition of *Jesus* is not merely longer, but also significantly better than its German forerunner.

An English translation by Ronald Walls from the German was published by Herder and Herder in 1969. Not being widely read, this translation was never reprinted and is no longer available. The German book, however, was reprinted repeatedly and translated into dozens of other languages. The uneventfulness of the English translation in comparison to the success of the original German edition and its translation into other languages led me to conclude that a new, improved English version of my book about Jesus was badly needed. Thus, I have not only corrected the numerous inaccuracies in the previous English translation, but I have found it necessary to include fresh insights drawn from both rabbinic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Although thoroughly revised and augmented, the structure of the German original and subsequent English translation remains largely intact.

The illustrations are not identical with that which appeared in the earlier editions of *Jesus*. I have updated them to reflect the wealth of recent archeological discoveries in Israel and other places. The bibliography is intended to be “user friendly” and provide assistance to the reader interested in additional information. Quotations from Josephus are taken from the bilingual edition to the Loeb Classical Library. The English translation of the Bible is taken mostly from the New International Version.

I have supplemented the book with articles that I have already published elsewhere. The short study about the ossuary of Caiaphas first appeared in *Jerusalem Perspective* 4/4–5 (1991), pp. 23–28. It is intended to provide more information about the Sadducean High Priest Caiaphas and his clan, and includes illustrations of the ossuary itself. The study “The House of David,” *Israel Museum* 5 (1986), pp. 37–40, is not only archeologically significant, but enabled me to correct a common error that I too committed regarding the existence of Davidids in Jesus’ time. It is now clear that there were Jews in the late Second Temple period who knew that they had descended from the House of David. Jesus may have been one of them. Nevertheless, as there were probably many Davidids at that time, simply belonging to this famous family was not proof of any messianic claim.

Three other studies from my “Selected Papers,” which were collated and published in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem, Magnes, 1988), have also been included. “What was the Original Meaning of Ecce Homo?” casts light on several new historical aspects of the person of Pilate, while “Who is it that Struck You” is a fresh treatment of the sequence of events between the time of Jesus’ arrest and the hearing before Pilate. The most important emendation of my original German manuscript is found in “The Crucified One and the Jews.” The description of Jesus’ loneliness on his way to the Cross is an achievement of the author of the Gospel of Mark (who influenced the description given in Matthew’s). In reality, on the way to the place of execution, Jesus was accompanied by the empathy of his people. It is easy to see how Luke’s report was deliberately changed by Mark, whose attempts to sever Jesus’ ties to his people are equally evident in his elimination of Jesus’ laments

over Jerusalem. I have traced the literary creativity of the author of the second Gospel in my concluding supplementary study, "Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem." Finally, I have added in the appendix of the present volume an original contribution about the last way of Jesus, the so-called *Via Dolorosa*, written especially for this book by the eminent expert Magen Broshi.

The German edition of my book was very well received in Europe, and encountered only slight opposition from some excessively conservative Christian circles. Their American counterparts should understand that, because of my Jewish background, I cannot be more Christian than the majority of believers in Jesus. My interpretation of the Gospels, however, is more conservative than that of many New Testament scholars today. I attribute my conservative approach to my training, which was neither that of a Jewish nor a Christian theologian, but of a classicist. My method is rooted in the discipline of classical studies whose interest is Greek and Latin texts. I am confident that the first three Gospels reliably reflect the reality of the "historical" Jesus. Moreover, I do not like the dichotomy made between the "historical" Jesus and "kerygmatic" Christ. I am not suggesting in any way that the texts should be read uncritically. This should become clear after reading the first chapter where I briefly discuss my critical method.

My conservative approach to the Gospels also stems from my Jewish identity. As a Jew I have studied, as far as possible, the various trends within ancient Judaism. This course of study is very helpful for interpreting the Jewish aspects of the Gospels, particularly the words and deeds of Jesus.

I know that some readers will open this book in order to inquire what the prevailing Jewish opinion is about Jesus. I have not written this book to describe Jesus from the "Jewish standpoint." The truth of the matter is that I am motivated by scholarly interest to learn as much as I can about Jesus, but at the same time being a practicing Jew and not a Christian, I am independent of any church. I readily admit, however, that I personally identify myself with Jesus' Jewish *Weltanschauung*, both moral and political, and I believe that the content of his teachings and the approach he embraced have always had the potential to change our world and prevent the greatest part of evil and suffering.

Here a short explanation will not be out of place. As a boy I grew up in the strongly Catholic, Bohemian town of Pířbram. The town was one of the great centers of pilgrimage in Central Europe. Because of the humane atmosphere in Czechoslovakia at that time, I did not experience any sort of Christian aversion to my Jewish background. In particular, I never heard any accusation of deicide directed against my people. As a student at the University of Prague, I became acquainted with Josef Perl, a pastor and member of the Unity of Bohemian Brethren, and I spent many evenings conversing with him at the local YMCA in Prague. The strong emphasis which this pastor and his fellow brethren placed on the teaching of Jesus and on the early, believing community in Jerusalem stirred in me a healthy, positive interest in Jesus, and influenced the very understanding of my own Jewish faith as well. Interacting with these Bohemian Brethren played a decisive role in the cultivation of my scholarly interests; their influence was one of the foremost reasons that I decided to occupy myself with the person and message of Jesus.

Later in life I became interested in the history of the Bohemian Brethren, and I discovered links between this group and other similar movements in the past and present. I have since had the honor to become acquainted with members of one such movement having spiritual links to the Bohemian Brethren — the Mennonites in Canada and the United States. When the German book on Jesus was first published, a leading Mennonite asked me if the book were Christian or Jewish. I replied, "If the Christians would be Mennonites, then my work would be a Christian book." What I have set out to do here is to illuminate and interpret, at least in part, Jesus' person and opinions within the framework of his time and people. My ambition is simply to serve as a mouthpiece for Jesus' message today.

This new, English book on Jesus would not have seen the light of day without the invaluable assistance of my former student, Dr. R. Steven Notley, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Jerusalem University College and visiting lecturer at King's College, London. He collaborated with me in correcting, revising and augmenting the earlier English edition, and he has added new essential contributions throughout the work. I also