
The Shadow Of The Galilean By Gerd Theissen; A Look At The Community, Historical And Spiritual Conditions Of The New Testament Era

Gerd Theissen's contemporary piece, *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form*, is recognized for its engaging narrative that explores the social, religious, and historical contexts of the era of the New Testament. Throughout the work, Theissen weaves biblical references and historical citations to give the reader insight into the tensions and turmoil of Jesus' time. Prior to the beginning of each chapter, Theissen pens a letter in response to his fictional colleague, Dr. Kratzinger. He uses this medium to justify his methodology, while entertaining doubts and objections his colleague raises.

The narrative opens with an introduction to the author and his fictional colleague. In his foreword, which is a letter to Kratzinger, Theissen confirms that he is writing a narrative about Jesus through the perspective of the fictional character, Andreas. He counters Kratzinger's objection by stating that he uses historical sources to write about Jesus and readers can distinguish between fact and fiction by the citations in the text. Lastly, he states his purpose is to paint a picture of Jesus and the New Testament time that parallels scholarly research and is comprehensible to the readers. In other terms, he wants his work to be historically accurate while also appealing to the modern-day reader. The following paper will summarize and analyze Theissen's *The Shadow of the Galilean*, as well as critique the strengths and weaknesses of the narrative.

The fictional protagonist who doubles as the main character, Andreas of Galilee, is first seen in a jail cell. Andreas had been caught up in the chaotic demonstration of the Jews against Pilate's tax laws when he was arrested. Andreas then undergoes the interrogation and accusation of the Roman officer. It is there where the reader learns about Andreas' background. Andreas is from the city of Sepphoris in Galilee where he is a fruit and grain salesman. He is from the upper class, as his father is a decurion in Sepphoris. After the officer's interrogation, Pilate blackmails Andreas to find information and provide material about "certain religious movements in the country" in exchange for Andreas' release and freedom from jail. After much wrestling with the thought of helping an oppressive man, Andreas accepts Pilate's offer. Pilate's officer, Metilius, then gives Andreas the task of getting information on the Essenes- who they are, what they do, why they live apart from the society, and whether they have connections to John the Baptist, who also dwells in the wilderness. Andreas is also asked to get information on John the Baptist- his work, if there is any connection to the Nabataeans, and his followers. Andreas is tasked to travel around getting the necessary information, and to

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send the results by army mail or by verbal report to Metilius. Andreas learns about the Essenes from a castaway, exiled Essene named Baruch. Andreas learns that they are a very disciplined community who choose to live in the wilderness because they believe they can better serve God and obey His commandments there. They do not follow the Jewish Temple celebrations or the Jewish calendar. The Essenes are “waiting for a miraculous transformation of the world.”

In the meantime, the news breaks out that John the Baptist is dead; he was beheaded by Herod Antipas. Antipas imprisoned John the Baptist because John was telling him that it was unlawful for Antipas to marry his brother’s wife. Andreas visits his friends Chuza and Joanna, where he learns that Herodias and her daughter was behind John’s execution. Together, they discuss the implications of Herodias and Antipas’ marriage and talk about Jesus of Nazareth, a particular disciple of John the Baptist. Jesus seems to be more radical in his teachings than John the Baptist. After John the Baptist’s death, Andreas, regarding his mission finished, reports to Metilius his findings. To his dismay, Andreas is assigned a second task from Pilate: to “discover whether Jesus is a security risk for the state and whether he has any connection with the resistance fighters.” Andreas then spends the majority of the narrative researching and gathering information about Jesus from conversing with people. He first goes to Nazareth, where he learns from a poor couple Tholomaeus and Sausanna that their youngest son, Bartholomaeus, left them to be Jesus’s disciple. He learns from them that Jesus is for the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed. Jesus also says things that are offensive to the populace of Nazareth. Shortly after, on a business trip to Bethsaida Julias, Andreas is kidnapped and blindfolded by Zealots. It is there that he is reacquainted with his friend, Barabbas, and learns that Simon the Zealot left and followed Jesus. Jesus teaches Simon to love his enemies and to not fight oppression with oppression, but to “not resist one who is evil.” In order to guarantee his release from the group of Zealots, Andreas, in his letter to his parents, writes that he was imprisoned by the Romans. He correctly assumed that once the Zealots read his letter, they would be more welcoming. To Andreas’ gratitude, the Zealots read the letter and determined that he was also against the Romans. Before they released him, they demanded that he provide information to them about the Romans and that he pay a small contribution to them.

The first strength of Theissen’s *The Shadow of the Galilean* is seen in the author’s methodology. Theissen inserts citations throughout his historical narrative. This is a strength because it gives historical backing to the thoughts, feelings, assertions, and facts that Andreas says or hears from other characters in the novel. Also, it enables the reader to “see [the] web of truth and fiction for what it is.” In a sense, this allows Theissen to establish credibility and gain the trust of the modern audience. The use of the appendix at the end of the novel is also a strength, as the reader can read and obtain more information on the subject matter. Also, the reader can clarify some misunderstandings or confusions that he or she has about the topic at hand. For instance, more information about Judas’ sons was needed while reading about his sons carrying out the resistance to the Romans in secret. This information was found without

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any issue in the appendix, where it provided the sons names, James and Simon, and that they were killed by crucifixion under Tiberius Alexander.

A weakness with Theissen's novel is that he pens letters to a colleague, Dr. Kratzinger, who was thought to be real, but is actually fictional. This is troublesome because it can potentially be biased. The author, Theissen, can impart criticism that is subjective or limited to what he feels Kratzinger would say. The present-day reader could have an entirely different critique. Also, a fictitious character limits the credibility, or ethos, of the author. Theissen addressed possible objections that he could formulate an answer to. However, there may be other pertinent objections that are equally significant, but Theissen may choose to ignore or leave them out due to his inability to answer them in a convincing or reasonable way.

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