

Salt & Light: The Complete Jesus

Jonathan Geoffrey Dean

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Sifting through a variety of historical and religious source material, the inquisitive book Salt & Light seeks to understand Jesus beyond how he is presented in traditional contexts.

Jonathan Geoffrey Dean's investigative book *Salt & Light* seeks to uncover the fullest possible reality of who Jesus was.

The book's investigation into the historical reality and truth of Jesus centers on three beguiling questions—of what Jesus did and said, and of who he was. Each of these questions is troubled throughout. And while the book includes only glimpses of the ultimate answers to these three questions, they are credible in that they derive from trusted sources and various theological opinions about Jesus's significance and purpose. This work represents both caution and confidence: it elects to "trust the information we are given until we have a good reason not to."

The chapters are thematic; they concentrate on reconstructing crucial narratives from Jesus's life with care. A variety of religious and historical lenses are applied, though belief is held off as a filter; instead, the book preferences an "open mind and common sense" as its ultimate rubric. There's skepticism involved, but also a sense of being captivated by the undeniable influence of Jesus, and of Jesus's followers, over the centuries.

Source texts are ably introduced with declarations about what makes them individually useful. Though the gospel narratives are centered, other Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious and historical texts are included, too, as are side-by-side comparisons of similar accounts. Assumptions about Jesus's status as a deity are evaded; the book is unwavering in its allegiance to rational rather than spiritual thought, and to investigations and data rather than to belief.

Though there are instances of interpersonal language in the book, it more often maintains an academic distance from its audience; there are clear efforts throughout to separate the book's contents and conclusions from the realm of personal opinions and interpretations. Its sense of searching is a constant, but so is its sense that discovering the full truth may be difficult. Still, the curiosity that the book evinces about the "compelling and allusive" Jesus is appealing. Photographs, maps, and diagrams are included as a source of additional insight and clarity; the diagram of the percentage of similar content between the Christian synoptic gospels is particularly intriguing.

Sifting through a variety of historical and religious source material, the inquisitive book *Salt & Light* represents an ongoing search for the historical Jesus, seeking to understand him beyond how he is presented in strictly traditional contexts.

MELISSA WUSKE (January 19, 2022)

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