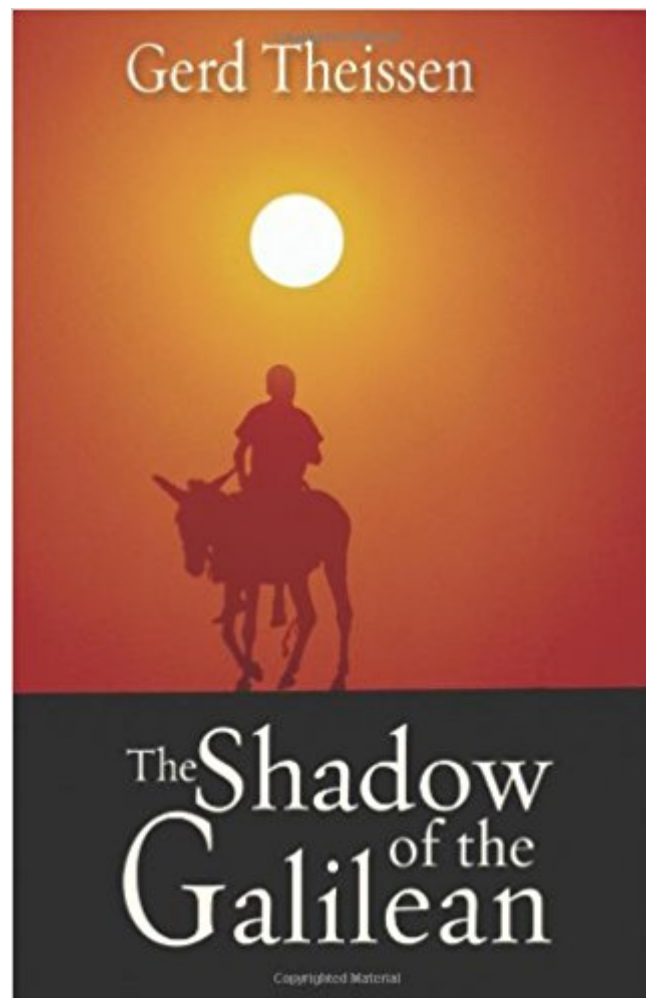




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# The Shadow Of The Galilean: The Quest Of The Historical Jesus In Narrative Form



## Synopsis

First published in 1987 by Fortress Press, this 20th anniversary edition of this classic bestseller includes a new Afterword from the author. Here, in narrative form, is an account of the activity of Jesus of Nazareth, scrupulously constructed so that it does not undercut the insights of New Testament scholarship. What makes it different from other such attempts is that Jesus never actually appears. What we find everywhere is his shadow, his effect. Such an approach avoids the usual pitfalls of the genre and lends this story - attributed to a fictitious narrator - an attraction, freshness, and power all its own. Tension and interest are maintained to the end, even for those sated with books about Jesus. Careful documentation in the footnotes shows how much of the narrative is based on ancient sources.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"An achievement in 'narrative theology,' illuminating the social world of Jesus from rich sources and imaginative reconstruction. Theissen's book combines scholarship and story. The author supplements his fictional creations with letters to a professional colleague, Dr. Kratzinger, illuminating methodology. The book should be a boon to preachers of the Gospels." --John Reumann, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

Gerd Theissen is Professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, and the author of *The Religion of the Earliest Churches* (Fortress Press, 1999) and *The Shadow of the*

Galilean (Fortress Press, 1987). He is co-author of *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Fortress Press, 1988) and a co-editor of *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Fortress Press, 2001).

Gerd Theissen's *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form* tells the story of Jesus' life through the eyes of Andreas, a Jewish merchant from Sepphoris. Throughout the book, we follow Andreas around as he tells the story of Jesus' life from a historical context through interactions with people who have come into contact with Him, and by piecing together stories and rumors about Jesus. I felt that certain aspects of this book exemplified the theme of secrecy that was found in the New Testament in the book of Mark. For example, Andreas avoids reporting stories of Jesus that he feels might be controversial, and portrays Jesus as a philosopher and a poet, instead of portraying Him as being merciful, almighty, and as the Son of God. The character Metilius converts to Christ after learning about Jewish life and religion, and after Andreas informs him about the reasons and story behind Jesus' crucifixion. I felt that this shared similarities with the reasons behind why people convert to Christ in this present day, as people tend to make the decision to follow Christ after hearing about his works and how he died on the cross for our sins. I particularly enjoyed reading this book, as even though it discussed a lot of Jewish history, it did not come off as boring, dull or repetitive. Theissen successfully informs the reader and discusses Jewish ideals and religion in a narrative instead of making it sound like a textbook with a list of historical facts. I also felt that it was nice to read and learn about Jesus through the eyes of a specific character, Andreas, instead of being told what Jesus did and whom he had spoken to. This way, I was able to get a better understanding of the impact that Jesus made on people and why he did what he did. Additionally, the method of narrative that Theissen employed throughout this book allowed me to learn more about the religious groups discussed in class such as the Essenes and Sadducees. It helped me understand aspects of them a lot better, as it was told in the form of a story, with Theissen illustrating their relationships with the Romans, and how they dealt with the Sabbath, and laws. For example, I was able to learn more about the Essenes from reading the conversation between Metilius and Andreas. I rated this book 3 stars as even though the story was told in an interesting way, I did not like the way Dr. Kratzinger was portrayed. I felt like Theissen's tone in their letters sounded too aggressive, and gave the impression that he was not willing to take any of Dr. Kratzinger's advice into account, even though he had invited him to criticize his

work. Additionally, I felt like Theissen could have placed more emphasis on Jesus's divinity, instead of only focusing on the human aspect of him. If he were to incorporate more information about how Jesus was God, it would have presented a more accurate representation of the historical Jesus to readers. Overall, I feel that Theissen successfully allows the reader to imagine how it was like to live in the time of Jesus from a whole new perspective. I would definitely recommend this book to others.

Theologian Theissen's novel traces Jesus in his own time through the facts and rumors circulated and chronicled by an educated Jew who attempts to observe him without actually getting to meet him. The format enables the author to speculate about how events described in the biblical miracles may have been exaggerated or misunderstood in the several decades between their actual occurrences and the writing of the Gospels. It's a useful technique and perhaps leads to a greater understanding of the teachings and formation of the early church but is too contrived to make a really great novel.

Gerd Theissen's, *The Shadow of the Galilean* is a historical fiction narrative that follows the narrator of the story, Andreas, through his daily life in first century Palestine. Throughout his journey, Andreas seeks to find and investigate a man named Jesus of Nazareth, whom many talk about, but Andreas does not know. Theissen addresses various distinctions in social class hierarchy by speaking to the core values and lifestyles of different Jewish groups. The Essenes, a community that goes against the usual lifestyle, rejects slavery because it is an offense against human equality and the law of nature (525). They interpret marriage laws strictly and reject all polygamy because God has made humanity as man and woman, and not as man and two women (546). The Sadducees, another Jewish group, are described through Chuza, one of Andreas's business partners, who is said to be part of a tradition of belief among the upper class that likes to enjoy life (595). Joanna, Chuza's wife, speaks to the differing rights of women and men in a marriage. In Rome, a wife can get a divorce, but among her people, only the husband can (629). Lastly, while on his journey, Andreas comes in contact with an impoverished couple in Nazareth, named Susanna and Tholomaeus. Most of their sons disappeared into the hills and became Zealots out of desperation and not knowing another way out (878). However, Jesus offers those Zealots who are willing to give up their way of life a new lifestyle (1852). In the end, Andreas realizes that Jesus's teachings to "love your enemies" through breaking down the barriers between people and having

these stratifications lose importance, is the only way out of the crisis in his land (1974). Although Andreas never sees Jesus in person, he is able to see shadows of Jesus and piece together characteristics of Jesus from anecdotes, stories, traditions and rumors throughout his journey. However, wherever Andreas went there were always contradictions in the stories he heard about Jesus. These contradictions left him questioning Jesus's character. Therefore, Andreas was attracted to and repelled from certain things regarding Jesus. Andreas was afraid of the disturbances Jesus made, but also attracted to him because he believed that they contained hope and promised change for the better. Andreas was most attracted to Jesus because he too felt as though he was "hovering in no-man's-land" (1345). Andreas was less believing of the miracle stories, such as the loaves that fed many people, because they do not all line up. Many people in the 21st century find themselves in a similar place as Andreas. Due to the media, bad personal interactions and personal motives, people today can be left feeling uneasy about what it really means to be part of the Christian community. However, putting contradictions aside and developing a personal relationship with Jesus will change one's life. For Andreas, his life was forever accompanied by the voice of Jesus. When looking at the novel at a literary level, Theissen did a great job utilizing vivid imagery and literary devices, such as similes and metaphors. Additionally, Theissen included a letter between himself and Dr. Kratzinger, a colleague, at the end of each chapter. Though this was creative and unique, in some cases it distracted from the narrative and hindered its flow. However, overall, I would give this novel 4 stars and recommend it to others based on all the different facets I was able to learn about Jesus's life, the gospels, and Jewish life in Palestine, I found it to be an enjoyable alternative to reading the typical school textbook.

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