



Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity

Paula Fredriksen

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In her new book, the acclaimed historian of Christianity gives us a portrait of Jesus that departs radically from the traditional. Paula Fredriksen draws on the narratives of all four evangelists, both John and the Synoptics, as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jewish authorities of Jesus' time -- Philo, Paul, and Josephus -- who wrote in Greek, and early rabbinic writings. She shows us a historical Jesus living in the tumultuous world of late-Second Temple Judaism: an observant Jew of his time, a prophetic teacher who traveled through the villages of Galilee and frequently in and around Jerusalem. At the center of her book she brings us to the questions raised by the least disputed fact about Jesus' life: his death. Jesus was executed by the Roman prefect, Pilate, on or around Passover, in the manner Rome reserved particularly for political insurrectionists -- crucifixion. Pilate could not have planned this very imperial death for a Jesus concerned purely with Jewish controversy.

Why was crucifixion chosen as the means of execution? If Jesus was executed as a political insurrectionist, why were none of his followers executed or even arrested?

The author's quest in search of the answers takes us through the religious world -- Jewish and pagan -- of Mediterranean antiquity, through the tangle of Judean and Galilean politics, and through the surprisingly intimate social interactions of Jewish and gentile communities in the ancient city. And it is through the Gospel of John -- a text out of favor in most academic reconstructions -- that she finds the answer to the interpretive dilemma posed by Jesus' execution and his disciples' survival.

She shows us a Jesus firmly situated in his native religious milieu, a Jesus whose mission and message, whose Jewish life and Roman death, account for his movement's rapid spread through territorial Israel to diaspora synagogues, its ready embrace of Gentiles, and its enduring commitment to the message of the crucified Messiah and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews won the 1999 National Jewish Book Award in the category of Jewish-Christian Relations.

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