



Gospel Truth

Russell Shorto

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With the skill of a seasoned journalist and the passion of an amateur sleuth, Russell Shorto offers a radical revision of the gospel story: a new composite of Jesus that is based on scientific research and supported by some of our most conservative religious scholars. A vivid and sometimes shocking reconstruction of the life and times of Jesus, Gospel Truth will change the way we see Jesus forever.

Gospel Truth Details

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Walter says

This is an excellent book. Russel Shorto's examination of the current trends in New Testament scholarship, and in particular the work of the Jesus Seminar (and its opponents), is a well-written, balanced, informative, inspiring and enjoyable. In addition to learning a good deal about the state of contemporary scholarship and theology, the reader may also have his/her own personal beliefs challenged and informed/evolved.

Shorto starts by introducing the reader to the Jesus Seminar, its work and, eventually, its critics. Essentially, this is a non-denominational, inter-disciplinary research effort to discover/uncover the "historical Jesus," basically Jesus the human being and first century Jewish peasant and subsequent itinerant prophet as opposed to the mythologized Christ on whom the world's largest religion is based. It is revelatory work, as public awareness of the current state of New Testament scholarship isn't high. In fact, the vast majority of those calling themselves Christians believe (literal) things about Jesus that most scholars do not believe to be historically accurate. In fact, a major thrust of the Seminar's critics is to insure that this 'belief gap' is not exposed, as the implication for modern Christianity is that many of its seminal tenets will be disproved and, in so doing, may alienate most (if not virtually all) of its erstwhile adherents.

That his treatment of all sides of the subject is so respectful and careful is a tribute to the author's abundant skill and is critical to the book's impact. It's hard to take him to task because he is so truly "fair and balanced" in his approach. If I were to quibble, about the only significant criticisms of the work are that the author may bend over a little too far backward to be so at various points and that the book starts more slowly than it finishes. Other than this, it is an enjoyable and informative read that will encourage the reader to compare, contrast and evolve his/her beliefs along the way.

Accordingly, I recommend this book to all who are interested in contemporary New Testament scholarship and theology - believers and non-, those more fundamental in approach and those more heretical, etc. - and to those who may be interested in evolving their own belief system. Essentially Shorto supplies an interesting and compelling overview that can serve as a strong foundation for one's own further exploration. You will come to know Jesus differently and better ... but not completely (which, the author notes, is an impossible task), thereby drawing you deeper into the mystery that is God....

Cynthia Scott says

I really enjoyed this book. It is an excellent review of the search for Jesus in history, the historical Jesus. It presents the many approaches and ideas which have occurred starting with the Reformation, but the main focus is on the research on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Q documents, the Jesus Seminar, and various scholarly (and some not so scholarly) interpretations of the material. The book is a rich history of the times as well as theological study.

Shorto reports in the introduction that he had anticipated that his attachment to his Catholic upbringing would be over when he finished researching and writing this book, but he found the results to be quite different for him personally.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the history of Judaism and/or Christianity and their place in the history of Civilization.

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I am now more than half way through my second reading of this fascinating book.

Aaron says

"Historical Jesus" work fascinates me, and this was a great (but somewhat dated) overview of the field. It is difficult to credibly dispute that Jesus lived, although there are a very small number of scholars who do, but the views of who Jesus actually was vary greatly across the academic world. This book does a good job of summarizing the main strands of those views, and of pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Dennis John Peyton says

One of the best history books on the subject

Nicely brings history and mythology together which lends a deeper meaning to the subject of religion. It made me think I may still find something worth while after all in an unconventional way.

Sarah Wells says

I spent a good deal of time reading through this book on the search for the "historical Jesus" - a worthy effort, of course, but I have to admit that I'm disappointed in the efforts of the Jesus Seminar and others who dissect the gospels and base their version of truth only after those things that would have been embarrassing or unheard of for a hero to do or be in that time period. Other than this frustration with the research, I have to hand it to Shorto for his efforts to preserve "the other side" - the mystical, miraculous aspects of faith that should not be grounded in the historical. Faith and belief are not reliant upon what we know of Jesus, where He walked, or what He ate. This book, along with others on the study of the first century, can be used by believers to enhance our experience of the gospels as long as we are willing to truly think through what the author proposes, and what the author states out of emotional charge or subjectivity.

David Quinn says

This book may have strong appeal to atheists and it will surely infuriate fundamentalist christians. Overall I thought it was good, if a bit uneven.

The book's best moments came when the author presented the historical consensus on the four gospels (although the Gospel according to John is barely mentioned) and the influence of certain Old Testament books on the writings of Mark, Matthew and Luke (whoever these gospel writers may have been). Information on the Jesus of history and what miracles he may or may not have performed was also a highlight.

History is this book's strength. Conjecture is its weakness. As Shorto periodically got away from the

historical consensus and introduced competing theories of who Jesus may have been he was swinging at air. Here he spoke with far less authority and the material was simply far less interesting. Also, Shorto made too much of how Jesus's teachings were largely nonsensical. I've heard enough excellent homilies about several of the cited messages to feel comfortable that they actually are very meaningful from a historical perspective and are meaningful today. In that regard I felt that Shorto cherry-picked to make a point.

Gospel Truth is provocative in a good way but maybe not the best book to read during the Christmas season.

Philip Garside says

A helpful survey of historical Jesus scholarship as it stood 20 years ago, and reactions to it then.

Andrew Kosztyo says

Author Shorto has achieved the nearly impossible -- written a book about the historical life and times of Jesus that will be a source of interest and inspiration to believers and non-believers alike.

Tom says

If you want an easy-to-read distillation of the research of the Jesus Seminar and other recent biographers of Jesus, Shorto's book is your best bet. He proceeds through Jesus's life chronologically, taking up such issues as whether there was a Virgin birth, was Jesus really born in Bethlehem, the relationship or perhaps rivalry between Jesus and John the Baptist, the authenticity of his miracles, etc. Of course, the fiercest debate is saved for last: the nature of the Resurrection -- did it occur literally, or was there a vision, or perhaps a mass hallucination? Shorto endeavors not to take sides, but it seemed rather clear to me that he accepts the debunking efforts of the Jesus Seminar theologians. A thought-provoking book that is bound to stir up some heated discussion in any Bible-study group. Not recommended for those who subscribe to view that "the Bible says it, that settles it."

Connie says

This was an interesting review of the "historical Jesus." Shorto is a good writer and I found the book compelling.

He did a good job researching and provided good end notes.

Garrett says

The first few chapters of this book were fascinating. They get right to the heart of the historical Jesus that the author is presenting, and why the gospels included references to a virgin birth, miracles, healings, etc. As you get into the later chapters, the author focuses on theories from different sources about specific aspects of the gospels. The chapters get into how factors like the Greek culture and John the Baptist influenced the

historical Jesus. Later, the author gets into what may have really happened at specific events in the gospels. It is interesting material, but the writing gets much more academic after those first few chapters. The insights also get more muddled. The author presents several different theories for how events may have happened rather than a more concise, "This is what probably happened and here's why," approach.

Laura Gabbard says

I've read several books on historical Jesus scholarship and this is one of the better ones. Using both canonical and non-canonical sources from Middle Eastern history and culture from the time period, this book paints a realistic and believable picture of who Jesus may have been.

Joeydag says

This is the second book I've read by Russell Shorto and I've enjoy both of them. This is a great review of where the search for the historical Jesus has accomplished, as of 1997, and the context for what the search means. For being such a serious subject I still found my self entertained. There is a chapter on John the Baptist, he being so important to the story of Jesus, and that chapter is titled "The Big Dipper."

It was very informative and open-minded. I recommend to this to anyone with questions about the gospels.

Nancy Thormann says

This books explains why I don't go to church anymore. The chapter "The Historical Jesus Goes to Church" describes how some ministers are trying to incorporate the historical Jesus into their sermons. I wish more minister were like that. I'd probably go to church more than once every 10 years. This book comes closest to what I believe Jesus was really like.

John says

Rather than give a long, detailed review, I'll just say that the author does an excellent job with his intention in giving historical context to the time of the New Testament. A great choice for those who would like to explore why events likely didn't happen exactly as stated, though Shorto does not at all throw the baby out with the bath water (atheist-style de-bunking).

As one example, the underlying Hebrew word used to describe Mary did *not* imply virginity at all, but that a woman hadn't yet become pregnant.
