



The Life of Jesus Critically Examined (Lives of Jesus)

David Friedrich Strauss

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David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (1835) brought about a new dawn in Biblical criticism by applying the 'myth theory' to the life of Jesus. Strauss treated the Gospel narrative like any other historical work, and denied all supernatural elements in the Gospels. *Das Leben Jesu* created an overnight sensation and Strauss became embroiled in fierce controversy. This earliest English version of 1846 was translated by the novelist George Eliot, and was her first published book.

Strauss's interpretation of biblical events was a result of and a response to the attacks on orthodox Christianity brought by the Enlightenment. In the face of scepticism about such biblical events as miracles, his aim was to explain how Christians came to believe when there was no objective historical basis for their faith. Taking the resurrection as the key article of faith, his verdict was that religion was an expression of the human mind's ability to generate myths and interpret them as truths revealed by God. Influenced by Hegel and Schleiermacher, Strauss characterized Christianity as a stage in the evolution of pantheism that had reached its culmination in Hegelian philosophy. He thus created an entirely new atmosphere of scholarship on Christ's life and historical criticism of the Bible. The furore turned the *Life of Jesus* into a cause célèbre and to German liberals Strauss became a symbol for the freedom of thought.

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