



There Ariseth Light in the Darkness: A Novel of First Century Galilee

JV Love

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It is fun to follow along as each character in this Christian novel fits into the biblical account: hearing Jesus preach, debating the Bible, and struggling to come to grips with a new world.

J. V. Love's thrilling historical novel *There Ariseth Light in the Darkness* makes a case for a Christian message.

First century life around Galilee is captured through a series of shifting perspectives. Jonah, an orphan, turns to banditry after he is forced off of his land for failing to pay rent. Vitus, a Roman soldier, struggles with the evil that is done in Caesar's name. Azara, a widow, lost everything when her husband died and now dreams of a better world. Alone, these characters move through a bleak landscape, limited in their prospects and possibilities, until Jesus arrives to challenge the status quo and bring hope into the world.

Plot-wise, prior to meeting Jesus, survival is the characters' main concern. They live in a difficult time, marked by crushing poverty, state-sponsored violence, and not much hope. Each character persists using whatever wits they have, with each having occasional flashes of divine inspiration. It is fun to follow along as each fits into the biblical account: hearing Jesus preach, debating the Bible, and struggling to come to grips with a new world. The characters' story lines work toward happy conclusions in keeping with the Christian spirit of the book, if their neatness strains credulity.

The text's developments draw upon biblical stories, too. In parable fashion, Jonah and his brothers discover a Samaritan who is injured, though in this novel the man meets a grisly end. This violence plays on contemporary expectations of justice and fairness, showing how such ideas were novel in the first century. The text develops historical context for each event, adding depth that complements the work it is trying to achieve.

Compelling and clear descriptions of the ancient world include evocative details about landscapes, cities, and people. The book's violence is cinematic, if its crucifixion scene is cringeworthy. There aren't many surprises, though the text does go to a few interesting and unexpected places, including considering the roles of women and presenting Jesus with an otherworldly, not-quite-human air. It is effective in bringing its particular picture of an ancient land to life.

The story includes familiar minor characters from the gospels, if such characters never rise above their biblical tropes. It comes to read like a novelization of a religious tract that's designed with evangelism in mind. It includes contextual guides, discussion questions for reflection, and historical source material, though some such work is heavy-handed.

There Ariseth Light in the Darkness is a Christian novel set in first century Galilee that argues that God is still needed today.

JEREMIAH ROOD (May 15, 2019)

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