

JOSHUA



JOSHUA
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

James Graham Johnston

Joshua, The Light of the World

Copyright © 2016 James Graham Johnston

ISBN-13: 978-0692672501

ISBN-10: 0692672508

MSE Press

Second Edition

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD v
I	MELCHIZEDEK 1
II	COMMENCEMENT 8
III	ORDINATION 27
IV	ADVANCEMENT 42
V	REJECTION 55
VI	EXILE 75
VII	RESTORATION 84
VIII	CONSOLIDATION 100
IX	TO JERUSALEM 124
X	FAREWELL 143
XI	DEPARTURE 158
XII	AFTER THE ASCENSION 168
	AFTERWORD: IMPEDIMENTS 177
	MAP OF 1ST CENTURY PALESTINE 181
	BIBLIOGRAPHY 183
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 185

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Though he is known today as Jesus Christ, while he lived he would have been called Yehoshua ben Yosef (Joshua, son of Joseph). I have used the name “Joshua” in this book to differentiate his life from the many theological connotations now associated with the name “Jesus.” I wanted to present his life and message as it appears in the four Gospels, unencumbered by doctrinal interpretations of two thousand years.

This book—Joshua: The Light of the World—assembles, as a composite chronological story, the four New Testament Gospels about Jesus. The four Gospels form the essential substance of this account, but other accounts and historical research help to connect the Gospels as one continuous chronological story.¹

The word gospel means “good news.” This is the essence of the Gospel of Jesus:

*We are sons and daughters of the living God.
God is present in our lives and loves each of us dearly.*

To understand that Gospel more fully, we must return to the question he posed to his inner circle of apostles: “Who do you say that I am?” The answer to that question was provided, according to firsthand accounts, by a voice from heaven: “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” Listen to him and observe him, for “He who has seen me,” said Jesus, “has seen the Father.”

The four Gospels of the New Testament enable us to both listen to him and observe the life he lived. When we listen to him in those stories, we hear him refer to himself as “The Bread of Life,” “The Way,

¹ I have woven direct quotes from the New Testament into the text. The later chapters have more direct quotes than the earlier ones because most of the content in the four Gospels speak of the last year and a half of Jesus’ life. Sometimes I adjusted the grammar and word usage from the New Testament writers to try to maintain a consistent voice. I have also included elements of the detailed account of Jesus’ life found in the Urantia Papers titled “The Life and Teachings of Jesus.”

the Truth, and the Life,” and “The Light of the World.” “I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.”²

John Mark wrote the first story of Jesus’ life, now known as the Gospel of Mark. He wrote his version, as outlined by the Apostle Peter, not long after Peter’s crucifixion.

Isador, who penned the Gospel of Matthew, relied on the Apostle Matthew’s written notes. He wrote his story using Mark’s as a foundation, and so with Isador’s narrative, more information about Jesus was added to John Mark’s story.

The physician Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke, interviewed many people who had met Jesus or heard him speak. He built his story on the foundations of Isador’s and Mark’s narratives.

Late in his very long life, the Apostle John told his story to his associate Nathan, whose written narrative became the Gospel of John. It provides much content not found in the other three Gospels.

Those four Gospels shed abundant light on the way of Jesus’ historic life and his teaching about his compassion-filled Father. Yet Jesus also continues to lead people as the Light of the World through his own spiritual presence.

With his departure from this world, he bestowed his Spirit of Truth. This is the “Counselor,” the “Paraclete,” the intimate spiritual companion he delivered to all the world that accompanies the spiritual presence of his Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ personal Spirit of Truth perpetually stands at the door of the human soul and knocks, inviting each of us into a friendship with God.

Friendship with God

How could we refer to the God of Jesus’ gospel, the One who upholds the universe, who sees to the courses of the planets and of electrons, who gives life to a barren world, and who hangs the earth upon nothing? We may call God “Abba”—roughly translated, *Papa* or *Dad*—the word Jesus used when he spoke to God.

For us to know God as an intimate Papa, the religion of Jesus is an indispensable guide. Jesus portrayed a God who probes the very depths of our souls, who seeks us out, searches through the rubble of our

² John 12:46

material concerns, searches for us when we are lost, and rejoices when we are found.

Jesus' faith had the purity of a child's trust. His emphasis on a personal relationship with an intimately compassionate God is a centerpiece of his religion. Friendship with God is the very heart and soul of his message, and it is available to everyone, of any ethnic culture, gender, sexual orientation, racial strain, or religious affiliation.

Jesus' religion of the spirit is for all. We are all fallible; even Jesus said, "Why do you call me good? None is good but God." It is not our present condition that matters so much but rather, the direction of our spiritual growth.

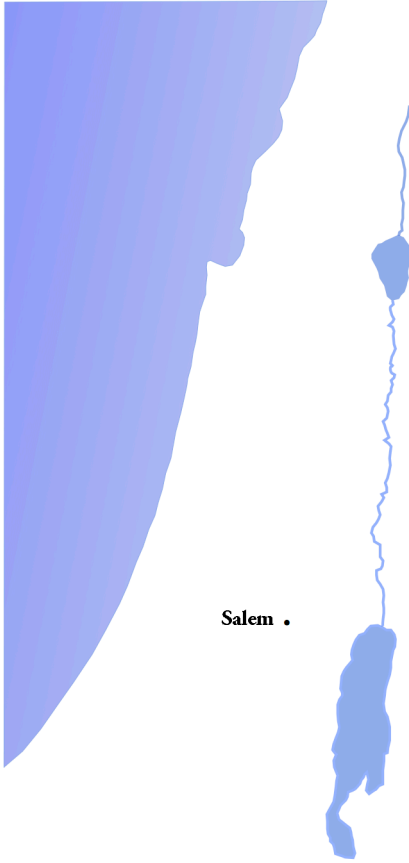
The good news is that we are valued and loved individually as the progeny of the Gracious One of Eternity and that the Father of all has an eternal purpose for our lives. We are privileged to personally seek and befriend the attentive God who is also seeking our friendship.

One common attribute marks the lives of those who have discovered an intimate relationship with God: *love*. The spirit engenders empathy, compassion, and unity while it simultaneously cultivates natural diversity.

The religion of Jesus can mightily transform civilization, and someday undoubtedly will. The very heart and soul of the universe resonates with that destiny, for this is our eternal inheritance that Jesus made clear: we are sons and daughters of the living, intimate, and compassionate God. "He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."³

This is the story of Jesus, *The Light of the World*, who came that we "might have life and have it more abundantly." If we seek a way to an abundant life, we all—Christian, Jew, Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, and Jain—can look to his life to illuminate our way.

³ John 1:12,13



I MELCHIZEDEK

FOUR THOUSAND YEARS ago, in a small nomadic community northwest of the Dead Sea, one individual arrived to prepare the world for the birth of Jesus. His contemporary, Abraham, called him “Lord”; the Dead Sea Scrolls speak of him reverently; the Book of Genesis refers to him as “a priest of God Most High”; a New Testament writer says that he is “like the Son of God”; the city of Jerusalem still marks his name: “Melchizedek.”

About Melchizedek we have much to say, much that is difficult to explain now that you have grown so dull of hearing. For indeed, though by this

time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the ABC of God's oracles over again; it has come to this, that you need milk instead of solid food. Melchizedek has no father, no mother, no lineage; his years have no beginning, his life no end. He is like the Son of God: he remains a priest for all time. Consider how great he must be for Abraham the patriarch to give him a tithe of the finest of the spoil.⁴

Melchizedek appeared in this world as a fully developed man, two thousand years before Jesus. He was not born here, nor did he die here, yet he lived here for nearly one hundred years. On his first day in this world, Machiventa Melchizedek entered the tent of a Chaldean herder and said simply, "I am Melchizedek, priest of El Elyon, the Most High, the one and only God."

The truth about God had become confused and hazy since the age when "the sons of God had intercourse with the daughters of men and got children by them."⁵ With the planned arrival here of a Divine Son, Melchizedek came well in advance to prepare the world for him.

He established a teaching community called "Salem," meaning "peace," which later became a settlement renamed "Jesub," and much later, a city called "Jerusalem." He prohibited the long-standing primitive ritual of slaughtering animals as sacrifice. He told his followers that another Son of God would someday be born into the world. With one of his leading disciples, Abraham, he made a solemn covenant: "Look to the heavens and number the stars if you are able; so numerous shall your seed be."

Rumors about Melchizedek spread rapidly among the many nomadic tribes. He attracted many early disciples, and he spoke to them in their native tongues. He taught these new disciples according to their capacities to grasp his teaching. To some he taught more than others, but to all he emphasized the central theme of his teaching: *Gain eternal life through faith in God.*

During his nearly one hundred years in the flesh, Melchizedek trained and sent out waves of missionaries to remote parts of the world. They carried wide and far his revelations about God and the cosmos.

⁴ Hebrews 5:11,12; 7:3,4 with text rearranged for emphasis and continuity

⁵ Genesis 6:4

Many modern ideas about heaven, angels, God, and the trinity are derived from Melchizedek's original teaching.

The first of Melchizedek's missionaries—men and women—were sent to the nearby regions of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor. Later, other missionaries traveled further, establishing teaching centers across the continents of Asia and Europe. These Salem missionaries met with varying degrees of success.

Entrenched Brahman priests in Northern India resisted them. People in China received them more favorably. The people in Mesopotamia ultimately rejected them when the missionaries attempted to reform their sexual mores. Their descendants in Mesopotamia privately kept their religion alive, inscribing much of their religious teaching on clay tablets. The Book of Job and many of the Psalms were derived from these clay tablets, discovered in Babylon by the later exiled Jews.

Aware of their lineage from the early "sons of God," the Egyptians readily accepted the teaching of the missionaries. Much of the Book of Proverbs was written in Egypt after the arrival of the Salem missionaries. The pharaoh Ikhnaton later subscribed to the Melchizedek doctrines and attempted to convert the entire country to a monotheistic religion; his short life was an insufficient foundation for his large agenda. Twelve of Ikhnaton's hymns are still preserved in the Book of Psalms.

The Hebrew slaves in Egypt had few meaningful ideas about religion and no formal organization. Moses held this polyglot mass of people together with the laws of a fearsome God, a revised version of the Melchizedek doctrines that was necessary to mold an unruly people.

The seeds of Melchizedek's revelations were planted across Eurasia. That seed nearly withered as the centuries wore on, but it was revived as a global renaissance in the sixth century BC. A remarkable array of teachers, among them Lao Tse, Confucius, Siddhartha, Zoroaster, Jainist teachers, Hebrew prophets, and pre-Socratic Greek philosophers reawakened and elevated a spiritual consciousness.

A worldwide infrastructure of religious and philosophical thought evolved. From Greek philosophy in the West to Taoism in the East, an enlightenment in many ways compatible with Melchizedek's original revelation found its way into contemporary life all over the known world.

Eastern and Western cultures established receptive foundations for the enlightened message of the prophesied Lord. The whole world stage was set for yet another revelation of the Gracious One of Eternity.

THE HEBREWS

Though the light of truth found its home in many cultures and in many languages, certain nomads stand out for the astonishing tenacity with which they adhered to Melchizedek's emphasis on faith in one God—the Hebrews.

After Moses' death, their religion ebbed and flowed. They entered many dark periods that put the Salem doctrines at risk. Their many bold prophets ceaselessly swung the torch of enlightenment back to illuminate the way.

Their nation struggled with foreign invaders; with internal divisions; and with separation, captivity, and near extinction as a people. Yet, they endured, and, with them, some of the most inspiring religious literature ever written. Of all the world cultures exposed to the Salem doctrines, the Jews alone survived as a nation worshipping one God.

As the first century AD began, the Jews were yet again overrun by a dominating foreign power, this time the Romans.

THE ROMAN WORLD

The rising Roman Empire was pulsing with vigorous life. Trade and travel flourished wherever Roman law ruled. The Romans, having cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates, made such abundant navigational use of the sea that they called it their "lake." Ancient caravan routes from the East linked the near Orient to the flourishing markets of the Mediterranean.

Commerce thrived as never before. People traveled freely on elaborate networks of well-built roads—an enduring testament to ingenious Roman engineering. The Romans built nearly fifty-thousand miles of primary hard-surface roads—enough to circle the globe twice. Many of these roads endure to this day; their substrate was often nearly three feet thick.

The doggedly consistent mindset that produced systematic language, government, and warfare also systematically produced prolific feats of civil and structural engineering, from Britain to Babylon. Their Herculean engineering achievements seem scarcely short of miraculous.

For the first time in the history of the Western world, an intricate network of travel routes linked centers of commerce and culture within one overarching government. The Roman Empire included all of southern Europe, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Northwest Africa.

The Romans ruled with a firm but tolerant hand. Conquered territories received ample latitude to retain their traditional cultural and religious practices. The Romans sought natural resources, trade routes, and tax revenue more than social uniformity. Earlier Greek invaders had already established a common language and culture.

Through his conquests over three centuries earlier, Alexander the Great of Macedonia had spread a unifying Hellenic culture and language throughout what later became the Roman world. Hellenic art, theater, literature, philosophy, science, sports, and technology infused the empire. The educated classes all spoke Greek.

The Romans had borrowed generously from Greek builders, applying many of their techniques to architecture, engineering, and town planning. Greco-Roman architecture studded the landscape along the eastern Mediterranean. Stone theaters and arenas blossomed wherever the seed of Greek passion for drama and sports took root.

Greek arts flowered and Greek philosophy flourished. Stoics, Skeptics, Cynics, and Epicureans won many converts. These philosophies stimulated the educated classes but offered little salvation for the common people.

A cavernous gap separated the numerous poor from the few rich. Though it was an age of prosperity, the wealthy elite gained enormously while the common people barely made do. Merchants and craftsmen had just begun forming a middle class. The vast majority of people were either slaves or proletariat.

Still, the entire Mediterranean world was alive with a new commercial, cultural, and spiritual vitality. The “Pax Romana”—peace among the nation-states of the empire—created conditions highly conducive to the development and expansion of new ideas, trade, technology, culture, and religion.

In the first century BC, Herod the Great ascended to the throne as agent ruler in the region the Romans called Palestine. His amicable relationship with Rome afforded Jews ready opportunity to continue the dispersion that had begun under the Greeks. And disperse they did.

With their migration, they transplanted their long-standing religious

traditions and built their synagogues—their centers of culture, community, and strenuously attained theology. They brought progressive morality and religious integrity wherever they migrated; they lived in virtually every province of the Roman and Parthian empires. Jews constituted about ten percent of the Roman population and as much as forty percent of the population of Alexandria, the center of Greek culture and learning.

Jewish pilgrims by the hundreds of thousands regularly attended the annual festivals in their sacred religious capital—Jerusalem. Their religious zeal attracted many gentile proselytes. The gentiles unwilling to convert were maintained as a fringe of believers known as “God fearers.” The temple in Jerusalem had a court for these gentile believers.

The common people of the Roman world hungered for a religious life that would offer comfort, liberty, and salvation from a punishing existence. With all the achievements of Greek and Roman civilizations, no truly soul-satisfying religion had yet been born.

The gentile religions consisted largely of Greco-Roman mythologies, emperor worship, astrology, and mystery cults, none of which filled a deep yearning for the solace of the spirit. Judaism, with its centuries-old heritage of enlightened prophets and inspired literature, was a balm for the soul. The Hebrew prophets, especially the later ones, portrayed a compassionate God—a message that could bring comfort to demoralized masses.

The Romans were the last of the waves of foreign aggressors to ebb over the Hebrews. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and Greece had all held dominion over the Hebrews, and they had all left their racial imprint. The Jews owed much of their creative resilience to the providential mix of these many racial strains. The Hebrew people evolved as a blended race. They were ideally constituted to carry religious teaching to either the East or the West.

At the crossroads of three continents, Palestine was of vital political interest. The Romans had built arterial roads for greater access into and out of the territory. Most of the ancient caravan routes from the East passed through Palestine to gain access to Mediterranean seaports.

More than half of these eastern caravan routes passed through Galilee, a region of often stunning beauty with dramatic hills and fertile valleys. The Sea of Galilee, cradled by steep picturesque cliffs, lay inland like a vast puddle of deep quiet, its surface six hundred feet below sea

level. Ethereal pastel vistas cast a calming aura at the rising or setting of the sun, but unexpected winds descending from the surrounding cliffs could whip the sea into a turbulent frenzy.

During the winter season, heavy rains saturated the fertile soil of Galilee, producing figs, dates, olives, grapes, barley, wheat, and corn in abundance. Fishing trades in the many villages around the lake prospered.

More gentiles than Jews lived in that region. The Galilean Jews had assimilated many of the cultural norms of the gentile culture, unlike their compatriots to the south in Judea.

The Jews were united by one attitude: they fully expected the arrival of a prophesied Messiah, one who would restore their exalted national position as the chosen people of God. This was an enchanted age of anticipation, in Galilee and all of Israel. The heroic Maccabean exploits were still fresh in their memories. The Jewish people not only believed in miracles; they *expected* them.



An unprecedented world stage had been fashioned for the establishment and spread of a new religion. The whole Roman Empire was hungry for a soul-satisfying faith. Interest in philosophy had attained new heights. A well-organized, efficient Roman government enabled peace among nations. The religion of Judaism, fashioned by generations of daring prophets, had established outposts dispersed throughout the Roman Empire.

On this opportune world theater, a profound Jewish teacher, delivered at this moment in history, would have an ideal opportunity to disseminate a world-transforming religion—*if favorably received*. It is one of the great enigmas of history that a world order so well orchestrated, with a people so well prepared, for a plan so well developed, could go so wrong.