



BIBLE LENS

APRIL 18, 2022

Shining a light on the weekly Bible Lessons published in the *Christian Science Quarterly*®

Probation After Death

April 18–24, 2022

from the **Golden Text**

Isaiah 9:2

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Written in the eighth century BC, this text is regarded by some scriptural authorities as part of King Hezekiah's coronation ritual. Others believe it was intended to celebrate the birth of a new descendant of David and the promise of an end to oppression. (Early Christians declared the prophecy fulfilled at Jesus' birth; see example in [Matthew 4:16](#), citation 11.) For both Christians and Jews the passage reflects renewed hope in God's deliverance and provision.

from the **Responsive Reading**

Psalms 27:4, 5

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

"Inquiring" in God's temple, per one source, implies that "we determine to associate ourselves with Christlike ends and Christlike means." Another commentator notes that being sheltered in "the secret of his tabernacle" carries the sweet significance of a guest given access to his host's most private rooms: "He would not merely admit him to His premises; . . . but he would admit him to the private apartments—the place to which He Himself withdrew to be alone, and where no stranger, and not even one of the family, would venture to intrude."

Pavilion (Hebrew, *sōk*) and *tabernacle* (*'ōhel*) together represent a range of refuges, from an animal's lair or shepherd's tent to a sacred space of worship.

Psalms 27:13, 14

I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

A translator offers this wording for verse 13: “[What . . . would have become of me] had I not believed that I would see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living!” The Psalmist urges expectant waiting on God, as a second scholar suggests: “Wait at his door with prayer; wait at his foot with humility; wait at his table with service; wait at his window with expectancy.”

from **Section 1**

3 | [Psalms 23:4](#)

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.

“Shadow of death” appears several times in the Hebrew Bible to depict mortal danger or the realm of death (see examples in [Job 10:21, 22](#); [Isaiah 9:2](#); [Amos 5:8](#)). Many experts see it as an allusion to deep mental darkness as well. The author proclaims God’s protection even in the midst of darkness and danger.

from **Section 2**

8 | [II Kings 2:1, 6, 7, 11](#)

It came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. . . . And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: . . . And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

Elijah’s mantle, or cloak, symbolizes his spiritual authority. He used it to confer the prophetic office on Elisha (see [I Kings 19:19](#)), and Elisha later wielded it to divide the Jordan River (see [II Kings 2:13, 14](#)).

Communities of prophets had been established at Bethel and Jericho, sites Elijah visits on his farewell journey (see [II Kings 2:2–5](#)). The fifty younger seers, hoping to witness Elijah’s departure, show respect by waiting at a distance.

Whirlwinds are mentioned several times in Scripture, including in Job’s interchanges with God (see [Job 38:1](#); [40:6](#)) and in oracles such as [Zechariah 9:14](#). A vision of fiery horses and chariots occurs again in Dothan, in answer to Elisha’s prayer when Syrians surround the city (see [II Kings 6:17](#)).

from **Section 3**

10 | [Luke 7:1, 11–16](#)

Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. . . . And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow:

and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.

Ancient burial places were located outside city walls, and bodies were wrapped in linen and carried openly rather than in closed caskets. In Nain, a hillside town near Nazareth in Galilee, the dead were taken to nearby caves.

This is the first instance recorded of Christ Jesus raising the dead. Witnesses acknowledge God’s power with the assertion “God hath visited his people”—language used in Luke’s account of events leading to Jesus’ birth as well (see [1:68, 78](#)). God’s activity and presence are often described as “visiting” in the Hebrew Bible (see examples in [Genesis 21:1](#); [Exodus 3:15, 16](#); [I Samuel 2:21](#); [Psalms 65:9](#); [Jeremiah 29:10](#)).

Commentaries compare Jesus’ healing of this young man to stories of Elijah and Elisha, each of whom raised sons from death (see [I Kings 17:17–24](#); [II Kings 4:18–37](#)).

11 | [Matthew 4:16](#)

The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

Matthew prefaces his citing of Isaiah’s prophecy ([Isaiah 9:2](#); Golden Text) with a reference to Jesus’ move from Nazareth to Capernaum (see [Matthew 4:12–15](#)). Called Jesus’ “own city” ([9:1](#)), Capernaum becomes a base of operation for the Savior. Its strategic location near a main trade route and its mixed culture of Jews and Gentiles help forward the spread of the gospel.

It is at Capernaum that much of the Master’s ministry takes place—including healings of a demoniac, a Roman centurion’s servant, Jairus’ daughter, the woman with an issue of blood, and Peter’s mother-in-law (see [Mark 1:21–27](#); [Luke 7:1–10](#); [8:40–56](#); [Matthew 8:14, 15](#)). These evidences of spiritual light are depicted by one scholar this way: “This whole country had been overspread with spiritual darkness, but, by the example and preaching of Christ, the day-spring from on high visited it, diffusing among its inhabitants knowledge and holiness, and guiding their feet into the way of peace.”

from **Section 4**

13 | [Acts 13:1, 43](#)

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; . . . Many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

Barnabas was a Levite Jew from Cyprus. Originally named Joses or Joseph, he first appears in Scripture in [Acts 4:36, 37](#). He and other early believers sold their land, giving the proceeds to the apostles to distribute according to need.

The Aramaic surname Barnabas, given him as a title of honor by the apostles, means “son of encouragement” or “son of consolation.” As an active member of the Christian community in Jerusalem, Barnabas persuaded the fearful apostles to accept Saul of Tarsus (see [9:26, 27](#)) and later joined Paul on his first missionary journey. He was also related to John Mark (widely accepted as the author of the Gospel of Mark). [Acts 11:24](#) characterizes Barnabas as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.”

15 | [Ephesians 4:17, 18, 20–24](#)

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: . . . But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Pagan Gentiles are portrayed in this passage as ignorant and blind. *Pōrōsis*, the Greek noun rendered *blindness*, refers to rigidity and inflexibility as well. A scriptural authority explains that the word “described something which had become so hardened, so petrified that it had no power to feel at all.” Another source compares it to “dulled spiritual perception.” *Stubbornness* or *hardness of heart* is preferred by many translators.

“To ‘learn Christ,’ ” a commentator writes, “is to grasp the new creation which he has made possible, and the entirely new life which results from it. It is nothing less than putting off our old humanity like a rotten garment and putting on like clean clothing the new humanity recreated in God’s image.”

“After God” is viewed by some as an allusion to the likeness of God described in [Genesis 1:26, 27](#). Similar wording occurs in [Colossians 3:10](#): “after the image of him that created him.”

from **Section 5**

16 | [Psalms 116:5, 6, 8, 9](#)

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. . . . For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

Scholars interpret “the simple” as signifying the inexperienced or guileless, though other biblical meanings are defenseless, naive, and uncertain. In the New Testament Paul mentions “the simple” in a warning against false teachers, who “by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” ([Romans 16:18](#)). The Psalmist is affirming that God preserves and safeguards everyone needing protection or comfort.

from **Section 6**

22 | [Romans 6:4, 23](#)

Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. . . . The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the same way that God’s glory brings about Christ Jesus’ resurrection, Paul announces, His glory impels “newness of life” in His children. [First Corinthians 6:14](#) likewise promises, “God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.”

Gift is translated from the Greek term *kharisma*, signifying an unearned divine bestowal. First Peter employs this word in the admonition, “As every man hath received the gift [*kharisma*], even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (4:10).

Read a related article, “[Raise the dead](#)” by Tom Black, at jsh.christianscience.com/raise-the-dead.

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