



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

## Probation After Death

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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.”

## Psalms 36:8

*They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.*

**fatness:** abundance; plenty

## from **Section 1**

### 1 | Psalms 145:1, 9, 13, 14

*I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. . . . The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. . . . Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.*

### **Translation**

*I will proclaim your greatness, my God and king;*

*I will thank you forever and ever. . . .*

*He is good to everyone*

*—and has compassion on all he made. . . .*

*Your rule is eternal,*

*and you are king forever.*

*The LORD is faithful to his promises;*

*he is merciful in all his acts.*

*He helps those who are in trouble;*

*he lifts those who have fallen.*

## 2 | Psalms 42:2, 8, 11

*My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? . . . The Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. . . . Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

### Translation

*In my heart, I am thirsty  
for you, the living God.*

*When will I see your face? . . .*

*Every day, you are kind,  
and at night*

*you give me a song*

*as my prayer to you,  
the living LORD God. . . .*

*Why am I discouraged?*

*Why am I restless?*

*I trust you!*

*And I will praise you again*

*because you help me,  
and you are my God.*

—Contemporary English Version

**countenance:** face; appearance

## 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.

## 5 | Ezekiel 18:32

*I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.*

### **Translation**

*I most certainly don't want anyone to die! This is what the LORD God says. Change your ways, and live!*

—Common English Bible

## *from* **Section 2**

### 6 | [Psalms 40:5, 11](#)

*Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. . . . Let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.*

### **Translation**

*O LORD my God, you have performed many wonders for us.*

*Your plans for us are too numerous to list.*

*You have no equal.*

*If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds,*

*I would never come to the end of them. . . .*

*Let your unfailing love and faithfulness always protect me.*

—New Living Translation

### 7 | [Psalms 56:11, 13](#)

*In God have I put my trust: . . . For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?*

### **Translation**

*I trust in God. . . .*

*You have saved me from death.*

*You have kept me from being defeated.*

*So I will walk with God  
in light among the living.*

—International Children’s Bible

## 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](#)).

**asunder:** apart

## 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](#)).

**bier:** movable frame for carrying the dead

**bare:** carried

## 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.*

### **Translation**

*“The people who were sitting (living) in [spiritual] darkness have seen a great Light,  
And for those who were sitting (living) in the land and shadow of [spiritual and moral] death,  
Upon them a Light has dawned.”*

—Amplified® Bible

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**

## 12 | [Acts 5:12, 16](#)

*By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; . . . There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.*

**wrought:** worked; done

**vexed:** suffering

### 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.”

**proselytes:** new believers

### 14 | [Acts 14:1, 2, 5–7, 19, 20](#)

*It came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. . . . And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: and there they preached the gospel. . . . And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city.*

**spake:** spoke; talked

**evil affected:** influenced or changed in a bad way

**assault:** attack

**despitefully:** hatefully

**ware:** aware

**howbeit:** however

### 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.*

## **Translation**

*So I tell you and encourage you in the Lord's name not to live any longer like other people in the world. Their minds are set on worthless things. They can't understand because they are in the dark. They are excluded from the life that God approves of because of their ignorance and stubbornness. . . . But that is not what you learned from Christ's teachings. You have certainly heard his message and have been taught his ways. The truth is in Jesus. You were taught to change the way you were living. The person you used to be will ruin you through desires that deceive you. However, you were taught to have a new attitude. You were also taught to become a new person created to be like God, with a life that truly has God's approval and is holy.*

—GOD'S WORD Translation

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.*

## **Translation**

*How kind the LORD is! How good he is!  
So merciful, this God of ours!  
The LORD protects those of childlike faith;  
I was facing death, and he saved me. . . .  
He has saved me from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling.  
And so I walk in the LORD's presence  
as I live here on earth!*

—New Living Translation

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**

19 | [John 1:1](#)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

## **Translation**

*In the beginning was the one  
who is called the Word.  
The Word was with God  
and was truly God.*

—Contemporary English Version

21 | [II Timothy 1:7, 9, 10](#)

*God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. . . . Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

### **Translation**

*God didn't give us a cowardly spirit but a spirit of power, love, and good judgment. . . . God saved us and called us to be holy, not because of what we had done, but because of his own plan and kindness. Before the world began, God planned that Christ Jesus would show us God's kindness. Now with the coming of our Savior Christ Jesus, he has revealed it. Christ has destroyed death, and through the Good News he has brought eternal life into full view.*

—GOD'S WORD Translation

## 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.*

### **Translation**

*. . . just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory and power of the Father, we too might walk habitually in newness of life [abandoning our old ways]. . . . The free gift of God [that is, His remarkable, overwhelming gift of grace to believers] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

—Amplified® Bible

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](#)).

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## Resources quoted in this issue

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