



BIBLE LENS

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

Reality

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from the **Golden Text**

I John 1:5

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Light is identified with God from the earliest scriptural texts (see [Genesis 1:2–5](#)), representing His goodness, wisdom, and guidance (see instances in [Psalms 36:9](#); [Isaiah 60:19](#); [Daniel 2:22](#); [Micah 7:8](#)). Because light and darkness are incompatible, a scholar notes, “. . . in God there is nothing unworthy, undependable, or morally ambiguous.”

from the **Responsive Reading**

I John 1:1–4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

Here First John refutes the belief held by some that Christ Jesus existed only as a spirit, not in the flesh. Later the writer adds, “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:3). The Greek verb he has chosen, *psēlaphaō* (translated *handle* in v. 1), encompasses physical touch as well as figurative searching or examining. Jesus uses the same word after his resurrection when he invites his disciples to touch him—to reassure themselves that he is indeed risen (see Luke 24:39).

Koinōnia is the Greek noun rendered *fellowship*. Describing more than simple companionship, it portrays partnering between people to achieve a specific purpose. In this passage the author invites readers to move beyond passive association with like-minded individuals to active participation in a shared commitment to unity with God and His Christ.

Christ Jesus speaks about fullness of joy in nearly identical terms in his farewell discourse (see John 15:11). This joy, one source suggests, “should not be confused with momentary delight or contented resignation or wishful thinking. Joy is the beforehand experience of that communion with God and Christ which is to be consummated in eternity (John 15:11; 16:20–24; 17:13), confident that Christ has already prevailed over this world’s tribulations (John 16:33).”

Psalms 89:15

Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.

Joyful sound (Hebrew, *tē rū‘ā*) refers to the blowing of trumpets to honor a king, the happy cries of pilgrims, or the praise of worshipers celebrating their God. In Joshua 6:20 it depicts the ringing shout that brought down the walls of Jericho.

Applied to God, *countenance* (Hebrew, *pānîm*) usually indicates His presence. Regarding men and women, the word also means face or expression.

Psalms 90:4, 16, 17

A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. . . . Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

“Watch in the night”—one of four periods of nighttime guard duty—underscores the insignificance of time in the eternity of God’s creation.

Perhaps recognizing the ephemeral nature of human experience (see also Ecclesiastes 2:11), the Psalmist prays fervently that God direct and strengthen his work. A commentator observes, “. . . it is God’s grace alone which gives purpose to life and durability to the work of man.”

from Section 1

2 | 1 Chronicles 29:14, 17, 18

All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. . . . I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. . . . O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee.

Translation

Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us! . . . I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. . . . “O Lord, the God of our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make your people always want to obey you. See to it that their love for you never changes.”

—New Living Translation

3 | I Corinthians 13:12

Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Translation

Now we see only a dim likeness of things. It is as if we were seeing them in a foggy mirror. But someday we will see clearly. We will see face to face. What I know now is not complete. But someday I will know completely, just as God knows me completely.

—New International Readers’ Version

Mirrors of Paul’s day were commonly made of bronze and polished with pumice stone. But even the most highly polished bronze mirrors were likely much less accurate than mirrors of today. Seeing “darkly” denotes the imperfect, material perspective as opposed to God’s perfect view. The Greek term *ainigma*, part of the phrase rendered *darkly*, is the source of the English word *enigma*. Other translations refer to dimness and obscurity.

from Section 2

5 | Genesis 21:9, 10, 12–20

Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. . . . And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the

bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad.

Hagar was probably purchased or given to Abram as a slave during his journey to Egypt (see [12:10–20](#)). Before this expulsion with her son, Hagar had fled into the wilderness another time to escape Sarah’s harsh treatment (after Hagar showed insolence toward her). At that point Hagar was visited by an angel who predicted the birth of Ishmael (see [16:3–13](#)).

Relations between the two women sour further following Isaac’s birth—this time because Sarah perceives mockery from Ishmael. Choosing not to call them by name, Sarah demands banishment of “the bondwoman and her son.” When their supplies run out in the desert, Hagar and Ishmael face death. Though Hagar cries in anguish, it is her son’s voice, according to the narrative, that God hears. And Ishmael does become the progenitor of a “great nation”—the Arab people.

from **Section 3**

6 | [Jeremiah 29:11, 13](#)

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. . . . And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Translation

“... I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. . . . If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.”

—New Living Translation

7 | [Isaiah 58:6, 8–11](#)

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? . . . Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting

forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Translation

*I'll tell you
what it really means
to worship the LORD.
Remove the chains of prisoners
who are bound unjustly.
Free those who are abused! . . .
Then your light will shine
like the dawning sun, and you
will quickly be healed.
Your honesty will protect you
as you advance,
and the glory of the LORD
will defend you from behind.
When you beg the LORD for help,
he will answer, "Here I am!"
Don't mistreat others
or falsely accuse them
or say something cruel.
Give your food to the hungry
and care for the homeless.
Then your light will shine
in the dark;
your darkest hour will be
like the noonday sun.
The LORD will always guide you
and provide good things to eat
when you are in the desert.
He will make you healthy.
You will be like a garden
that has plenty of water
or like a stream
that never runs dry.*

God’s prophets regularly censured His people for hypocrisy in worship (see other examples in [Amos 5:21–23](#); [Micah 6:7, 8](#)). Here the writer records God’s response to their complaint that He hasn’t noticed their diligence in fasting (see [vv. 3–5](#)). Devotional rituals are empty, this prophecy asserts, if accompanied by oppressive and unjust acts. True fasting involves loving ministry to those in need.

The “putting forth of the finger” portrays gestures of accusation and condemnation. “Speaking vanity” alludes to malicious or slanderous talk.

8 | [Psalms 5:3](#)

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.

Translation

LORD, in the morning you hear my voice.

In the morning I lay it all out before you.

Then I wait expectantly.

—Common English Bible

In this psalm, “looking up” connotes faithful expectancy. A scriptural authority reflects: “[Psalm 5](#) is an eloquent profession of the faith that underlies all the prayers for help. Indeed, bold affirmation of God’s reign while simultaneously waiting patiently ([vv. 2, 3](#)) is the perennially appropriate posture for the people of God.”

from **Section 4**

9 | [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 lived in darkness

have seen a bright light.

A light has risen

for those who live in a land overshadowed by death.”

—GOD’S WORD Translation

11 | [Mark 8:22–25](#)

[Jesus] cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

Commentators view the placement of this story—the only biblical account in which Jesus’ cure is not instantaneous—as significant. Just prior to the blind man’s healing, Jesus reprimands the disciples for failing to understand him (see [vv. 14–21](#)). And shortly afterward, he rebukes Peter’s inability to recognize the import of the Savior’s crucifixion and resurrection (see [vv. 31–33](#)). Taken together, the three texts convey the charge to move beyond a dim vision or partial understanding of Christ’s teachings. Increased spiritual maturity in his followers will be vital as the Master moves toward the culmination of his work.

12 | [John 4:35](#)

Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

In ancient Palestine, grain was typically planted at the end of December and harvested at the beginning of May. During this four-month period, grain turned from green to yellow or white, indicating readiness for reaping.

In this counsel Jesus highlights the disparity between this interval of waiting and the immediacy of the kingdom. This lesson follows his interchange with the Samaritan woman who brings a crowd of Samaritans to see him (see [vv. 7–30](#))—compelling evidence of the fields “white already to harvest.” The disciples are to trust their experience in Christ over conventional wisdom about spiritual growth and maturity.

One scholar explains that while crops take time to ripen, “. . . the gospel is fitted to make an immediate impression on the minds of men.”

from **Section 5**

13 | [Acts 26:1, 9, 12–19](#)

Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: . . . I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why

persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.

King Agrippa II, great-grandson of Herod the Great, was the last of the Herodian line of kings as well as the final Hebrew ruler of Palestine. He showed early support for the Israelites, but his alliance with Rome became stronger—and he embraced Hellenistic culture, approving pagan images on coins and later siding with Rome in the Jewish rebellion of AD 66.

Paul’s stirring plea before Agrippa takes place in answer to Jewish complaints against the apostle. Festus, Roman governor of Judea, had been willing to appease the Jews. But as a Roman citizen, Paul states his intent to appeal to Caesar, so Festus takes his case to Agrippa (see [Acts 25:1–21](#)).

Paul anchors his defense in his Jewish roots, citing the king’s own Jewish heritage and familiarity with Hebrew law (see [26:2–6](#)). Then he recounts his conversion story and tells the king, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” (References to Paul’s encounter on the Damascus road appear in several New Testament passages; see [22:1–11](#); [I Corinthians 15:8–10](#); [Galatians 1:11–17](#); [I Timothy 1:12–17](#).)

Although Festus accuses Paul of madness (see [v. 24](#)), Agrippa makes the remarkable statement, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” ([v. 28](#)). Sources are divided on whether Agrippa was sincere or sarcastic, but his words are followed by the judgment “This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds” ([v. 31](#)). Paul would likely have been freed at this point if his determination to petition Caesar hadn’t already set in motion his eventful trip to Rome.

14 | [Ephesians 5:8](#)

Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.

Translation

Once you lived in the dark, but now the Lord has filled you with light. Live as children who have light.

—GOD’S WORD Translation

from **Section 6**

15 | [Revelation 21:2, 23, 27](#)

I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. . . . And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.

Jerusalem is twice called the holy city in Hebrew Scripture (see [Nehemiah 11:1](#); [Isaiah 52:1](#))—and prophets write about the specifics of dimension, design, and adornment of a new city and temple (see [Ezekiel, chaps. 40–48](#); [Zechariah 2:1–5](#); [Isaiah 54:11, 12](#)). The Revelator builds on the deeper meaning of these descriptions, identifying New Jerusalem not as a national shrine but as the spiritual representation of God’s presence (see other portrayals of Jerusalem in divine terms in [Galatians 4:26](#) and [Hebrews 12:22](#)).

Bible experts point out that the bridal imagery for New Jerusalem stands in stark contrast to the author’s metaphor of Babylon as a harlot (see [Revelation 17:1–5](#), for instance)—just as the actual cities of Jerusalem and Babylon symbolized contrasting characteristics to the Israelites.

Christ Jesus is first called the Lamb of God by John the Baptist (see [John 1:29](#)). Christians espoused this sacrificial image, finding support for it in [Isaiah 53:7](#): “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (a verse expounded by Philip to the eunuch in [Acts 8:30–35](#)). First Peter compares Jesus to “a lamb without blemish and without spot” ([1:19](#)), and the book of Revelation includes over two dozen mentions of God’s Lamb.

16 | [I John 1:5](#)

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Translation

This is the message [of God’s promised revelation] which we have heard from Him and now announce to you, that God is Light [He is holy, His message is truthful, He is perfect in righteousness], and in Him there is no darkness at all [no sin, no wickedness, no imperfection].

—Amplified® Bible

Read a related article, “[Unconditional love: is it a myth?](#)” by Mary Ann Livingston, at jsh.christianscience.com/unconditional-love-is-it-a-myth.

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