

THE LIFE AND LIGHT OF MEN – R. 3474

— JOHN 1:1-18 —

1. Why does a precise definition and understanding of the “beginning” in John 1:1 matter to our faith? How do precise understandings of the first three verses of John 1 help us to understand the creation of the universe and *man’s* relationship to God? (Par 1-5,7; verses 1-3)
2. Explain the relationship of Jehovah God to Jesus. Why are 1 Cor. 15:27, Eph. 4:5,6 and correct translations of John 1:1-3 so important to this understanding? What other scriptures are also helpful? (Par 5-8)
3. How could the *life* in Jesus be the light of men, and yet not be appreciated? What “blessed thought lies half hidden in the Apostle’s words?” What scriptural cautions are given to those who have seen the light, at least to some degree? (Par 9-17; verse 9)
4. Why wasn’t it possible for the Jews to become “Sons” before Jesus’ first advent? Why would Jesus’ claim of being the Son of God have been so offensive to them? What was the “power to become Sons,” and to whom and when was it given? (Par 18-20)
5. How do we know that Jesus is still not a human being? Why won’t He return in the flesh? How might “grace for grace” factor into our understanding of this concept? (Par 21-26)
6. What blessings did you receive from this study that may not have been covered by the questions or comments given thus far?

R. 3474 – THE LIFE AND LIGHT OF MEN

—JOHN 1:1-18—JANUARY 1—

“In him was life; and that life was the light of men.”—Verse 4

1. OUR lesson is an epitomized statement of the entire plan of God in most comprehensive form, reaching from long before the creation of the earth down into the future to the grand consummation of the divine plan at the close of the Millennial age. The subject is wide enough, deep enough, high enough to furnish food for thought for a score of lessons. In considering it as a whole, therefore, we can touch only briefly on its various points at this time.

2. “In the beginning”: These same words introduce us to the Bible as the record of the world’s creation in the book of Genesis, but here the reference is to a beginning long before the creation of this earth. At the beginning mentioned in Genesis, Job tells us that the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. There were then at that time angelic beings, sons of God, previously in existence, who rejoiced at this further manifestation of divine power in the creation of this world. There must have been a beginning, so far as they were concerned, long before. It is to this original beginning that our text refers, a beginning before the angels were created. To what beginning, then, could it refer—a beginning of what? We answer that it was not the beginning of the divine being, for respecting the heavenly Father, Jehovah, the Almighty, we have the distinct statement that from everlasting to everlasting he is God—he had no beginning. Hence the beginning mentioned in our text refers neither to man, nor to angels, nor to the Father: it does refer to the “beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14), a name or title given to the only begotten of the Father, who subsequently became our Redeemer and Lord, Jesus. With this thought in mind all is clear: the Apostle’s explanation has settled the matter.

3. This original or beginning or first creation of God in our text is called the Word of God—the Logos. History tells us that in olden times

it was customary to regard the person of the king as too sacred to be seen by the common people except on special occasions, and that when certain great laws or edicts were to be announced it was customary for the king to be screened by a lattice from the gaze of the multitude assembled, while before the lattice stood a person who enjoyed the king’s favor and confidence and who became his representative and was called the king’s word, because he spoke in a loud, audible tone the commands and directions of the king, who communicated with him in a low voice from beyond the lattice work. This illustration gives us a clue to the use of the Word as one of the titles of the only begotten Son of God. It suggests to us what the Scriptures variously declare, namely—that all of the Father’s dealings with all others of his creatures are done indirectly through the Son, his mouthpiece, his Word, his representative.

A GOD, WITH THE GOD

4. In the beginning the Word was alone with the Father, the Apostle declares. But the whole matter is still more clearly seen when we take the literal reading of the Greek, because in it the Greek article appears before the word rendered God, which would make the translation into English properly read, “And the Word was with ***the*** God.” Here we see most clearly and beautifully the close relationship existing in the very remote past between the heavenly Father and the heavenly Son, between the Almighty God and his only begotten Son, in whom centered all the divine purposes and through whom he was pleased to manifest every feature of the divine power and glory.

5. The next statement, “And the Word was God,” is not to be understood as contradicting the statements previously and elsewhere made, but the distinction is considerably lost in the translation. We explain, therefore, that here the Greek article does not appear before the word translated God, and hence the thought in the statement is ***a*** God, as in contrast with the previous statement, ***the*** God. Thus understood the passage would properly read, “The Word was with the God and the Word was a God.” Ah,

now we have it clearly! The word god signifies mighty one, and in the Scriptures is used not only respecting the Father but also respecting the Son, also in reference to the angels, and in one instance when referring to men, influential men—the seventy elders of Israel whom Moses appointed or designated *elohim*, that is gods, mighty ones. The thought in our text, then, is that the Word of God, the Only Begotten of the Father, the beginning of the creation of God, was created on a nobler and higher plane of being, endued with grand qualities, so that he was in very fact a god—not the Father, not the God, not Jehovah, but “The Son of the Highest.” The Apostle Paul clearly sets forth this matter, saying, “To us [Christians] there is one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ.”—I Cor. 8:6.

6. The second verse reiterates and thus emphasizes the statement that the Word, which was *a* God, was in the beginning (before the creation of others) with *the* God. If anyone were in danger of misunderstanding the statement of the first verse that the Word was *a* God, if in any danger of thinking of this as signifying that the Word was *the* God, the second verse would correct the error by showing that the Word as *a* God was with *the* God, and that therefore they were two and not one in person.

7. The third verse is a grand, comprehensive statement, which gives us a glimpse of the great honor and dignity of the Son of God, “the Only Begotten” of the Father, the “beginning of the creation of God.” “All things were made by him,” by the Word—angels, worlds, mankind—all things: “Without him was not one thing made that was made.” How grandly, how gloriously, the dignity and honor and position of our great Lord looms up before us as we think of how highly the Father honored him, even before he came into the world, even before he manifested his obedience to the Father’s will even unto death.

“HE IS EXCEPTED WHICH DID PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIM”

—2 COR. 15:27; EPH. 4:5,6—

8. We are not from this statement to get the inference that the Son was superior to the Father, that the Father had created nothing previously because of lack of ability to create, but that the Father was pleased thus to recognize, honor and use this particular channel in his great work. The Apostle sets the whole matter straight, saying, “To us there is one God of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things.” This explains the matter. The power all resided in the Father—everything is of him, from him, through the Son, by the Son as his honored instrument and representative, “that all men may honor the Son even as they honor the Father also.” (John 5:23.) It will be noticed from this last quotation as well as in all the other statements here examined that there is no suggestion whatever that the Father is the Son and that the Son is his own Father, but quite to the contrary—that there are two persons, both Gods, both Creators, but the one the superior, the other his honored representative in glory and in power.

9. Verse four transports our thought from the glorious Only Begotten, the Word of Jehovah, creating angels, worlds and man, to his work as man’s Redeemer—present among men. Elsewhere we get the particulars of how he who was rich became poor for our sakes; how the Only Begotten, the Word, left the glory of the Father to carry out the Father’s great and wonderful and loving plan of salvation toward man. Briefly the Apostle assures us that when Jesus was amongst men “in him was life.” There is a great force and meaning in this expression when we understand it. When our Lord was amongst men he was the only man who had life in him. Father Adam once had life, but he lost it through disobedience in Eden, and instead the curse, the sentence of death, rested upon him and was inherited by all of his children, so that not a man in all the world of Adam’s race had life—except this Son of man of whom John was writing. Of all others the Apostle Paul wrote, “By one man’s disobedience sin entered into the world, and death as a result of sin; and thus death passed upon all men, for all are sinners.” (Rom. 5:12.) Our Lord’s words respecting those about him were, “Let the dead bury

their dead.” True, not all were dead in the sense of having lost every spark of life, but all were more than nine-tenths dead and the other tenth fast ebbing away. But in him, in this Only Begotten of the Father when amongst men, there was life, absolute life, perfect life, because his life had not come from Adam through an earthly father but was directly transferred from his prehuman state or condition to the womb of Mary. Thus born he was indeed partaker of a human organization but without any impairment of his life rights; hence, as the Scriptures declare, he was holy, harmless, separate from sinners—separate and distinct from all the race of Adam, peculiarly different because of his different begetting.

“AND THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN”

10. Needless to say light is here used in a figurative sense: it signifies hope, intelligence, instruction. Our Lord’s life as the “man Christ Jesus,” his holiness of heart, his full obedience to the Father’s will, his loyalty to every principle of righteousness, his manifestation of divine character, no less than the words of instruction that he spoke as never man spake—all these attest that indeed he was a great light amongst men—a light which ever since has been shining, not only through his recorded discourses and instructions but also through the lives of his disciples, and that in proportion as they were and are truly his.

11. “And the light shined in darkness; and the darkness appreciated it not.” How true! not only of the Jews of his own day, but how true still in respect to the world in general. How few grasp, comprehend, appreciate the light of divine truth and grace which shone out through the words and deeds of the man Christ Jesus. True, we are informed that about four hundred million, nearly one-fourth of the world’s population, are named by his name—Christians,—yet how impossible it would be to close our eyes to the great fact that the vast majority of these are in nearly as great darkness as the remaining three-fourths of the world’s population, the heathen. Into how few hearts and minds has this true light shined! The Apostle’s explanation is the only one that

covers the case. He declares, “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the glorious light of the goodness of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord should shine into their hearts.”—2 Cor. 4:6.

12. How sad! Three-fourths of the world in total darkness, while nearly all of those who say, We see, are “blind also”! (John 9:40.) If by the grace of God our eyes have been opened to some degree to appreciate this great light, let us not be highminded but fear lest the light should pass from us, lest we should ever get into darkness again, lest pride of heart or the cares of this world or the deceitfulness of riches, or any other thing should again blind us to the goodness and grace of God in Christ. Even Christians, the Apostle intimates, see only in part, but may see increasingly in proportion as they come into line and accord with the divine plan respecting them. Let us keep in memory how he wrote respecting some true followers of the Lord in his day, saying, “I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”—Eph. 1:16-18.

13. In verses six to eight the Apostle begins to particularize respecting the Lord’s earthly ministry, and shows us that John the Baptist was divinely commissioned to bear testimony and witness to the Lord, to this great Light, the object being the giving of a ground for faith in Jesus as the Light, the life of the world. John was not the Light, but merely the messenger of it, one to point out the true Light. And we remember, indeed, that John was particular not to take any honor in respect to these matters to himself, but declared plainly that his mission was to introduce the Messiah; and as soon as he received from the Father the witness that Jesus was indeed the expected one he made haste to proclaim the Lord, declaring himself unworthy to even be his servant to unfasten his shoes. So faithful was John’s testimony

that many of his own disciples at once forsook him and became followers of Jesus, as the record shows.

“HE WAS THE TRUE LIGHT”

14. As he was the Father’s Word or Messenger he was also the Father’s Light, whose mission it was to reveal, to make known, the Father’s love, that thereby those who had eyes to see might be attracted, drawn, blessed. Alas, how many were blind! Eyes had they but they saw not, and understanding had they and appreciated not. Those who did see, who did appreciate, what a blessing they received!—not only those who saw the Lord personally but those who have since seen his glory, his light, through the words of his faithful messengers under the guidance of his holy Spirit. “Blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear.” What a blessed thought lies half hidden in the Apostle’s words—in the declaration that this true Light shall enlighten every man born into the world! What a ray of hope this lights up in the sympathetic and Christian heart! All who have the Spirit of God, who so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son to be its Redeemer, are sure to be sympathetic with the world in its lost and blinded condition. To such this promise is a reassurance of all the glorious privileges and messages sent by the Lord through the prophets telling of the age of glory, when the Messiah shall be the Sun of Righteousness to scatter the darkness and miasm of sin and death and to bring in everlasting righteousness and life to the world—to whomsoever will accept the same.

15. Nothing is plainer than that our dear Redeemer has not yet enlightened those born into the flesh four thousand years before he was made flesh and died for our redemption. It is equally clear that not more than one in ten of those born into the world during the past two thousand years since he redeemed us have ever heard of that great transaction or had the opportunity of thus being enlightened and blessed. This, then, is the glad message, the good tidings of great joy which shall yet be unto all people—our dear Redeemer is not only the Redeemer of the Church and the light of the Church, but the

Redeemer of the world, the light of the world, that shall ultimately enlighten every man born into the world, every son and daughter of Adam. In this connection we are reminded of the words of the Apostle to Timothy, “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all—to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:5,6.

“TO BE TESTIFIED IN DUE TIME”

16. Ah, yes! there is a due time for every feature of the divine plan, and not until all of these various features have been developed will its glory and beauty fully appear. For two thousand years the world was left practically without hope of any kind; during the next two thousand years Abraham and his seed alone of all the families of the earth enjoyed divine favor and a partial knowledge of the glorious plan of salvation which would be outworked by Messiah, who according to the flesh would be of the seed of Abraham; during the last two thousand years the knowledge of Messiah has been largely hidden from the Jews and from the majority of other nations, but has gone nevertheless hither and thither, selecting a peculiar people, a Royal Priesthood, a holy nation—spiritual Israel. Each of these features has its due time: in due time God revealed the outlines of his plan to Abraham; in due time Christ died for the ungodly; in due time his second coming will usher in his Kingdom and with it the blessing of all the families of the earth, when the true Light shall lighten every man.

17. “He was in the world, the world was made by him and the world knew him not. He came unto his own [nation] and his own [people] received him not.” Thus briefly the rejection of Christ by the blind world and blinded Israel is recorded. But this blindness, which God foreknew and had left provision for in his plan, did not hinder our dear Redeemer from accomplishing the gracious purposes intended. He came not to reign, not to be ministered unto, but to serve Israel and the world as their Redeemer—to purchase them with his own blood, and to draw them out from under the condemnation that rested upon all because of disobedience to the

divine law. Grandly he finished the work that was given him to do.

18. But not all rejected him: a small remnant as compared with the whole nation believed on him, trusted him and obeyed him, and were blessed by him in a special manner. These were the apostles, and other faithful brethren to the number of about five hundred. (I Cor. 15:6.) To these by divine arrangement a special favor or blessing was extended—the privilege of passing from the house of servants to the house of sons. Moses was the head of the house of servants—natural Israel; Christ is the Head of the house of sons—spiritual Israel. This the Apostle points out, saying, “Moses, verily, was faithful as a servant over all his house; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we if we hold fast the confidence of our rejoicing firm unto the end.”—Heb. 3:5,6.

JEWS NOT SONS OF GOD

19. The Jews never claimed to be sons of God, neither are they referred to in the Scriptures as such. No greater dignity than that of being servants of the Most High God could possibly have been dreamed of up to the time when our Lord himself announced the privilege of adoption to the new nature. In evidence of this we remember that the Jews sought to stone our Lord simply because he claimed to be a son of God. (John 5:17,18.) The place and time of adoption for these believers was in the upper room at Pentecost, when the spirit of adoption was granted unto them—the holy Spirit, the anointing; and similarly the spirit of adoption is granted to all the followers of the Lord during all the centuries since, although not accompanied by the same miracles and manifestations granted and necessary in the beginning. It is this begetting of the spirit to a newness of life on the spiritual plane to which the Apostle refers, saying, “Which were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” The word born, as used both in the Common and Revised Versions, is erroneous and misleading; begotten is the proper translation of *genao* in this case. We note also that Westcott bears out this thought, saying, “Literally *begotten*, as in I John 2:29; 3:9.”

20. The Apostle is very particular to show that this begetting to the new nature is as necessary to the new creation as begetting of the flesh is necessary to human generation. Furthermore, he hedges the subject all around to prove that the begetting power is not of heredity, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh directly or indirectly, not of the will of man in any sense of the word: God alone does this begetting, God alone accepts to membership in this new creation, God alone imparts the seal of his adoption; and hence those so begotten, when born in the resurrection, will be in the highest sense of the word children of the Highest, “heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord.”

21. Coming back to our original topic to view our Lord’s advent amongst men from the standpoint of the faithful disciple, he says, “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Note first the statement that he was made flesh, a totally different thought from that expressed in some of the creeds when they speak of the Lord as “incarnate.” To be incarnate would signify to get into flesh as though the flesh were merely a covering or garment. This is not the statement nor the significance of the Scriptural testimony, which is very explicit, “made flesh.” The Revised Version, following the original still more exactly if possible, gives it, “The Word *became* flesh.” This is in accord also with the statement of Romans 1:3, that our Lord was made “of the seed of David according to the flesh;” and again, the statement of Galatians 4:4, that “God sent forth his Son made by a woman.”

WE BEHELD HIS DIGNITY

22. The apostles and all believers who had intercourse with our Lord in the days of his flesh experienced, “beheld, his glory.” They beheld the grandeur, the nobility, the perfection of the “man Christ Jesus”—a perfection and glory seen in no other because all others were sinners, while he by virtue of special birth was holy, harmless, separate from sinners. The Word glory here represents the same thought as in Psalms 8:5, where, speaking of Adam and his perfection

and God likeness as the perfect man in the image of God, it is declared that God “crowned him with glory and honor.” Similarly our Lord Jesus was crowned with glory and honor of human perfection in the days of his flesh, and his disciples beheld this dignity of human perfection, which marked him as separate and distinct from all others; and they recognized it as differentiating him from the world of sinners, marking him as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth—abounding in every proper and desirable quality and characteristic.

23. Another thought is somewhat covered by our translation in the word *dwelt*. In the Greek this signifies tabernacled or tented, as if it read, “The Word was made flesh and tabernacled amongst us.” A tabernacle was intended to be a temporary residence or dwelling, and thus the Scriptures point out that our Lord took the human nature, “was made flesh,” not that he might forever be a fleshly being, a human being, but merely temporarily. Other Scriptures fully corroborate this thought, and it seems strange indeed that Christian people should have so generally received the erroneous thought that our Lord is now a human being, a flesh-and-blood being in heaven. Quite to the contrary—flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of heaven. Our Lord was changed in his resurrection and is now, as the Apostle declares, “a quickening Spirit,” and again “Now the Lord is that Spirit.” Again he declares that all of the Lord’s people who shall be joint-heirs with him in his Kingdom must be “changed,” because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom.”

24. It would be too bad indeed to think that our Lord had made the great stoop from heavenly conditions to earthly conditions, laying aside the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, being made flesh and suffering on our behalf, and that then, after thus being obedient to the Father and serving us so graciously, he should be obliged to remain forever upon the lower fleshly plane of being. It would indeed be a distressing thought. But not only do the Scriptures cited above prove the contrary of this, but in harmony with the statement of the text we are considering, namely, that he

merely tabernacled with us for a little while, the Apostle distinctly explains the object of our Lord’s coming into the world and shows that it was all accomplished at his death: he says he was made flesh that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (Heb. 2:9.) That was the object, the only object, the only necessity for our Lord’s becoming a man, and when he had finished that work which the Father gave him to do he was glorified, and, as we are distinctly told, he was highly exalted and given a name above every name—“far above principalities and powers and every name that is named.” Phil. 2:9; Eph. 1:21.

25. The Apostle John proceeds to show that John the Baptist fully proclaimed the Lord as the Messiah, and doubtless he notes this fact because many of the Jews evidently had great confidence in John the Baptist though rejecting Jesus. The Apostle proceeds to say that the fulness of Christ, the grace and merit which were in him, have been conferred upon all of his followers, his true disciples, “grace for grace,” or, more literally, favor upon favor. This last expression seems to be a statement of what all the Lord’s people recognize in their own experiences, namely—that the blessing coming to them first in their relationship to the Lord is by no means all of his favor; that they may grow in grace, grow in knowledge, grow in the fruits of the Spirit, and possess favor upon favor additionally, continuously to the end of the course; and then—in the resurrection morning—that which is perfect shall come as the climax of God’s favor, and we shall be like our Redeemer and see him as he is and share his glory.

26. Proceeding, the Apostle contrasts Moses, the typical mediator, the head of the typical house of Israel, with Christ, his antitype, the Head of Spiritual Israel. The Law Covenant communicated and mediated by Moses was a great blessing to that nation in many respects; but the grace and truth, God’s favor and the knowledge of his wonderful plan, came not through Moses but came through Christ, and not to the followers of Moses but to the followers of Christ.

27. Our lesson concludes by pointing out that

our Lord Jesus was the only begotten Son of his Father's bosom, and that his mission in the world was to declare the Father, to make him known, to reveal the Father first to the Church, and ultimately, in due time, to the world. The Father, standing as the embodiment of perfection and righteousness, could not properly and justly recognize sin and sinners, for they are wholly contrary to the best interests of the universe and contrary to the divine purposes: they can not be recognized by God. Hence, if he would exercise mercy it must be through another—a mediator. His love and mercy, therefore, are revealed to us in Christ, and are none the less his because exercised toward us in this circuitous manner, and with the reservation that no man cometh unto the Father but by him, and that there is no other name given under heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved. Thus the entire work of the Son in man's redemption, in the instruction of his followers, and ultimately in the judgment and blessing of all the families of the earth—all of these will be but the revelation of the Father, the showing of his real character both for love and justice, wisdom and power.