

# John 1:5 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

**CLICK VERSE**

**To go directly to that verse**

**([John Commentaries](#))**

John 1:1

John 1:2

John 1:3

John 1:4

John 1:5

John 1:6

John 1:7

John 1:8

John 1:9

John 1:10

John 1:11

John 1:12

John 1:13

John 1:14

John 1:15

John 1:16

John 1:17

John 1:18

John 1:19

John 1:20

John 1:21

John 1:22

John 1:23

John 1:24

John 1:25

John 1:26

John 1:27

John 1:28

John 1:29

John 1:30

John 1:31

John 1:32

John 1:33

John 1:34

John 1:35

John 1:36

John 1:37

John 1:38

John 1:39

John 1:40

John 1:41

John 1:42

John 1:43

John 1:44

John 1:45

John 1:46

John 1:47

John 1:48

John 1:49

John 1:50

John 1:51

Click chart to enlarge  
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## JESUS' RISE FROM OBSCURITY FOLLOWED BY OPPOSITION IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

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## THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED BY GOSPEL OF JOHN (shaded area)

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John 1:5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it kai to phos en te skotia phainei (3SPAS), kai e skotia auto ou katelaben (3SAAI) ([NASB: Lockman](#))

- John 1:10 John 3:19,20 John 12:36-40 Job 24:13-17 Pr 1:22,29,30 Ro 1:28 1Co 2:14

**CSB** That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not **overcome** it.

**ESV** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not **overcome** it.

**NIV** The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not **understood** it.

**NET** And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not **mastered** it.

**NLT** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never **extinguish** it.

**Wuest** - And the light in the darkness is constantly shining. And the darkness did not **overwhelm** it.

**Barclay** - And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not **put it out**.

Compare Jn 1:9 which says "There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man."

**The light shines in the darkness** - As noted below the tense switches from imperfect (Jn 1:4 - "life **was** [imperfect] the light...") to the present tense indicating the **light** continually **shines**.

**R Kent Hughes** explains that "Literally, this (**the light shines in the darkness**) means it **shines** continually in the **darkness**, meaning that Christ is continually bombarding every corner of our hearts of **darkness** through the work of His Holy Spirit in nature, conscience, and the Scriptures. Whether you are with or without Christ, meditate upon Christ being **light**, and you will better understand how much He loves you. ([John- That You May Believe - Preaching the Word](#))

**Hendriksen** explains how **the light** continually **shines** - Moreover, whereas the Word (Christ) is the One in Whom the **life** resides and by Whom it is made to shine forth as **light**, He is also Himself called the **light**. (Cf. Jn 1:9; 8:12; 1 John 2:8.) Like the sun in the sky this **light** shines forth in the mother-promise ([Protoevangelium](#) in Ge 3:15), in the book of Exodus with its Passover Lamb and all the other types, in Leviticus with its offerings that point forward to the shedding of Christ's blood, in Numbers with its serpent lifted up (Nu 21:8; cf. Jn 3:14, 15), yea, in all the historical, prophetic, and poetical books of the old dispensation. See, for example, Ge 49:10; Dt. 18:15-18; 2Sa 7:12-14; Ps. 40:6, 7; 72; 110; 118; Isa. 1:18; 7:14; 9:6; 11:1 ff; 35:5; 40; 42:1-4; 53; 54; 55; 60; 61; 63; 65; Hos. 11:8; Am. 5:4; Mic. 5:2; 7:18; Hag. 2:9; Zech. 9:9; 13:1; Mal. 1:11. We emphasize, however, that not only in these prophecies, promises, and invitations, is **the light shining**; rather, throughout the entire old dispensation and in the whole Old Testament it shines; also throughout the entire new dispensation and in the whole New Testament, revealing God in all his glorious attributes. That light is shining even today in the midst of this world' darkness. ([New Testament Commentary Exposition of the Gospel According to John](#))

**MacLeod** - Three things come to mind, Barclay wrote, when one thinks of **light** and **darkness**. **First**, the light that Jesus brings **puts chaos to flight**. He can save one's life from becoming chaos. When Jesus enters a life, light comes. A child stayed overnight in a strange house while his parents were away. The lady who took him in offered to leave the light on when he went to bed. Politely he declined the offer. "I thought," said the hostess, "that you might be afraid of the dark." "Oh, no," said the boy, "it's God's dark." With Christ in our lives the darkness is dispelled.

**Second**, the light that Jesus brings is a **revealing light**. Later John wrote, "The Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Light shows what is going on in the dark. It strips away all disguises, and shows things as they really are. People never see themselves truly until they see themselves through the eyes of Jesus. He drives people to God by revealing them to themselves.

**Third**, the light that Jesus brings is a **guiding light**. When someone walks in darkness, he "does not know where he goes" (Jn 12:35). When he receives the light and believes the light, however, he no longer walks in darkness (Jn 12:36). When Jesus comes into a life, guessing and groping about the meaning of life are ended. ([The Eternity and Deity of the Word- John 1:1-2](#))

**Light** ([5457](#))(**phos**) from **pháo** = to shine) is defined by many lexicons as that which contrasts with darkness. Light is the medium of illumination that makes sight possible or makes things visible. In Scripture phos can refer to literal, physical light (Ge 1:3), but often is used metaphorically or symbolically, the greatest metaphorical use being used to symbolize Jesus as "the Light of the world." (Jn 8:12).

**Zodhiates** says figuratively **phos** means "moral and spiritual light and knowledge which enlightens the mind, soul or conscience; including also the idea of moral goodness, purity and holiness, and of consequent reward and happiness." ([Complete Word Study Dictionary- New Testament](#))

#### Light - phos -

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the **Light** of men.

5 The **Light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

7 He came as a witness, to testify about the **Light**, so that all might believe through him.

8 He was not the **Light**, but he came to testify about the **Light**.

9 There was the true **Light** which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

John 3:19 "This is the judgment, that the **Light** has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the **Light**, for their deeds were evil.

20 "For everyone who does evil hates the **Light**, and does not come to the **Light** for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

21 "But he who practices the truth comes to the **Light**, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

John 5:35 "He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his **light**.

John 8:12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the **Light** of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the **Light** of life."

John 9:5 "While I am in the world, I am the **Light** of the world."

John 11:9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the **light** of this world. 10 "But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the **light** is not in him."

John 12:35 So Jesus said to them, "For a little while longer the **Light** is among you. Walk while you have the **Light**, so that darkness will not overtake (**katalambano**) you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.

John 12:36 "While you have the **Light**, believe in the **Light**, so that you may become sons of **Light**." These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them.

John 12:46 "I have come as **Light** into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.

**Bruce Barton on the Light shines** - The timeless Light (**Ed**: of Christ, in the Gospel message) has invaded our time, and we can see it in our darkness. Christ's life and message are still effective. John could see it around him in his day as he witnessed the strength of the Christian church—planted, thriving, growing. And it is still present tense today—for Christ's light still shines in our dark world. ([Life Application New Testament Commentary](#))

**Robertson on the light shines** - Linear present active indicative of **phaino**....“The light keeps on giving light.”...(Light is) An evident allusion to the darkness brought on by sin. In 2Pet. 2:17 we have "the blackness of darkness". The Logos, the only real moral **light**, keeps on shining both in the Pre-incarnate state and after the Incarnation (Ed: How? See Hendriksen's reasonable explanation above). John is fond of *skotia*, *skotos* for moral **darkness** from sin and *phōs*, *phōtizō*, *phainō* for the **light** that is in Christ alone. In 1 John 2:8 he proclaims that “the **darkness** is passing by and the true **light** is already shining.” The Gnostics often employed these words and John takes them and puts them in the proper place!

**Shines** ([5316](#))(**phaino**) means to bring to light, to cause to appear. To shed light upon (Rev 8:12). To seem to be (Lk 24:11). Figuratively of sin being shown to be sin (Ro 7:13). "The sinfulness of sin is revealed in its violations of God's law." (ATR). Figuratively **phaino** is used of the Word of God as that which shines in a dark place (2Pe 1:19). **Phaino** describes the glorified Jesus' face (Rev 1:16). Appear ("are seen") in Php 2:15 could be translated "shine." In Mt 24:30 **phaino** refers to the Second Coming of Christ (cp Mt 24:27).

**Phaino** is in the **present tense** indicating that this supernatural light continually shines in the darkness. This is not the shine of the sun or the moon, but the Son's shine! "The present here has gnomic force; it expresses the timeless truth that the light of the world (cf. Jn 8:12, 9:5, 12:46) never ceases to shine." ([W Hall Harris](#))

**Vincent** comments on the **present tense** "Note the present tense, indicating not merely the present point of time, but that the light has gone forth continuously and without interruption from the beginning until now, and is still shining." ([John 1 Commentary - Vincent's Word Studies](#)) (See above for **Hendriksen's** discussion of how the light is continually shining.)

Jn 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the **light of the world**; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the **light of life**."

Jn 9:5 "While I am in the world, I am the **light** of the world."

Jn 12:46 "I have come as **light into the world**, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.

**NET Note** - To this point the author has used past tenses (imperfects, aorists); now he switches to a present. The light continually shines (thus the translation, "shines on"). Even as the author writes, it is shining. The present here most likely has gnomic force (though it is possible to take it as a historical present); it expresses the timeless truth that the light of the world (cf Jn 8:12, 9:5, 12:46) never ceases to shine.

John writes that "God is **Light**, and in Him there is (absolutely) no **darkness** at all." (1Jn 1:5) And as John says Christ's Light is still shining in our dark world and that it will shine in the world to come, John describing heaven "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its **light**, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it....And there shall no longer be any **night**; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever." (Rev 21:23-24-[note](#), Rev 22:5-[note](#))

**Paul** speaks of **darkness** (signifying sinful deeds) to the believers in Ephesus telling them "do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of **darkness**, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the **light**, for everything that becomes visible is **light**. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ **will shine** on you." (Eph 5:11-12-note; Eph 5:13-14-note)

**Vincent on darkness** - In classical Greek **skotos**, as distinguished from **zophos**, is the stronger term, denoting the condition of darkness as opposed to light in nature. Hence of death; of the condition before birth; of night. **Zophos**, which is mainly a poetical term, signifies gloom, half-darkness, nebulousness. **Here the stronger word is used. The darkness of sin is deep. The moral condition which opposes itself to divine light is utterly dark. The very light that is in it is darkness.** Its condition is the opposite of that happy state of humanity indicated in Jn 1:4, when the life was the light of men; **it is a condition in which mankind has become the prey of falsehood, folly and sin.** Compare 1John 1:9–10. Ro 1:21, 22. ([John 1 Commentary - Vincent's Word Studies](#))

**Hendriksen on darkness** - The **darkness** to which the evangelist refers has a concrete meaning. It refers to fallen mankind, darkened by sin and unbelief. This is not the only case in the New Testament in which an abstract noun acquires a concrete meaning. For other examples see Rom. 11:7 ("the election," meaning the elect remnant), Rom. 3:30 ("the circumcision," signifying

the circumcised individuals). This darkness is synonymous with "the world" of Jn 1:10. It is the antagonist of Christ, the **light**. It is an active, personal **darkness**: it did not accept or appropriate the **light**.

**John Calvin** - Unless God's Word illumine the way, the whole life of men is wrapped in **darkness** and mist, so that they cannot but miserably stray....The light of human reason differs little from darkness.

**Harris** - Here we are introduced to what will become a major theme of John's Gospel: the opposition of **light** and **darkness**. The antithesis is a natural one, widespread in antiquity. Genesis 1 (**Ed: Dark** = Ge 1:2, 4, 18; **Light** = Ge 1:3-5, 14-18) gives considerable emphasis to it in the account of the creation, and so do the writings of [Qumran](#). ([Prologue John 1:1-18](#))

**Alexander Maclaren** - So far, John has been speaking as from the upper or divine side, but in John 1:5 he speaks from the under or human, and shows us how the self-revelation of the Word has, by some mysterious necessity, been conflict. The '**darkness**' was not made by Him, but it is there, and the beams of the **light** have to contend with it. Something alien must have come in, some catastrophe have happened, that the **light** should have to stream into a region of **darkness**. John takes 'the Fall' for granted, and in John 1:5 describes the whole condition of things, both within and beyond the region of special revelation. The shining of the **light** is continuous, but the **darkness** is obstinate. It is the tragedy and crime of the world that the **darkness** will not have the **light**. It is the long-suffering mercy of God that the **light** repelled is not extinguished, but shines meekly on. ([John 1 Commentary](#))

**D A Carson** on **darkness** and **light** - The '**darkness**' in John is not only absence of light, but positive evil (cf. Jn 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46; 1Jn. 1:5, 6; 2:8, 9, 11); the **light** is not only revelation bound up with creation, but with salvation. Apart from the **light** brought by the Messiah, the incarnate Word, people love **darkness** because their deeds are evil (Jn 3:19), and when the **light** does put in an appearance, they hate it, because they do not want their deeds to be exposed (Jn 3:20). ([The Gospel according to John -The Pillar New Testament Commentary](#))

**Darkness** ([4653](#))(*skotia* from *skotos* = darkness) is a condition resulting from the partial or complete absence of light and refers to literal darkness in Jn 6:17, 20:1, but more often is used figuratively to refer to spiritual darkness. In every NT figurative use, **darkness** is contrasted with **light** in all but one passage (1Jn 2:11). "Darkness has no existence by itself, being definable simply as an absence of light." **Darkness** is also the realm of sin and evil.

**See also William Barclay's discussion below on Darkness**

In the spiritual sense darkness describes both the state and works of a person. It symbolizes evil and sin, everything that life should not be and everything that a person should not do!

When the Light shines, it drives away the spiritual darkness for the unsaved world is blinded by the prince of this world.

Jesus explained to Paul that the purpose of the Gospel was "to open their eyes so that they may turn from **darkness** to **light** and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." (Acts 26:18)

In Colossians we learn that we as believers should continually be "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in **light**, for He delivered us from the domain (right and the might) of **darkness**, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col 1:12-14)

Paul writes "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the **light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, Who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "**Light** shall shine out of **darkness**," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the **light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly **darkness**, but now you are **light** in the Lord; walk as children of light. (Eph 5:7-8)

**Dictionary of Biblical Imagery** - The greatest of God's acts in regard to darkness, though, is his spiritual rescue of people from darkness through the work of Christ. God himself "is light and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 Jn 1:5). Christ is a light that "shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (Jn 1:5). Whoever follows Jesus "will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Jesus came "as light into the world," so that everyone who believes in him "should not remain in the darkness" (Jn 12:46). In a similar vein Paul writes that believers in Christ once "were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light" (Eph 5:8 NRSV).

**Skotia** - 14 of 16 NT uses are by **John**, twice to in the literal physical sense (Jn 6:17, 20:1) and the remainder in the spiritual sense.

Matthew 10:27 "What I tell you in the **darkness**, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear,

proclaim upon the housetops.

Luke 12:3 "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the **dark** will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.

John 1:5 The Light shines in the **darkness**, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 6:17 and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become **dark**, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

John 8:12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the **darkness**, but will have the Light of life."

John 12:35 So Jesus said to them, "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that **darkness** will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.

46 "I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in **darkness**.

John 20:1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still **dark**, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no **darkness** at all.

1 John 2:8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the **darkness** is passing away and the true Light is already shining.

9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the **darkness** until now.

11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the **darkness**, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

## **THE DARKNESS DID NOT GRASP OR OVERPOWER THE LIGHT**

**Hughes** writes - The light met with tremendous resistance. Jn 1:10–11 round out the description in terms that are tragically absurd as we bear in mind the immense description of Christ that has gone before: "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." The One who said, "Let there be light," the One whose love constrained him to shine his saving light through creation and conscience, the One who mercifully sheathed his light in a human body so that he might bring light to men, the One who set aside a special people for himself to be a light to the nations, was rejected! Yet today he is still light and continues to seek to pry his way into hostile hearts. Amazing love! ([John- That You May Believe - Preaching the Word](#))

The **light** cannot lose against the **darkness**. **The darkness** did not comprehend, apprehend, appropriate, grasp, master, extinguish or overcome the **Light** of Jesus!

**Wiersbe** on **katalambano** - The Greek verb can mean "to overcome" or "to grasp, to understand." **Throughout the Gospel of John, you will see both attitudes revealed: people will not understand what the Lord is saying and doing and, as a result, they will oppose Him.** John 7–12 records the growth of that opposition, which ultimately led to the crucifixion of Christ. Whenever Jesus taught a spiritual truth, His listeners interpreted it in a material or physical way (**Ed**: That is they were unable to *comprehend* the light). The **light** was unable to penetrate the **darkness** in their minds. This was true when He spoke about the temple of His body (John 2:19–21), the new birth (John 3:4), the living water (John 4:11), eating His flesh (John 6:51ff), spiritual freedom (John 8:30-36), death as sleep (John 11:11-13), and many other spiritual truths. Satan strives to keep people in the **darkness**, because **darkness** means death and hell, while **light** means **life** and heaven. ([The Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Paul** speaks to **darkness** not comprehending the **Light** - "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." (1Cor 2:14-note)

**Paul** describes the danger of rejecting the **Light** - And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper (Ro 1:28-note)

**Steven Cole** on **katalambano** - The word translated "**comprehend**" (NAS translation) can have two meanings, much like our word **grasp**. It can mean to **comprehend or grasp mentally**, or it can mean to **overcome or take hold of something in the sense of mastering it physically**. ....John uses the **present tense** (for **shines**) here, which probably focuses on Jesus' coming to earth and the conflict between Him and the powers of darkness that unfold in this Gospel. They crucified Him, but He arose and conquered the

darkness. His salvation conquers the spiritual darkness in every heart that trusts in Him. But the word may also be translated “**comprehend**,” and this meaning also fits a theme in this Gospel. In Jn 1:10b, those in the world “did not know Him.” In Jn 1:11b, even His own people “did not receive Him.” Jesus points out (Jn 3:19-20) that those in the darkness love the darkness and hate the Light because their deeds are evil. Thus they didn’t “comprehend” Jesus. Because sinners walk in darkness (Jn 8:12), they fail to see who Jesus really is. In John 8:48, they actually accuse Him of having a demon! **So perhaps John’s use of this ambiguous term has both meanings: the darkness will not overcome the Light as it comes through Jesus. Also, the darkness cannot comprehend the Light, unless Jesus opens their blind eyes to see.** ([John 1:1-5 Jesus: Revealer of God](#))

**Constable** favors **katalambano** having the sense of **overcome** - John did not view the world as a stage on which two equal and opposing forces battle; He was not a philosophical dualist. He viewed Jesus as superior to the forces of **darkness** that sought to **overcome** Him but could not. This gives humankind hope. The forces of **light** are stronger than the forces of **darkness**. John was here anticipating the outcome of the story that he would tell, specifically, Calvary. Though **darkness** continues to prevail, the **light** can **overcome** it. ([John 1 Commentary - Expository Notes](#))

**Barton** on meaning of **katalambano** writes that "On one hand, this word can refer to physical restraint, controlling, or conquering. On the other hand, the word can allude to a mental grasping or understanding. John may well have meant both (**Ed**: John is fond of using words that seem to convey a double meaning). Unbelievers did not comprehend Christ’s true identity and tried to conquer him. Thus, darkness failed on both counts to master Christ!" ([Life Application New Testament Commentary](#))

**Blaise Pascal** wrote that "There is enough **light** for those who only desire to see the **light**, and enough **darkness** for those who only desire the contrary."

**John Calvin** said that "The blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clarity of the gospel; the sun is no less bright because blind men do not perceive its light."

**A. W. Tozer** - The human intellect, even in its fallen state, is an awesome work of God, but it lies in **darkness** until it has been illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

**Spurgeon** on the fact that the **darkness** will not overcome the **light** - It never has done so; it never will. You may sometimes call the **darkness**, the ignorance of men, or the sin of men. If you like, you may call it the wisdom of men, and the righteousness of men, for that is only another form of the same **darkness**. "The light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."

**Vincent** on the meaning of the verb **katalambano** - The word is used in the sense of laying hold of so as to make one’s own; hence, to take possession of. Used of obtaining the prize in the games (1Cor. 9:24); of attaining righteousness (Ro 9:30); of a demon taking possession of a man (Mk 9:18); of the day of the Lord overtaking one as a thief (1Th. 5:4). **Applied to darkness**, this idea includes that of eclipsing or overwhelming. Hence some render *overcame* (Westcott, Moulton). **John’s thought is, that in the struggle between light and darkness, light was victorious. The darkness did not appropriate the light and eclipse it.** "The whole phrase is indeed a startling paradox. The light does not banish the darkness; the darkness does not overpower the light. Light and darkness coexist in the world side by side" (Westcott). ([John 1 Commentary - Vincent’s Word Studies](#))

**W Hall Harris** on **katalambano** - "To seize" or "to grasp" is possible, but this also permits "to grasp with the mind" in the sense of "to comprehend" (esp. in the middle voice). We are probably faced with another Johannine double meaning here, but I prefer the sense of "to overcome" rather than "to understand": one does not usually think of Darkness as trying to understand light. For it to mean this, we must understand "darkness" as meaning "certain men," or perhaps "mankind" at large, darkened in understanding. But in John’s usage, darkness is not normally used of men or a group of men. Rather it usually signifies the evil environment or 'sphere' in which men find themselves. They loved darkness rather than light (Jn 3:19). Those who follow Jesus do not walk in darkness (Jn 8:12). They are to walk while they have light, lest the darkness "overtake"/"overcome" them (Jn 12:35, same verb as here). For John, with his set of symbols and imagery, darkness is not something which seeks to "understand/comprehend" the light, but the forces of evil which seek to "overcome/conquer" it. But they did not succeed. ([Prologue John 1:1-18](#))

**Did not comprehend (2638)** (**katalambano** from **katá** = adds intensity [or surprise as in 1Th 5:4] to the meaning of the verb + **lambáno** = take; gives us our word catalepsy) means to take eagerly, grasp with force, lay hold of, seize with hostile intent (this literal meaning vividly depicted by the demon who seizes the son and dashed him to the ground in Mark 9:18). **Katalambano** was used in the sense of laying hold of so as to gain control of. In a secular Greek use we read "they were pursued and overtaken."

**Katalambano** is used with its meaning to overtake, lay hold of or seize in Jn 8:3-4 (**caught** in adultery") and Jn 12:35 = "Jesus therefore said to them, "For a little while longer the **light** is among you. Walk while you have the **light**, that **darkness** may not overtake (katalambano) you; he who walks in the **darkness** does not know where he goes." Paul uses katalambano with a similar sense writing " But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should **overtake** you like a thief." (1Thess 5:4)

**Boice** on **katalambano** - the word can also mean "to overtake" and, thus, by extension "to overtake in pursuit" or "to overcome."

This is the clear meaning of the verb in the only other place where it occurs in John's Gospel—John 12:35—where we read, "Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you." In this sense the word passed into the sports vocabulary of antiquity and was used when a wrestler was said to have "taken down" his opponent. This is the meaning adopted by Williams, who says that the darkness "never overpowered" the light, and by the New Scofield Bible and the Revised Standard Version, which use the verb "overcome."....And yet, there is another meaning of the word that I believe comes even closer to John's true meaning and is more appropriate. It is "to quench," "to extinguish," or "to eclipse," the concepts employed by J. B. Phillips and the New English Bible. Thus, to use the terms of astronomy, which may certainly be involved here, we can say that God's light is shining in the darkness and that it has never been eclipsed. ([The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary](#))

**Barclay** writes that *katalambano* "can have three meanings. (a) It can mean that the darkness never understood the light. There is a sense in which the man of the world simply cannot understand the demands of Christ and the way Christ offers him. To him it seems sheer foolishness. A man cannot understand Christ until he first submits to him. (b) It can mean the darkness never overcame the light. *Katalambanein* can mean to pursue until one overtakes and so lays hold on and overcomes. This could mean that the darkness of the world had done everything possible to eliminate Jesus Christ, even to crucifying him, but it could never destroy him. This could be a reference to the crucified and conquering Christ. (c) It can be used of extinguishing a fire or flame. That is the sense in which we have taken it here. Although men did all they could to obscure and extinguish the light of God in Christ, they could not quench it. In every generation the light of Christ still shines in spite of the efforts of men to extinguish the flame. ([John Commentary- Daily Study Bible](#))

**A T Robertson** says "The light kept on shining in spite of the darkness that was worse than a London fog as the Old Testament and archaeological discoveries in Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Crete, Asia Minor show."

**Hendriksen** favors the sense in Jn 1:5 that the darkness did not appropriate or apprehend the light. Hendriksen goes on to explain that "From passages such as Jn 3:20 (cf. Eph. 6:12) it is evident that this darkness does not merely behave negatively; on the contrary, it hates the light. It refers to the world of mankind viewed as a hostile power, which actively resists the light and refuses to accept it. What we have here is a manifestation of the absolute antithesis between light and darkness, kingdom of God and the world, Christ and the forces of the evil one." ([New Testament Commentary Exposition of the Gospel According to John](#))

John frequently contrasts **light** and **darkness** - John 1:5, 3:19, 8:12, 12:35, 12:46.

**Steven Cole's** conclusion of John 1:1-5 - So John's point in this opening stunning description of Jesus Christ is to tell us that He is the eternal Word, the Creator of everything, and that He reveals the life and light of God to this dark world. Have you ever been stunned like that soldier in Ben Hur because God opened your eyes to see who Jesus really is? Because He is the eternal God, we should believe in Him and submit everything in our lives to Him as the Sovereign Lord. Because He is the Creator, we should worship Him as we see His handiwork in what He has made. If His life is in us, our salvation is secure. Because He is our life, we should be filled with hope because we will spend eternity with Him. Because He is our light, we should let Him shine into every decision we make and into every area of our lives. To know God, look to Jesus, the eternal Word of God! ([John 1:1-5 Jesus: Revealer of God](#))

**Hendriksen's** synthesis of John 1:1-5 -

**a. In the beginning.** When the universe was created, he already existed; he is from everlasting. He enjoyed an eternity of infinitely close communion with his Father, rejoicing always before him. He was himself God.

**b. At the creation.** All things, one by one, came into being through him. Of all that exists today there is nothing that originated apart from him. In him from eternity and also

**c. After the fall,** throughout the entire old dispensation, the full, rich life of God resided. Throughout that same old dispensation that life was made manifest: God's glorious attributes, exhibited in the work of salvation, were proclaimed to mankind. Life which is made manifest is called light. Thus, the life was the light of men. But the light is shining still, also during the new dispensation: it is the very nature of light to shine. However, the world did not appropriate the light: is steadfastly refused and actively opposed the message of God's truth and love. It hated the Christ in whom the life of God resided and from whom as light it shines forth to those in darkness. ([New Testament Commentary Exposition of the Gospel According to John](#))

**Boice** applies the truth about the light continually shining to believers - Jesus is no longer the light of the world directly but is so only as his light is reflected to the world by Christians. It is true that John uses the present tense in describing Christ's light—"the light shines in the darkness"—but John would be the first to say that Christ shines in our day only through Christians (cf. 1 John 2:7-11). Thus, when Jesus was in the world he said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." But when he turned to those who had believed on him, he said, "**You are the light of the world**" (Matt. 5:14). He did not mean that they were to glow in their own right like fireflies. Rather, they were to be kindled lights, like John the Baptist, whom Jesus termed a "lamp that burned and gave light" (John 5:35). Do you see what Christ is saying? He is saying that today Christians are the light of the world. But they can be the

light of the world only because he is their light and they reflect him. It is as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Do men see Christ in you? They will not find him in the world today—not in the world's literature, culture, or pastimes. They will see him only as you look to Jesus, as he increasingly becomes your light, and as he is reflected from your life to others.

Is Jesus your light? He is if he does for you what light always does when it issues forth from the Father. First, it puts confusion to flight. This is the picture that we have in the opening chapter of Genesis where we are told how God moved upon the formless void that existed before the world began and said, "Let there be light." The light of God dispelled the darkness and brought forth life and order. If Jesus is the light of your life, he also dispels the darkness and places your life in order.

Second, the light of Jesus Christ is revealing. That is, it penetrates the darkness and shows us what has always been there. If the light of the Lord Jesus has had this effect in you, then you will not be playing the part of the hypocrite. You will have seen your heart. You will have been able to say with Isaiah, "Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5); or with Peter, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8); or with Paul, "I am the worst" of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

Finally, if Christ is your light, you will have guidance in the midst of darkness and, with the guidance of God, true liberty. [The Gospel of John: An Expositional Commentary](#)

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Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night:  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light:  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

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**NET NOTE** on **comprehend** (or overcome) - Or "comprehended it," or "overcome it." The verb *katalabon* is **not easy to translate**. "To seize" or "to grasp" is possible, but this also permits "to grasp with the mind" in the sense of "to comprehend" (esp. in the middle voice). This is probably another Johannine double meaning - one does not usually think of **darkness** as trying to "understand" **light**. For it to mean this, "**darkness**" must be understood as meaning "certain people," or perhaps "humanity" at large, darkened in understanding. But in John's usage, **darkness** is not normally used of people or a group of people. **Rather it usually signifies the evil environment or 'sphere' in which people find themselves:** "They loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:19). Those who follow Jesus do not walk in darkness (Jn 8:12). They are to walk while they have light, lest the darkness "overtake/overcome" them (Jn 12:35, same verb *katalambano* as here). For John, with his set of symbols and imagery, **darkness** is not something which seeks to "understand (comprehend)" the light, but represents the forces of evil which seek to "overcome (conquer)" it. The English verb "to master" may be used in both sorts of contexts, as "he mastered his lesson" and "he mastered his opponent."

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**QUESTION - [What does it mean that the light shines in the darkness \(John 1:5\)?](#)**

**ANSWER** - The opening verses of John's Gospel introduce us to Jesus Christ as the [incarnation](#) of God. John wants his readers to know that Jesus is fully God in human form. John then reveals the purpose of God coming to earth as a human: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4–5). Jesus Christ came to bring the light of God's life into a spiritually dark and dying world.

In Genesis, the creation of light was God's first creative move (Genesis 1:3). In the process of generating life, light was God's initial instrument for illuminating the dark and formless void. It was the inaugural instance of God shining light in the darkness.

When John spoke of the Incarnation, he was echoing the creation account. Scripture tells us over and again that God is the source of life and light: "For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see" (Psalm 36:9, NLT; see also Acts 17:28; Psalm 27:1). "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Jesus Christ is God's light sent down to earth to pierce through the darkness. That light is God's life, both physical and eternal. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25; see also John 14:6). The life within Christ is the life of God: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26).

The Bible tells us that the life of Christ serves as a light to all people. That life is the light of truth—the message of Christ's salvation and eternal life with God: "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). The brilliance of Christ's life and truth shine like a light into the darkness of this world.

In the New Testament, light and darkness are common symbols of good and evil. It's clear that *light* in John 1:5 represents life, and ultimately, eternal life with God in His heavenly kingdom. Darkness is the absence of light—the lack of God. It represents the power of evil, sin, and unbelief in this world, all of which lead to eternal death (John 3:19; Job 10:22; 38:15; 1 Samuel 2:9).

John continues to focus on the theme of light and darkness throughout his gospel. In John 8:12, Jesus proclaims to the people, “I am the [light of the world](#). If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life” (NLT). John 1:5 says the darkness “has not overcome” the light because evil cannot overpower Jesus Christ, who states, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness” (John 12:46).

Jesus declared that those who believe in the light become sons and daughters of the light: “Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light” (John 12:36, NLT). According to the apostle Paul, Christians have passed from darkness into light: “For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light!” (Ephesians 5:8, NLT).

By loving one another, believers shine light into the darkness: “Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them” (1 John 2:8–11).

The nature of light is to shine, and darkness cannot exist in the presence of light. Just as a bright street lamp discourages criminal mischief at night, so the light of Christ dispels the darkness of sin in the world. Just as the first rays of dawn pierce the blackness of night, God's light and truth carry spiritual awakening to darkened hearts.

***The light shines in the darkness*** means Jesus Christ has come into the world, bringing the good news of God's salvation to every person. As Isaiah foretold, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2). The life of Jesus, which is the life of the Creator God Himself, is the light of the world. No power of darkness can defeat or snuff out this light (Matthew 16:18; John 16:33).

Jesus is the giver of life and bearer of light. The Son of God continues to shine His light to humankind through His church, the body of Christ (Philippians 2:15). Whoever believes in Him receives eternal life (John 3:15; see also Psalm 112:4).

## WILLIAM BARCLAY ON DARKNESS

HERE we meet another of John's key-words—**darkness** (skotos, skotia). This word occurs seven times in the gospel. To John there was a darkness in the world that was as real as the light.

### **(i) The darkness is hostile to the light.**

The light shines in the darkness, but, however hard the darkness tries, it cannot extinguish it. Sinning man loves the darkness and hates the light, because the light shows up too many things.

It may well be that in John's mind there is a borrowed thought here. John, as we know, was prepared to go out and to take in new ideas, if by so doing he could present and commend the Christian message to men. The great Persian religion of Zoroastrianism had at this time a very great influence on men's thoughts. It believed that there were two great opposing powers in the universe, the god of the light and the god of the dark, Ahriman and Ormuzd. This whole universe was a battle-ground in the eternal, cosmic conflict between the light and the dark; and all that mattered in life was the side a man chose

So John is saying: “Into this world there comes Jesus, the light of the world; there is a darkness which would seek to eliminate him, to banish him from life, to extinguish him. But there is a power in Jesus that is undefeatable. The darkness can hate him, but it can never get rid of him.” As has been truly said: “Not all the darkness in the world can extinguish the littlest flame.” The unconquerable light will in the end defeat the hostile dark. John is saying: “Choose your side in the eternal conflict and choose aright.”

### **(ii) The darkness stands for the natural sphere of all those who hate the good.**

It is men whose deeds are evil who fear the light (Jn 3:19, 20). The man who has something to hide loves the dark; but it is impossible to hide anything from God. His searchlight sweeps the shadows and illuminates the skulking evils of the world.

### **(iii) There are certain passages where the darkness seems to stand for ignorance, especially for that wilful ignorance**

### **which refuses the light of Jesus Christ.**

Jesus says: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness" (Jn 8:12). He says to his disciples that the light will be with them only for so short a time; let them walk in it; if they do not, the darkness comes and a man who walks in darkness does not know where he is going (Jn 12:35). He says that he came with his light that men should not abide in darkness (Jn 12:46). Without Jesus Christ a man cannot find or see the way. He is like a blindfolded man or even a blind man. Without Jesus Christ life goes lost. It was Goethe who cried out for: "Light, more light!" It was one of the old Scots leaders who said to his friends towards the end: "Light the candle that I may see to die." Jesus is the light which shows a man the road, and which lights the road at every step of the way.

There are times when John uses this word darkness symbolically. He uses it at times to mean more than merely the dark of an earthly night. He tells of Jesus walking on the water. He tells how the disciples had embarked on their boat and were crossing the lake without Jesus; and then he says, "And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them" (Jn 6:17). Without the presence of Jesus there was nothing but the threatening dark. He tells of the Resurrection morning and of the hours before those who had loved Jesus realized that he had risen from the dead. He begins the story: "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came, while it was still dark" (Jn 20:1). She was living at the moment in a world from which she thought Jesus had been eliminated, and a world like that was dark. He tells the story of the Last Supper. He tells how Judas received the sop and then went out to do his terrible work and arrange for the betrayal of Jesus; and he says with a kind of terrible symbolism: "So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night" (Jn 13:30). Judas was going out into the night of a life which had betrayed Christ.

To John the Christless life was life in the dark. The darkness stands for life without Christ, and especially for that which has turned its back on Christ.