

## DARKNESS IN JOHN

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“John presents man as either belonging to one of two things: the darkness or the light. There is no in between. The darkness is associated with death, while the light is associated with life. This theme is developed throughout the Gospel” (The Gospel of John). The last gospel to be authored is that of John. Most scholars put the writing of John’s gospel around ad. 90. (McCilntock 950). There are three major schools of thought to the reason for the writing of John’s gospel, because of the study only one reason will be presented in light of the impending study of the word *skotia* (darkness).

The fourth Gospel is the most complete answer to the manifold forms of Gnosticism, yet it was the writing most used by the Gnostics. It contains no formal narrative of the institution of sacraments, and yet it presents most fully the idea of sacraments. It sets forth with the strongest emphasis the failure of the ancient people, and yet it points out most clearly the significance of the dispensation which was committed to them. It brings the many oppositions - antitheses - of life and thought, and leaves them in the light of the one supreme fact which reconciles all, *the Word became flesh*; and we feel from first to last that this light is shining over the record of sorrow and triumph, of defeat and hope (Vincent 6).

Note in the preceding quote the use of the word *light*, throughout this study the contrast will be seen between the word *light/photos* and the word of our study *darkness/skotia* within the Gospel of John.

The word that John chooses to use for darkness is *skotia*. It is profitable for a student of John's gospel to observe that though there are other New Testament writers that employed *skotia* the word for darkness, John however is almost exclusive with his use of it. The word *skotia* in the New Testament is used "17 times, of which 14 are in the Johannine literature". Out of those 14 Johannine instances of the word's usage, there are specifically nine times when it is used in the gospel within a total of seven verses (Wigram 668). The verses in the gospel that contain *skotia* are as follows: John 1:5, 3:19, 6:17, 8:12, 12:35, 12:46, 20:1. It would benefit this study that before John's usage is delved into, that we examine the use of the word throughout other literature.

The first place that we will examine the words usage is in Classical Greek, "The whole range of meaning may be understood in terms of the basic sense: darkness, not in connection with it's optical effect, but experienced as an enveloping sphere and described in it's significance for existence, i.e., as a hindrance to movement and action, to foresight, as the sphere of objective peril and subjective anxiety" (Conzelman 424). The Classical Greek usage of *skotia* differs some with that of the usage in the Old Testament, while the Classical Greek usage was a more figurative sense, the usage in the Old Testament was represented as more of a literal usage. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament points out that darkness in the Old Testament was in "...connection with natural phenomenon, also with the regular rhythm of day or night meteorological changes (clouds), is of course more strongly asserted than in the Greek world" (Conzelman 428). When observing the usage of *scotia* in ancient works, it would benefit the student to note how the word is used within Hellenism and Gnosticism. As noted earlier in this writing it is thought that John's gospel was to combat the Gnostic thought that was prevalent in Asia Minor (Clarke 510). Within Gnostic Dualism darkness is viewed as a sphere in opposition

to the light. Conzelman describes Philo's usage of darkness in this way: "Philo is wholly of the illumination school. He naturally speaks of darkness in cosmology and in expounding the biblical creation story. Yet he interprets it, not in terms of the antithesis of light and darkness but in terms of the heavenly and earthly or first and second light" (Conzelman 434).

As our study takes us to the New Testament, the usage of *skotia* is seen in three different ways. The three ways that the word is used is literally, figuratively, and in a transferred sense. The literal use of *skotia* is seen in "the darkness of the sun at the crucifixion" (Conzelman 439). The figurative sense is in reference to the unknown, Arndt and Gingrich define it as "the state of being unknown and therefore known to nobody" (Bauer 765). The final of the three basic ways that the word is used in the New Testament is that of the Transferred sense. The transferred sense is that of "what is dark is hidden" (Conzelman 441).

For the purpose of this study the uses of the word in other writings just serves as an introduction to the biblical writing where the word is found the most and that would be the gospel of John. When looking at the use of the word *skotia* within the gospel of John one underlying theme is brought out in every occurrence, and that is that darkness is in reference to the absence of God and or Christ. "To John the Christ-less life was life in the dark. The *darkness* stands for life without Christ and especially for life which has turned his back on Christ" (Barclay 27). As will be pointed out through the remainder of this study that whenever the apostle John uses the word *skotia* it is to prove the point of separation from our Lord. We are going to see this theme played out in the Gospel of John in three areas. The first area that will be examined is when *skotia* is used to describe the world of sin; second we will examine when *skotia* is used to describe the life of sin, and thirdly when *skotia* is used to describe literal darkness when Christ is absent.

The first area that we will observe is when John uses the word *skotia* to describe the world of sin. The word *skotia* is used to describe the world of sin twice within the book, both times in 1:5 where it states “And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not.” (ASV). This passage is showing the relationship between Christ and the world. In verse 4 it shows that in Christ is life and that the purpose of the life was to bring light to men, when the light of Christ shines in the world, darkness cannot put it out. This light that Christ brings stands in glaring contrast to this sinful world. This is the world that was going to reject Christ and persecute the apostles, this is the world that influenced Christians the time of John’s writing to leave the abode of light and join themselves with the world of darkness. This is the same world that hates Jesus, 7:7 states “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that its works are evil”. In describing this darkness/*skotia* that is used in this verse Marvin Vincent writes “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 John, when the life was the light of men; it is a condition in which mankind has become the prey of falsehood, folly and sin” (Vincent 9). Without Christ the world would continue in utter darkness, it would be doomed to be lost, but since Christ came into the world, the world cannot overpower the light.

The next way that the word *skotia* is used in the gospel of John is to describe the life of sin apart from the Son, otherwise known as darkness. Without Christ as Lord in ones life darkness reigns and the evil ones hate the light. *Skotia* is used in this way most of time in John’s gospel. *Skotia* is utilized to represent a life of sin in 3:19, 8:12, 12:35, and 12:46. The use of *skotia* in the 3:19, and 8:12 is slightly different than the use in 12:35 and 12:46. Note the use of “darkness” in the following verses “And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the

world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil” 3:19, “Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.” 8:12. both of these verses show how those whose works are evil enjoy darkness, i.e. there life of sin apart from the Son who would bring all of their evil deeds to light. A life of sin is a life apart from the son, in the same way a life in darkness is away from the light.

The next two verses that will be examined under the category of *skotia* as representing the life of sin, is those who are in a life of sin are also blinded to the truth and thus in a figurative sense in darkness. 12:35 reiterates this point when it states “Jesus therefore said unto them, Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not: and he that walketh in the darkness knoweth not whither he goeth” 12:35, this verse shows that when one is overtaken by darkness (a life of sin) that he is blinded to the truth that is found in Christ. Albert Barns says about being left in darkness is to be left in “... ignorance, blindness, and woe” This point is driven home in 12:46 when the beloved apostle records in his gospel Jesus’ statement “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me may not abide in the darkness”. If one honestly comes to Christ and believes in him, he will no longer be trapped in the life of sin, the life of darkness which blinds one to the true light that is in the world which is Jesus Christ. When one is blinded to Christ, he does not seek him and believe in him, and it for this reason that when one is not in the presence of Christ, he is in darkness/*skotia*.

The third way that *skotia* is used in the book of John is the literal sense. There are two instances in the gospel where the word is used this way those places are: John 6:17, and 20:1. In both of these instances the word darkness in the simplest sense is just in reference to the time when the sun is set and there is an absence of light. This author observes however that the same

underlying theme that was in the other uses of the word is also found in this situation, and that theme would be that when it is dark Christ is absent. Observe in 6:17 it states “and they entered into a boat, and were going over the sea unto Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them”. It is not just a coincidence that John chose to note that not only was it dark, but the apostle also mentions that Jesus had not come to them. As has been observed earlier when Christ the true light is subtracted from the equation the sum can only be darkness. Jesus was not with them in the boat and John notes that it was dark/*skotia*, there have been several times in the gospel when one would assume that it was night time but yet it is not referred to as darkness. The same is true in 20:1 when it says “Now on the first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the tomb, and seeth the stone taken away from the tomb”. This is leading to one of the greatest scenes in the entire book of John yet the author chooses to note that it was dark. Why? The answer is simple, at this moment Mary and the disciples there thought that their master was gone, the one who was the true light was missing and therefore only darkness could reign. Without Jesus, the world is dark and it was important enough for John to note that it was dark when the tomb was found to be empty.

As seen throughout this study the word darkness/*skotia* in John is used to represent the absence of the true light (Christ). Whether represented as the world of sin, the blinded life of sin, or literal darkness, they all show that without Christ only darkness can exist.

When one looks at the wonderful gospel of John he or she must be dedicated to following the teaching that is within, to keep from falling into the blinding sin filled world of darkness. John is not about darkness but about the true light (Christ) and if one believes in Christ he is in the light, he has grabbed hold of the light and is no longer living a life blinded by sin. The light that Jesus brought into the world is the light that will ultimately save mankind. As this study

comes to a close we must constantly remember the words of our Lord Jesus the True Light which shines in this world of darkness when he said “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light”(12:35-36). Also in 12:46 when he continues by saying “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness”. John made no mistake in all the times that he employed the use of the word *skotia*, and the reason that he did is simple. The reason is, to keep us from abiding in it, for inside the darkness is absence of hope, but if one emerges from the darkness and abides in the light, he or she will be a possessor of the life, and darkness will reign no more.

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