

## Psalm 23: In Deepest Darkness

Read Psalm 23:4

Life is not all green pastures and quiet streams. “The valley of the shadow of death” (v.4) could also be translated, “the valley of gloom” or “the valley of deep darkness”. The same word is used in other places in the Old Testament. Job spoke of dying when he said,

*“I go to the place of no return,  
to the land of gloom and deep shadow,  
to the land of deepest night,  
of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness.”*  
(Job 10:21-22, NIV)

Psalm 107 talks of those who had rebelled against God sitting “*in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains*” (v.10, NIV). But God delivered them when they turned to Him.

Isaiah was prophesying about the coming Messiah when he wrote:

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.* (Isaiah 9:2, NIV)

As we read these usages of the word and reflect back on Psalm 23:4, we see that the psalmist might be talking about literal death, but not necessarily. Our lives can also be shrouded by deep mental and emotional darkness. The point is this: when we can see and feel nothing but darkness and gloom, we don’t need to be afraid. When he says, “*I will fear no evil*,” he doesn’t just mean moral evil, but anything negative or harmful. Even when my life is immersed in deepest darkness, I don’t need to be afraid, for my Shepherd is with me. I can know that He is still there, providing for every need.

*Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* (v.4b, NIV)

A Palestinian shepherd normally carried two implements: a club (or rod) to fend off wild beasts, and a crook (or staff) to guide and control the sheep. We can be confident in our Shepherd’s protection and care no matter what comes.