

The Valley of the Shadow of Death (צִלְמוֹת)

A Note on Psalm 23:4

Geoffrey R. Kirkland
Christ Fellowship Bible Church

David affirms in Psalm 23.4 that even though he walks through the valley of the shadow of death that he will fear no evil. He can do this because God resides with him. The Hebrew phrase “valley of the shadow of death” (בְּגִיא צִלְמוֹת) includes a number of elements.

In the Old Testament, the image of the shadow of death (Ps 23.4) can refer to shade of death, terror, or calamity. It carries the idea of a thick fog, a blackness, or a deep shadow (Job 3.5; 10.21-22; 12.22; 16.16; 24.17; 28.3; 34.22; 38.17). God also can extinguish this kind of thick darkness (Job 12.22; Amos 5.8). So bad is this kind of darkness that the Messiah would come and bring the saving Light to those who are trapped in this kind of evil (Isa 9.2).

To suggest then, that this valley of the shadow of death was a thick darkness that threatened his life and his welfare is not an understatement. David trusts in Psalm 23.4 that even though he walks in the valley of the shadow of death he does not need to fear any evil.

The reason David courageously shuns fear is not because God promises deliverance from the valley. God nowhere does this in Psalm 23. Rather, God’s abiding presence with David prompts him to an abiding trust, a courageous perseverance, a towering endurance and a resilient hope in God.

Some concluding thoughts can include:

- 1. Even in the hardest of life’s troubles, God is with you.**
- 2. It is always better to be in hell with Jesus than to be in heaven without Him.**
- 3. When God’s Shepherd-like presence is with you, no reason exists to fear, worry, or be anxious.**
- 4. When life-threatening enemies, circumstances, and uncertainties lurk, keep walking confidently in the Lord’s paths of righteousness trusting in His gracious sovereignty and providential watch-care.**
- 5. It is often in the deepest, darkest, and loneliest valleys that the power, presence, and comfort of God is most clearly seen, felt, and experienced.**
- 6. God may see to it that your “valley of the shadow of death” remains perpetually or, perhaps, for the entirety of one’s life; nevertheless, one can still find a deep, robust, triumphant joy in God’s pursuing goodness & love.**