

Facing The "Threat Of Death"

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1986 (Rev. 92,04)

Introduction: A technical definition of a "shadow" is "a dark figure cast by a solid object when it intercepts the rays from a source of light." When most of us think of a "shadow" we may think of the silhouette our body makes on the ground in the day light. Many of us may even think of the "shadow" a tree or building makes. This type of "shade" gives protection and relief from the heat of the direct sun light. God's Word has many things to say about the subject of "shadows." The subject of "shadows" in God's Word appears at least 80 times. God's Word a "shadow" (Hb. "salal" or "sel") can refer to many things.

"Shadows" illustrate God's protection.

God's Word uses a shadow to refer to a real "shadow" which protects us from the sun, (Judges 9:36; Dan. 4:12; Hos. 4:13; Mark 4:32). It can refer to the "Messiah's blessings," (Isa. 4:6; 32:2; 49:2; 51:16). It can refer to "God's protection," (Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 91:1). It can refer to "God's unchangeableness," (James 1:17). It can refer to God's working in the Old Testament dispensation with a view toward the New Testament dispensation, (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1).¹

"Shadows" illustrate the "frailty" of life.

God's Word uses a "shadow" as a metaphor for life. A "shadow" can refer to the "shortness of life," (1 Chron. 29:15; Job 8:9; Psalm 102:11). It can refer to the "temporal" nature of things, (Ecc. 6:12). It can refer to the "failing condition of one who is enduring a sickness," (Job 17:7).²

"Shadows" illustrate the "experience of a progressively severe sickness."

God's Word uses the term "shadow" to describe the "experience of a progressively severe sickness" by using the phrase the "shadow of death." There are approximately 20 references in God's Word to the phrase the "shadow of death." There are at least four applications or ways of understanding the phrase the "shadow of death" (Hb. "salmawet") with reference to the experience of a progressively severe sickness.

The "shadow of death" refers to the "essence of death without dying."

Concerning the phrase the "shadow of death" the word "shadow" (Hb. "salal") and the word "death" (Hb. "mawet") may have been joined together by a scribe to form the phrase the "shadow of death" (Hb. "salmawet"). Death's "shadow" would not be death itself, but would refer to the likeness or essence of death without actually dying.³

The "shadow of death" refers to the "intense or dark experiences within life."

Again, concerning the phrase the "shadow of death" (Hb. "salmawet"), the words may mean a "very deep shadow" or a "deep darkness." Many translators believe that the word "death" added to the word "shadow" may be a "superlative image" for the "darkness" of the shadow or an idiom for the "intense" darkness of the shadow.⁴

The "shadow of death" refers to the "threat of death or the nearness of death."

The phrase the "shadow of death" is found in many places in the book of Job. Peter Craigie writes, the "shadow of death" may be used "deliberately to convey the threat of death." (Job 10:21; 28:3; 38:17).⁵

The "shadow of death" refers to the "vulnerableness of impending dangers within life."

Many Christians who are suffering or grieving have found comfort in Psalm 23. It has been called the "shepherd." Psalm 23:1 says, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Psalm 23:4 states, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." Did you notice the phrase "the shadow of death?"

Concerning the "shadow of death," in Psalm 23:4, Willem Vangemeren comments, "This imagery is consistent with the shepherd metaphor because the shepherd leads the flock through ravines and wadis (i.e. rivers) where the steep and narrow slopes keep out light. The darkness of the wadis represents the uncertainty of life."⁶

Those who suffer with a progressive illness and are living with the constant "threat of death," may be able to relate to the phrase "shadow of death" as found in God's Word.

1. THE PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE THE "SHADOW OF DEATH"

Who experiences the "threat of death?"

A. Anyone alive is susceptible.

All humans will walk through the "valley" within the "shadow of death," (Ps. 23:4) and at times live in the "land" of the "shadow of death," (Isa. 9:2; Jer. 2:6).

B. Anyone out of fellowship with God.

God places some of the "rebellious" people who rebelled against His Word and despise His counsel in the "shadow of death," (Psalm 107:10).

C. Anyone who enjoys evil.

The workers of "iniquity" do their evil within the "shadow of death," (Job 34:22), and actually love the deep darkness, (Job 24:17).

2. THE PLIGHT WITHIN THE "SHADOWS OF DEATH"

What is the experience of the "threat of death?"

A. Fear

The "shadow of death" is a place where "fear" (Hb. "yare") runs rampant, (Psalm 23:4).

B. Exposure to evil

The "shadow of death" is a place of "evil" (Hb. "ra'a" meaning "calamity and wickedness," Ps. 23:4).

C. The loss of life

The "shadow of death" is a place that seeks to claim one's life through death itself, (Job 3:5).

D. Confusion and lack of focus

The "shadow of death" is living in a place where one cannot understand what is happening or cannot see things clearly, (i.e. darkness), (Job 10:21-22).

E. Disorder

The "shadow of death" is living in a place where things do not have any order or where chaos exists, (Job 10:21-22).

F. Weeping

The "shadow of death" is a place where the eyes that have been weeping and have dark cycles around them, (Job 16:16). Since death is not physically visible, Job is already experiencing the gloom of death.⁷

G. Terrorism

The "shadow of death" is a place where "terrors" (Hb. "balah" plural, terrors and things that bring destruction") exist from those who rebel to the light, (Job 24:17).

H. Affliction

The "shadow of death" is a place where one is bound in "affliction" (Hb. " 'ana" meaning "things that bring a humbling effect," Psalm 107:10).

3. THE PRODUCER OF THE "SHADOW OF DEATH"

From where does the "threat of death" originate?

A. Sometimes the "threat of death" just happens.

The "shadow of death" can come into our life without any warning and without us knowing any justification for it, (Example, Job 1:9-12; 2:4-6, Although, Job did not know it was Satan who was behind the "threat of death").

B. Sometimes we ourselves can bring the "threat of death" upon our life.

The "shadow of death" can come upon us because of the way we live. The results of not following God's counsel from His word can bring the "threat of death," (Psalm 107:10).

C. Sometimes God will bring the "threat of death" into our lives.

God can turn difficult times into a time of the "shadow of death" in order to accomplish His glory and His plan, (Jer. 13:16).

4. THE PROVISION WITHIN THE "SHADOWS OF DEATH"

What will help us when we face the "threat of death?"

A. The Lord's presence.

The shepherd's presence (i.e. the Lord), to guide us, (Psalm 23:4). He will use his rod and staff illusions to His provision, guidance and protection. No matter how dark life's experiences are God will lead His people through the darkness so that they do not need to fear, (Psalm 23:4).

B. The light of God.

God brings light into the life facing the "shadow of death," (Job 12:22). God's revelation uncovers or exposes the information needed to survive the "shadow of death.," (Lk. 1:79). God's own presence will create enlightenment.

C. God can deliver you out of the "threat of death."

God can bring people out of the "shadow of death," (Psalm 107:14). He hears the cry of those in distress and brings them out of the "threat of death."

D. God may remove the affliction of the "threat of death" by ushering you into His presence through death itself.

God can turn the "shadow of death" into the morning daylight, (Amos 5:8; Mat. 4:16). God controls the planets movement, the cycles of time and elements of nature. God's dominion was unchallenged and not able to be resisted. God can work in life and He can work through death.⁸

Conclusion: After examining the "shadows of death," I would like to conclude by sharing with you three warnings about facing the "threat of death."

The first warning is facing the "threat of death" without knowing Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

For those without eternal life, death is the entrance into the darkest area man will ever face. John Hartley comments on Job's knowledge of death, (Job 10:21), "The dreary state of death (sheol) is vividly pictured through the building up of words for darkness. Five different words for darkness are heaped up in seven expressions, (cf. 3:4-6); darkness (hb. hosek), deep shadow (salmawet), thick darkness (epata), gloom (hb. opel), without order (Hb. "lo'sedarim"). Unfortunately it is hard to capture the nuances of all these words in English. Death is a realm of gloomy darkness. Having no order, it is a land of chaos."⁹ No one should experience death without Jesus Christ.

The second warning is dealing with the "threat of death" solely with "human wisdom." I enjoy going into caves. I have visited many of the caves in the United States. One thing that is common with all caves is "darkness." The tour guides will get you deep into the cave and then turn off the lights. Within the darkness the guide asks you to try to see anything around you. You can't. John Hartley comments, "Men skillfully apply their extensive technical ability to mine ores and refine them, expressing the wonder of human ingenuity. They sink shafts into the mountainside to find precious minerals. With torches or lamps the miner puts an end to darkness, the supposed abode of evil spirits, and searches every recess for a (precious) stone in the thick darkness (Job 28:2-3). Miners do not fear to penetrate into the foreboding darkness of the earth's interior, the underworld, the abode of the dead (Job 10:21-22), in search of treasures. Through men probe to the edge or limit, wisdom still lies beyond their reach, (Job 11:6-9)."¹⁰ As man thinks he can reason through the dark and deep places in the earth, he thinks he can reason through the darkness of the "threat of death." You need God's wisdom.

The third warning is dealing with the succumbing to the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of the "threat of death." solely with "human wisdom." The "shadow of death" (i.e. the threat of death" is only the "shadow" of death, not death itself. John Phillips comments, "The shadow of a dog can't bite, the shadow of a sword cannot kill, the shadow of death cannot harm the child of God."¹¹ George Knight reminds us, "So the idea is that God's comfort and strength are with us in all kinds of darkness, in times of depression, serious illness, rejection by one's friends, horror at discovering the disloyalty of one's own heart, and so on, as well as in the experience of death itself."¹²

Only the Christian can survive the "threat of death."

End Notes:

¹The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, Merrill C. Tenny, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1986, p. 775. Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Herbert Lockyer, Nelson: Grand Rapids, 1986, p. 970.

²Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Harris, Archer, and Waltke, Moody: Chicago, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 767.

³The Book of Psalms, J.J. Stewart Perowne, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 252. Word Biblical Commentary, David Hubbard, "Psalms 1-50" Peter C. Craigie, Word: Waco, 1983, Vol. 19, p. 207. Psalm 1-72, Derek Kidner, IVP: Downers Grove, 1973, p. 111.

⁴Analytical Studies in the Psalms, A. G. Clarke, Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 80. The Expositors Bible Commentary, Frank Gaebelin, "Psalms" by Willem A. Vangemeren, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1991, Vol. 5, p. 216.

⁵Word Biblical Commentary, David Hubbard, "Psalms 1-50" Peter C. Craigie, Word: Waco, 1983, Vol. 19, p. 207.

⁶The Expositors Bible Commentary, Frank Gaebelin, "Psalms" by Willem A. Vangemeren, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1991, Vol. 5, p. 216.

⁷Word Biblical Commentary, David Hubbard, "Job 1-20" David Clines, Word: Waco, 1989, vol. 17, p. 386.

⁸The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Walvoord and Zuck, "Amos" Donald Sunukjian, Victor: Wheaton, 1985, p. 1439.

⁹The Book of Job, John Hartley, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1988, p. 376.

¹⁰The Book of Job, John Hartley, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1988, p. 376.

¹¹Exploring The Psalms, JohnPhillips, Loizeauz Brothers: Neptune, 1985, p. 175.

¹²Psalms, George Knight, Westminster: Philadelphia, 1982, Vol. 1, p. 116.