

Darkness

The idea of darkness, not to mention its presence in the world, is one that immediately brings a multitude of associations to mind. Its perhaps one of the most well known figurative elements in the scriptures and a familiar concept to just about everyone around the world. Darkness can convey multiple meanings at the same time and is frequently used in stories, songs and other creative expressions. As we turn to the scriptures we find that darkness is one of the first things we're introduced to.

As the narrative opens we're told that "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" (**Gen 1.1**). This statement of God's being and use of his power is followed by a description of the newly created world. "*And the earth was without form, and void..*" (**Gen 1.2**). Here we have an image that first introduces God, declares his power in the fact that he's created the world and then we're provided with a description of the physical state of the planet. As we continue in the chapter we'll see definition added and items made to live and grow on the Earth but at the outset its literally a blank slate.

The next statement provides a description of the environment in which this unformed world existed. "*And darkness was upon the face of the deep*" (**Gen 1.2**) provides an additional description indicating that the globe was covered by water and enveloped in darkness. The spirit of God moved on the face of the waters and God begins to shape the new world.

The first step in this process is the creation of light which God then separated from darkness (**Gen 1.3**). This seems to be a simplistic statement but we have to consider what's taking place. God creates light but there's no sun at this time and there won't be until the fourth day of creation. The statement regarding darkness treats it as if it has physical properties. Its separated, or divided, from light which implies form to some degree.

In the modern world we recognize that darkness is the absence of light. Shadows are created by objects interrupting transmission of light from a radiant source but in Genesis chapter one there's no radiant source named. We see that darkness is set in place by God who understands and is able to manipulate its nature. From that point on in the biblical narrative however darkness is present, well known, and at times, a powerful figure symbolically and physically.

In God's restatement of his promises to Abraham when asked about an heir God caused a sleep to come on the patriarch that's described as a horror of great darkness (**Gen 15.10-12**). It was during this episode that God sealed his promises with Abraham with a solemn vow and foretold of events that would bring his offspring to the land of Canaan and eventually bless all families of the Earth in the coming of the Messiah. God used darkness in this instance as a vehicle to impress on Abraham the seriousness and depth of his power. The ability to induce such a state and then communicate in language and visible forms at the same time is testament to the ability of God to enter even our most private thoughts. While he revealed himself in this state of darkness it created an environment that made the visible and audible elements appear with a show of power that Abraham wouldn't soon forget.

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As Moses dealt with Pharaoh to release the children of Israel the Lord demonstrated his authority and power over a hostile monarch. Pharaoh's refusals to allow the Hebrews to leave brought about a series of plagues that began with the water of the land turning to blood. Through a succession of calamities that demonstrated the gods of Egypt were powerless before the God of Heaven. The ninth plague that God brought on the Egyptians involved darkness. "***And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.***" (Ex 10.21-23).

Notice the description of the darkness given in this passage. This wasn't just a lack of light. Its described as a thick darkness that could be felt and was so heavy that none of the Egyptians attempted to move from where they were. We might have a tendency to read through the account of this event very quickly and by doing so we miss the spiritual and physical combinations that are made here.

1. The darkness was over the Egyptians, not the Hebrews marking a line between the people of God and those who opposed the Lord.
2. The darkness has a tangible almost physical quality to it that the people could feel. We may dismiss this as being a figurative expression but there's a sense in which even darkness, an immaterial intangible state, appears to have both nonmaterial and physical properties. This wasn't ordinary darkness and it was under the direct control of God
3. We also have the number three associated with the plague. We have the presence of an unnatural or supernatural darkness that is placed over a specific area and is done for a specific period of time. As I mentioned in the lesson on the numbers of God, three is a significant expression that denotes God's direct involvement and exercise of his power. The association with the number three, the unworldly nature of the darkness and its confinement to a restricted area all point to a being who is able to control anything in the physical and spiritual realm.

We're well acquainted with the association of darkness with evil, a lack of knowledge or rejection of the Lord. Some examples of this are:

1. Those who walk contrary to God are said to behave foolishly and their path is characterized as being in darkness (Eccl 2.14).
2. Darkness is the abode of those who seek to evade judgment. As the people of God continued to sin the Lord allowed their enemies to overtake them. When the Babylonians besieged the city of Jerusalem, there were those who tried to hide themselves to evade capture and judgment. God stated through the prophet Zephaniah that even though they tried to take shelter in the darkness he would search them out with candles and deliver

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them to their foes (**Zeph 1.12**). Darkness while being seen as the ally of evil won't be able to avoid the wrath of God.

3. Lack of spiritual knowledge and the pursuit of evil is referred to in the scriptures as darkness. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul describes their previous state of not knowing the Lord as having their understanding darkened (**Eph 4.18, Eph 5.8**). Paul refers to the warfare of the Christian as being against the power of darkness adding that the struggle isn't just against flesh and blood but against "*spiritual wickedness in high places*" (**Eph 6.12**).

4. John characterizes those who walk contrary to the Lord as being in darkness as well (**1 John 2.9-11**).

5. God sent his son into the world to dispel the spiritual darkness that mankind lives in. Paul describes the spiritual digression of mankind in his letter to the Romans. He states that humans rejected God and "*became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*" (**Rom 1.21**). As the chapter ends this willingness to reject God and live in spiritual darkness caused the Lord to withdraw from them as they followed their evil ways into destruction.

6. John speaks of the world as being in darkness in his description of Christ in his Gospel account. John describes Christ as a light that was rejected because "*the darkness comprehended it not.*" (**John 1.5**). God sent his son into the world to dispel this darkness, so that we could know his will and thus be saved through obedience to him (**1 John 1.5-6**).

7. Punishment by God associates separation from the Lord with fear and being cast into "*outer darkness*" (**Matt 22.13**).

8. God brought darkness over the Earth as Christ died on the cross (**Lk 23.44**). Although Jesus wasn't regarded as being anything but another troublesome Jew by the Romans the events surrounding the crucifixion had an effect. "*Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*" (**Luke 23.47-48**).

There are numerous references and uses of darkness in the scriptures and its not hard for us to understand them. The power in these images is that

1. To God darkness is tangible and has substance
2. It demonstrates the power of God over both the physical and spiritual
3. Represents ignorance and evil in the sight of God and it
4. Represents our spiritual state until we come to a knowledge of God & Christ