

Valleys

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The pathways of God's people are not always in the sunshine and invigorating air of the mountain top; our experiences often involve our passing through the lowland, the valleys. It is one's desire that we all may find the "comfort of the Scriptures" in such experiences.

When God spoke of His earthly people possessing the land to which He would bring them, He said that it was "a land of hills and valleys," (Deuteronomy 11: 11); but He also spoke of "fountains and depths that spring out of *valleys* and hills," (Deuteronomy 8: 7). Thus there is provision for the refreshing of our souls whatever may be the circumstances in which we are found.

In Psalm 104: 8, we see that "valleys" are actually a creation of God Himself, "the valleys sank, unto the place which thou hadst founded for them," (New Trans.). We can therefore accept our "valley" circumstances as the ordering of God, and rejoice in the knowledge that "he sendeth the springs into the valleys" (v. 10). How blessed to hear Him say to His people, "I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them, I will open . . . fountains in the midst of the valleys," (Isaiah 41: 17, 18).

Again we read in Psalm 65: 13, "The valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." Refreshment, support and a joy that cannot be restrained are the portion of those passing through the valleys of God.

David was a man who knew what "valley" experiences were. In the valley of Elah, as a type of the Lord Jesus, he knew what derision and scorn were (1 Samuel 17: 28), and he knew what conflict meant. But in the list of the "*king's treasures*" we read of "the herds that were in the valleys," (1 Chronicles 27: 29). If we consider for a moment the anti-type, what increase and substance has accrued as the result of that conflict in the valley! Do we not adoringly own that all the joy and blessing which is ours has come to us through the going down of the One who loved us; He who went into the very valley of death itself?

It is possible for us to find ourselves in "valley" circumstances as the result of our own failures, an experience involving sorrow of heart. In Joshua 7, the people of God are found in the "valley of Achor" — the valley of sorrow, consequent upon their defeat by the men of Ai. Achan (which means "troubler") had coveted "a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight," (v. 21). It was the "goodly Babylonish garment which apparently attracted him first, something which would cause him to be outstanding and give him prominence before others. Doubtless he considered the silver and the gold would help him to keep up this prominent position. Alas! how often the desire for self-examination has brought in conditions of sorrow amongst God's people! The "valley of sorrow" remains "unto this day," (v. 26). yet the light of sovereign mercy shines even in the gloom of such a valley. In Isaiah 65: 10, we read "the valley of Achor (shall be) a place for the herds to lie down in, *for My people that have sought Me*". If failure has come in, with its consequent sorrow, the remedy is to seek the Lord. He alone can make such circumstances to yield blessing and substance to truly repentant hearts. Again we read in Hosea 2: 15, "I will give her . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day she came up out of the land of Egypt." Who but God could fill the "valley of sorrow" with the joyful strains of Exodus 15?

There is a further reference to the valley of Achor in Joshua 15: 7, in relation to the lot of Judah,

and careful study of that verse, and the route given, will yield much for the exercised heart.

Psalm 84 introduces another valley — the "valley of Baca," which is the valley of weeping. This speaks of the deep exercises which belong to those whose desires are towards the living God and towards His habitation. As appreciating the mercy of God — and as longing for His interests, our hearts are conscious of the contrary scene through which we are passing, but as finding our strength in God (v. 5), and our affections making room for His ways, we find the vale of weeping turned into "a well-spring; yea, the early rain covereth it with blessings," (v. 6, New Trans.). The blessing of God moves quickly towards those whose hearts are truly set upon Himself, and whilst *still in the valley of weeping*, the whole scene is filled with the consciousness of His inexhaustible supplies of refreshment and blessing.

In 2 Chronicles 20, in the days of Jehoshaphat, a great multitude of the enemies of God's people were arrayed against them, but in the power of the prophetic word of Jahaziel ("seen of God") they moved forward to complete victory. As obedient to the word of God they were able to assemble "themselves in the valley of Berechah; for there they blessed the LORD; therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berechah (blessings) unto this day," (v.26). In the history of the Church men who have opposed the truth have often brought the saints into conditions of anguish and distress, but as waiting upon God and giving place to His word, the apparent defeat has been turned into a "valley of blessings" in which the praises of God have issued from the hearts of His people. This was true in the so-called dark ages, when many a Swiss valley rang with the praises of God's people, and it is equally true to-day. God is "The Same;" and His word abides in all its unalterable power and authority.

The taunt of the Syrians was "the LORD is God of the hills, but He is not the God of the valleys." God's answer to this was the complete deliverance of His people.

There is no valley experience which is beyond the reach of the love of God. The Psalmist could say "Yea, though I walk through *the valley of the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil; for *Thou art with me*". Thus in the darkest valley of all, where the strongest enemy is found, we have not only the inexhaustible blessings of our God, but *His actual presence with us*. In Mark 5, we see Jairus passing through such a valley, and it is said (v. 24), "Jesus went with him." When the shadow had deepened, and his daughter was dead, what comfort there must have been to his bereaved heart in the precious words of Christ, "Be not afraid, only believe," (v. 36).

If the experiences of the "valleys" are to yield their fruit there must be real exercise in relation to them. The valley of Eschol was "searched out," and as the fruit of the searching was "in their hand," they were able to say, "It is a good land which the LORD our God doth give us," (Deuteronomy 1: 24, 25).

Above all the blessing that may be ours as we move through these exercises with God — there is the fruit which accrues to the heart of the blessed Lord Himself — "I went down . . . to see the fruits (verdure) of the valley, to see whether the vine budded, whether the pomegranates blossomed. Before I was aware, My soul set me upon the chariots of *My willing people*." (Solomon's Song 6: 11, 12. New Trans.). Is He not worthy of our willing praise?

Never was there a valley — never such depths as those to which the love of Christ took Him.

May every exercise through which we pass yield joy to His own blessed heart.