

I had a feeling the “valley of the shadow of death” David wrote about in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm was a real place, I just didn’t know I would actually see it in a recent visit to Israel.

*Psalms 23:4 says “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.”*

Looking out the tour bus window while in Jerusalem, I was fascinated by a little valley with limestone cliff sides, noticeable caves and crevices, gradual slope, and its “C” shape which conceals the exit or entrance to those walking in this valley. Just as I thought “this is no place for a person at night”, our tour group leader spoke over the PA system of the bus “out the left window is the ‘valley of the shadow of death’ David wrote about in Psalms, and Jesus talked about too, it is called Ge'Hinnom, which in Greek is ‘Gehenna’.”



Almost too late for a photo, I did manage to get a couple through the bus window. Sorry if not very clear. I’m sure the buildings weren’t there in Jesus’ or David’s day, but nevertheless, here are some thoughts to help you gain more from this fantastic 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm passage that has helped so many get through troubles, fearful situations, and trials:

- There are places like caves and crevices in the upper walls of the valley for wolves, enemies, or similar troubles to hide, and you can do nothing about it, but pray and keep going with a proper frame of mind.
  - Evil and troubles lurk around us, keep your head on your task at hand and don’t let yourself be bothered by the scary things.
- You are in the shadows when in the valley.

- So do the best you can with the light you have. Shadows make us fearful. David says "even in the fearful shadows, I will not be afraid because God is with me." Need reassurance? Look at these: Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5
- You are vulnerable walking through the valley, a “sitting duck” so to speak, unless someone goes with you, or miraculously protects you.
  - You cannot change the trouble, or where it is, so you just have to put your head down and walk through the valley...trusting God. Psalm 31:24
  - Jesus said in John 16:33 “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have troubles; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Then in His parting words in Matthew 28:20 He said “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Who better to have with you than someone who has overcome the troubles of this world...Jesus!
- There are rocks and potholes in the path to trip you up if you look at the troubles around you, instead of where you are walking.
  - So quit focusing on the troubles, and focus on what you CAN do, like walk as fast as you can without tripping or falling. Bob and weave if you need, but focus on what is right in front of you, and who is with you (Jesus). Maybe that also means paying attention to helpful family or friends, and certainly God’s promises and His faithfulness. Psalm 28:7, Psalm 31:3-4
  - You don’t get tripped up when you take one step at a time...one day at a time. Remember in Matthew 6, Jesus promises grace sufficient for the day, not down the road, so focus just on today, and what is right in front of you. Don't let your mind think days into the future where you will come up with something to worry about, which does you no good.
  - Don’t stop moving. The enemy can get a bead on you and score direct hits when you stop moving. So avoid being alone sitting at home sulking, that’s when self-pity, doubts, fears, worries, blaming the innocent, etc. hit you like shots from the enemy (which those are). Keep active, even if you have to volunteer some place. (Volunteerism is the #1 prescription with positive results for depression, by the way)



- This valley is “C” shaped. You cannot see the end, but it’s there. Sound familiar? While in a troubling situation, there is no end in sight, and sometimes when you think it is getting better, there is more trouble right around the corner.
  - I have found God works in seasons. That is comforting, because winter ends and spring comes, always. That is true with troubles in our life. “This too shall pass” 2

Corinthians 4:17-18 Remember this, each step, each minute that goes by, gets you closer to the end.

- At the start of this valley, you can see Bethlehem, and the Shepherd Hills mentioned in Luke 2. These are where David was born and grew up tending sheep.
  - Troubles come when you are in familiar surroundings. “How could this happen to me?!” usually comes out of our mouth because we just can’t believe troubles and attacks are coming at us while at home, at our job, and around our family. Don’t be surprised, for God has a plan to work these troubles out for good for you. Romans 8:28-29
- In Jesus’ day, He used this valley as an idiom of hell, because it was where people dumped their trash and dead carcasses, and there was a continual fire burning there.
  - David says that God’s rod and staff comfort him. Those are references to laws to protect you (rod), and correction in direction (staff). Obeying God’s Word, and letting God correct you when you mess up (and learn from those mistakes) are actually comforting because doing what is right always is the best way to go. Trust God, He knows what is best, and His ways are best for you, you will get through the valley then.
  - If you are a true Christian, you always have this going for you: The valley of troubles you are going through, are the only “hell” you will experience. You will not spend one second in the real hell: the eternal separation from God, the lake of fire. Thanks to Jesus, you will skip that and spend eternity with Him in His Kingdom. Matthew 25:46
- The valley ends almost abruptly, and opens up to a nice field.
  - This may mean no more troubles for a while because the very next verse says God prepares a banquet dinner for you, which is either refreshment and rewards for making it through the troubles, or is a reference to the marriage supper of the Lamb in Heaven Revelation 19:6-9. Either is a work as a good promise from God to look forward to.

One other thing I noticed from the tour bus was at the end of this valley, less than half a mile up on a ridge is where David ruled as King at the southern edge of the old city of Jerusalem called the “City of David”, and is very near the site of God’s Temple. David made his home and office in between the House of God, and the valley of the shadow of death. It forms somewhat of a triangle, but I will let you ponder possible analogies.

I was so happy to see this valley, it brings the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm to life, and more importantly, shows me it is a real place David wrote about while facing real troubles, and God really got him through it. That’s good news for us – we can take the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm seriously. So memorize it, you will need to know it word for word when troubles come. I did, I’ve used it in the past, and will again.