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The “Valley of the Shadow” and Its Several Meanings

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“The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”



“Yes, though I walk through valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me” (Psalms 23:4a KJV MOD). This verse is the one we will look at today.

What is “The valley of the shadow of death?”

Often people would guess that this Scripture refers to the end of one’s life or physical death. Death is not a favorite topic for most people.

The comic Woody Allen says, “I don’t mind death. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”

Yet the Jewish interpretation of this verse is different, “The morbid valley characterizes exile. ... It is a place so dangerous that it is as dark and forbidding as the grave” (*Te-hillim* commentary p. 57). The Jews know what it is like to be in exile for hundreds of years in: Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Poland/Germany until it became worse than exile. Experiencing holocaust is beyond death itself.

Persecution of any individual or group of people is truly, “a valley of the shadow of death.”

The 1994 Rwandan genocide with one million people killed is a

most recent holocaust. Immaculee Ilibagaza prays through her many close calls with death, “God, I am really walking through the valley of death – please stay with me. Shield me with the power of your love. You created this ground that we’re walking on, so please don’t let these killers spill your daughter’s blood on it” (Ilibagaza and Erwin, *Left To Tell*, Hay House, 1994).

THE VALLEY OF DEATH

Another way to look at this verse in the 23rd Psalm is to see each person’s death as “walking through the valley of the shadow of death.” When we know the Lord, our Good Shepherd, we can see death as only a fleeting “shadow.” We walk out of the “shadow lands” into the true reality of the fullness of God’s Kingdom. “There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4 NKJV).

When my friend Dianne’s husband Dave Herivel died in the mid 1990’s, I had the sad and joyful experience of praying with him while he was near the end of his life.

I bowed my head, and suddenly it seemed right to pray Psalm 23 over him. I began, “The Lord is Dave’s Shepherd he shall not want. You are leading him beside the refreshing still waters. You are restoring His soul. Lord Jesus You have led him in the paths of righteousness for Your namesake.”

Yes, though Dave is walking through the Valley of the Shadow

of death, he will fear no evil. For you Lord are with him.”

Your rod and Shepherd’s staff they comfort Dave. You prepared a table before your child in the presence of his enemies. You have anointed Dave’s head with oil; his cup runs over.”

Surely goodness and mercy have followed Dave all the days of his life. And he will dwell in the House of the Lord, Forever. Amen” (Psalm 23 paraphrased).

Though Dave could not speak, his eyes looked over to his wife, Dianne on the other side of his bed. She explained to me, “He said, ‘Thank you.’ ... How grateful I was. . .” (Bennett, *Heaven Tours*, Bridge-Logos, p. 78-79).

GOD’S OMNIPRESENCE

“I will fear no evil; for You are with me” (Psalm 23:4b).

As long as God is with you, you can handle anything. He is there, you just need to acknowledge Him.

Tell Him: “Abba, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, I want You with me always.” Now relax, and wait to sense God’s loving presence with you.

(See you next time at the 7th Psalm 23 series.)

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