

The God of the Valleys

by H. A. Ironside

"And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD *is* God of the hills, but he *is* not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD" (1 Kings 20:28).

I do not know how familiar you may be with the incident linked with these words, but some of you at least will recall that when Ahab of evil memory was king of Israel, Ben-hadad, king of Syria, sought an occasion of quarrel with him, and invaded the land of Israel with a great army. Although Ahab had no real title or right to cry to God and expect any blessing, yet, because of the need of His people, and because of the proud and hard Syrians, God intervened in a wonderful way, and in the hill country, in the northern part of the land, gave to Israel a great victory so that the Syrians were utterly scattered.

Trying to account for their defeat, they said, "It is very evident that the God of Israel is a God of the hills; our gods are gods of the valleys. These Israelites are highlanders, they are used to the mountains and their God is accustomed to giving them victory in the hill country. Their God is a God of the hills; He is not the God of the valleys; therefore, we will reorganise our armies, and will come against Israel at the turn of the year, but we will be careful not to be lured by them into the highlands. We will draw them down into the plains, and there we will overwhelm them, and we will prove that our gods are the gods of the valleys, and theirs is not."

So when this word came, Jehovah sent a prophet to Ahab, saying, "Thus saith the Lord: because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but He is

Not God of the Valleys

therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

The people of Israel were just a little company, and the Syrians encamped against them were a great host. The result was a tremendous victory for Israel. They did not deserve it, but God who delighteth in mercy, and is very jealous of the honour of His own Name, took this way of proving that He was just as truly the God of the valleys as He

was the God of the hills.

You know many of us live in the valleys the greater part of the time. We do not spend nearly as much time on the mountain tops of blessing as, perhaps, we should. We gather together in meetings, and get enthused by a splendid song leader, and sing, "I'm living on the mountain, underneath the cloudless sky," and then we leave the meeting and the beautiful music behind, and go out to face life. We come down into trying experiences, and to the commonplace difficulties of life, and realise that we are no longer on the mountain; we are down in the valley. In fact, most of us spend much of our time in

The Valley of the Commonplace.

Very few of us attain the ideals that were in our minds years ago.

Many of us can look back to the time when we were young, and had such high ambitions—ambitions which we have never realised. As the years have gone on we find that most of us live our lives down in the valleys of the commonplace; we do not get very high up; we do not know very much of fame or honour. If we should pass away, perhaps the most that the newspaper would have about us would be a little paid notice put in by the undertaker. Yes, we live our lives in the valley of the commonplace, but we come to realise that God is the God of the valleys, and that He is interested in the people of the lowlands, and not merely in those who climb to the mountain tops. President Lincoln said, "God certainly must have loved the common people because He made so many of them."

But I am not thinking so much of the valleys in that sense; I have in mind certain valleys of which we read in the Word of God, valleys through which all of us will have to pass some time or another.

I. The Valley of Baca

We read of one of these in Psalm 84:5, 6: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who, passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools."

You may consult any Bible atlas; you may look over any map of ancient lands, but you will never find the valley of Baca. The fact of the matter is that it is a well-known district indeed through which all our feet pass at some time as we go through this life, for the valley of Baca is really the valley of weeping, the valley of trouble. You know

something of that—of the valley of sorrow, the valley of trial, the valley of perplexity, the valley of testing, the valley of difficulty, when the tears will start, try to keep them back as you may. But what a blessed thing to know that God is with us when we go through the valley of Baca. Those who are in fellowship with Him find that passing through this valley He provides springs of refreshment, "The rain also filleth the pools." It is wonderful the way God makes Himself known to the troubled heart in such a manner as He cannot reveal Himself to those with whom all is going well. It is in the trials of life that we learn to know our God in a way that we could not know Him without them.

"We know Him as we could not know
Through Heaven's golden years,
We there shall see His glorious face,
On earth they saw His tears."

It is in the hour of trial, and it is in

The Valley of Weeping

that the blessed Lord can reveal Himself as at no other time, for He, too, has passed through that valley, and so we speak of Him as "The Man of Sorrows."

"'Man of Sorrows,' what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His Blood.
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

"Lifted up was He to die,
'It is finished,' was His cry;
Now in Heaven exalted high.
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"

And up there in the glory He is "this same Jesus" who once trod the valley of weeping here on earth.

"When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed Home to bring;
Then anew this song we'll sing:

Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"

When we look at His wonderful face, upon that visage that was once marred more than any man, we shall know that He is indeed our blessed Jesus, the Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief, who has been our Companion, our Friend, our Sustainer, as we walked through the valley of weeping.

The Bible does not exhort to

Stoical Indifference

to trial, and does not insist that we dry our tears, for Jesus wept with the sorrowing sisters of Bethany. Be assured to-day if you are going through the valley of weeping, that His heart beats in tender love and sympathy; for if "one member of the Body suffer, all the members suffer with it." Yes, the God of the valleys is with His people as they pass through the valley of weeping. Do not hold anything back from Him; avail yourself of the privilege of prayer, of going to Him with your troubles. Remember He has said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

II. The Valley of Achor

There is another valley of which we read in Hosea 2:14, 15, where the Lord, speaking of Israel, says: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and 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 when she came up out of the land of Egypt."

But what is the valley of Achor? Do you remember where we first read of that valley in Scripture? You recall how God gave Israel such a marvellous victory when they went up against Jericho. He told them that they were not to take of the riches of Jericho for themselves. Then a few days later, when they went against Ai, only to suffer an humiliating defeat, Joshua threw himself down before God and said, "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies?" And God said, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of

The Accursed Thing,

and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies."

Then you will recall how the tribes passed before the Lord, and the tribe of Judah was taken, and then a certain family of this tribe, and then God pointed out Achan, and said, "That is the reason I cannot give you the victory." And Joshua said. "Confess what you have done." And Achan answered, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel...when I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it."

A messenger was sent, and found it was exactly as Achan had said, and then because it was the dispensation of law, and not of grace, he and his family were taken out into the valley of Achor, and stoned with stones until they died.

What is the valley of Achor ? It is

The Valley of Retribution;

it is the valley of suffering for one's own failures, for one's own sins. The greatest grief that Christians can ever be called upon to bear is to be brought into the valley of Achor, where they realise that things might have been so different if in years gone by they had only walked with God; but they failed Him, they acted contrary to His Word, and because of that they have had to prove the truth of that passage, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." These words are spoken to the children of God. Do not think for a moment that because we have been washed in the precious blood of Christ we shall escape the result of our sins.

I know a splendid Christian man, who in years gone by lived a life of sin. The Lord came in in a wonderful way and saved him, and that man now is as great a saint as he was a sinner, but he will bear in his body

The Results of His Former Life

as long as he lives. He has suffered untold agony physically because of the path he once trod, and he has said that there were times when he was tempted to wonder whether God had ever forgiven him. There are some results of sin from which we shall never be delivered until we receive the redemption of our bodies at the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But as we pass through the valley of Achor, we may have the

blessed presence of our Lord with us, and know that He is indeed the God of the valleys as well as the God of the mountains.

Only a few weeks ago a splendid Christian woman who has known the Lord only seven years, a widow of a millionaire, said to me, "Pray for my boy; pray for my girl; they have no interest in the things of God. I can never get them to hear the Word of God. They are courteous and polite if I bring a servant of the Lord to my home, but they will allow no one to say a word to them, and they will not read the Bible." And then she said, "The worst of it is that they are what they are because I brought them up that way. Until seven years ago, I lived the life that they are living; I led them in the path they are now going. A Bible was never opened in my home until my husband died, and left me a broken-hearted woman, surrounded with all the luxuries he had given me, and I was crying out for something that could help me. Christ came to me, but it was too late to turn my children's steps in the right way. They are treading the path on which I started them. Pray for them. Join with me in pleading that as God reached me, He will reach them."

This mother was passing through the valley of Achor. The Lord says, "I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for

A Door of Hope."

This is what He is going to do for Israel; they have been passing through the valley of Achor since refusing the Messiah, and what has been the result? They have suffered as no other people have suffered, and the worst is yet to come, but He will bring them in triumph through the valley of Achor. So, as we seek to be subject to the will of God, to endure what He in His infinite wisdom puts upon us, He will prove that He is the God of the valley of retribution as well as of every other experience of life.

III. The Valley of the Shadow

There is another valley through which we all pass. Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." I said that every one of us shall pass through this valley, and some of you may have thought, "Oh, but if the Lord should come, we will never have to go through the valley of the shadow of death."

The valley of the shadow of death is not the hour of death itself; but it is that deep, dark valley through which we are called to pass when the death of a loved one casts a dark shadow over our lives. That is the

valley of the shadow of death, and who is there here that has not passed through it!

"There is no sheepfold howsoever defended,
But one dead lamb is there;
There is no household howsoever protected,
But has one vacant chair."

There is not one of us here who has not cried out, "Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand, the sound of a voice that is still!"

An orphan lad whose foster-mother had just passed away, sat on the steps after the funeral service, sobbing out his little heart, and when some one tried to comfort him, he exclaimed, "Oh, I want some one to love who will never die!" Thank God, we who trust Christ have some one to love who will never die. "I am He that liveth!"

It is of Him we speak when with the Psalmist we cry, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me." He, once the Man of Sorrows, is nevertheless the God of the valleys, as truly God as truly man, and as truly man as He is truly God. Having passed through death, He is able to comfort and strengthen and cheer our hearts, as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

IV. The Valley Berachah

Not all the valleys are dark. There is another one which is the valley of gladness. We are told that when King Jehoshaphat won a great victory, he led the people of Israel into a remarkable valley. "And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah: for there they blessed the Lord: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day" (2 Chron. 20:26). Berachah means what? It means blessing. All blessings are not received upon the mountain tops, in the high and great experiences of life, but down in the low places, down in the valleys of the commonplace; there we also have communion with God, and happy fellowship with Him. One of our Christian poets has written:

"In the valley with my Saviour I need never, never fear,
For 'tis there His sweetest message oft is whispered in my ear.
There I learn the heavenly secrets, there with joy He fills my soul;
Though the torrent rushes by me, and the chilly mists enroll."