

**THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD
THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH-PT 1
PSALM 23:4**

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Introduction

In my studies on this verse, I found that in ISRAEL there is actually a real place called “***THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.***” I did not know that before. The following quote is from an article by James K. Wallace who quotes the word of Ferando D’Alphonso, an experienced shepherd.

“There is a valley of the shadow of death in the Holy Land. It is south of the Jericho Road leading from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and is a narrow (way) through the mountain range. Climatic and grazing conditions make it necessary for the sheep to be moved through this valley for seasonal feeding.

The valley is four and a half miles long. Its sidewalls are over 1500 feet high in places and it is only 10 or 12 feet wide at the bottom. Travel through the valley is dangerous, because its floor, badly eroded by cloudbursts, has deep gullies. Actual footing on solid rock is so narrow in places that a sheep cannot turn around, and it is an unwritten law of shepherds that flocks must go up the valley in the morning hours and down towards the eventide, lest flocks meet in the (narrow way). Mules have not been able to make the trip for centuries, but sheep and goat herders from earliest Old Testament days have maintained a passage for their stock.

About halfway through the valley, the walk crosses from one side to the other at a place where the path is cut in two by an eight-foot gully. One section of the path is about 18 inches higher than the other; the sheep must jump across it. The shepherd stands at this break and coaxes or forces the sheep to make the leap. If the sheep slips and lands in the gully, the shepherd’s staff is brought into play. The old-style crook is encircled around a large sheep’s neck or a small sheep’s chest, and it is lifted to safety. If a more modern narrow crook is used, the sheep is caught about the hoofs and lifted up to the walk.

Many wild dogs lurk in the shadows of the valley looking for prey. After a band of sheep has entered the (narrow way), the leader may come upon such a dog. Unable to retreat, the leader baas a warning. The shepherd, skilled in throwing his rod, hurls it at the dog and knocks it into the washed-out gully where it is easily killed. Thus the sheep have learned to fear no evil, even in the valley of the shadow of death for their master is there to aid them and protect them from harm.

It is believed that DAVID led his SHEEP through “***THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH***” to greener pastures as he was growing up and that his experience with that is how he came to use the imagery in this PSALM.

We also know that the term “valley” is often used to refer to all kinds of low times or rough times of difficulty in this life. Even today we talk about *being on a mountain top* when things are going well and *being down in the valley* when things are NOT going so well.

When we talk about someone in difficulty of some sort, we may refer to them as *going through a valley* in their life.

The term “valley” is sometimes referred to as a “place of disadvantage”. **If you are wanting an advantage over your enemy, you want the higher ground! When you are on high ground, gravity is usually your friend. When you are in a valley, gravity is usually your enemy! (e.g. 1 Kings 20:23; 28) Also we get the song:**

**God Of The Mountain
(by Bill & Gloria Gaither)**

*Life is easy, when you're up on the mountain
And you've got peace of mind
Like you've never known*

*But then things change when you're down in the valley
Don't lose faith, child, you are never alone*

*For the God on the mountain is still God in the valley
When things go wrong, He'll make them right
And the God of the good times, is still God in the bad times
The God of the day, is still God in the night*

*We talk of faith when we're up on the mountain,
But talk comes so easy
When life's at its best
But it's down in the valley of trials and temptations,
That's when faith is really put to the test.*

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Now, up to this point in this **PSALM**, **DAVID** has been speaking **about** the **LORD his SHEPHERD**. But then he gets to this verse and it appears that his thoughts shift to the **VALLEYS** of this life (*And make no mistake, DAVID had his share of VALLEYS in life! We saw that in our journey through the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings in our Wednesday night Bible Studies*).

As David thought on how he made it through those many difficult days, he remembered that it was the **LORD his SHEPHERD WHO** got him through those times in the same way **DAVID** got his **SHEEP** through **“THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH”** to lead them to other side.

DAVID changes **WHO** he is speaking to here. He directs the statement of *verses 4 and 5* to the **SHEPHERD!** He forgets the reader and speaks to the **LORD his SHEPHERD!**

It is as if as he was writing this and the thoughts of his *tough times* came into his mind and he pictures what he did— i.e. the times that he ran into the **PRESENCE** of the **LORD** where he found **PEACE, HELP, and SAFETY through the VALLEYS!**

What a great picture for us. When we go through the **VALLEYS OF LIFE** we need to realize our great need to run into the **PRESENCE OF OUR SHEPHERD, THE LORD!** It is **ONLY** in the **PRESENCE OF THE SHEPHERD** that we find **PEACE, HELP, and SAFETY!**

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SCRIPTURE speaks of other **VALLEYS** that were places of some rough times and evoked some strong emotions when they were mentioned.

Turn with me back to the BOOK OF JOSHUA Chapter 6. Here we find **ISRAEL** experienced a great victory from the **LORD** as the walls of **JERICHO** came tumbling down! **THE LORD DID THAT FOR ISRAEL!** (That was a **“MOUNTAIN TOP”** experience no doubt!)

However, we find that one man in **ISRAEL**, **ACHAN**, made a fateful decision on that glorious, victorious day to directly disobey the **LORD’S** very clear command found here in **JOSHUA 6:17-19!**

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ACHAN disregarded the **SHEPHERD** and suffered in a **VALLEY** of his own making and choosing!

Now, did **ACHAN** see anything wrong with what he had done? Well, he most certainly did in that he **HID** that which he had taken during the destruction of **JERICHO!** His hiding the **GOODS** was as good as a **CONFESSION** that he knew what he was doing wasn’t right!

There is no need to **HIDE** anything if we are doing right! If we are having to **HIDE** something, that should tell us that what we’re doing isn’t right!

Now **ACHAN’S** actions caused some **“VALLEYS” (i.e. difficulties)** for not only him, but for his family, for **36 unnamed families, and for all of ISRAEL!**

His actions first negatively affected **36 families of his BRETHREN** as well as **all of ISRAEL!** (*Joshua 7:1-5*)

Then in *Joshua 7:19-23*, **ACHAN’S** sin was exposed causing a **“VALLEY”** of embarrassment to his tribe of **JUDAH**, to his family of the **ZARHITES**, and to **ZABDI** his father’s household!

Then we see he caused a **“VALLEY”** for himself and his family as they were taken out with **ALL** of their possessions and stoned to death and burned with fire for the **TROUBLE** he caused **ISRAEL.** (*Joshua 7:24-26*)

(One can **CHOOSE** to **SIN**, but they cannot **CHOOSE** the **CONSEQUENCES!**)

The **VALLEY** where they stoned them and burned them and piled stones on top of their corpses was called the **VALLEY OF ACHOR** which means **“VALLEY OF TROUBLE.”** That **VALLEY** from that day forward was a reminder of what happened that day!

Sometimes we find ourselves in a **VALLEY** through no fault of our own! A **VALLEY** we find ourselves in may be because of the choices of others!

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*(e.g. **ACHAN'S** sin affected not only him, but his wife, and his children!)*
*(e.g. **ACHAN'S** sin affected the **NATION OF ISRAEL** who lost a battle and affected the 36 families who lost a loved one in the battle of Ai!)*

But, sometimes we find ourselves in a **VALLEY** because of our own poor choices! *(e.g. **ACHAN'S** choice was a **VALLEY** of his own making!)*

We need to ask the **LORD** to help us to **NOT** cause our own **VALLEYS!**

But in this world we will find ourselves having to go through **VALLEYS.**

***Job 14:1**– “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and **full of trouble.**”*

***John 16:33** – “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world **ye shall have tribulation:** but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”*

So, when we find ourselves having to go through a **VALLEY**, which we will, let's run to our **SHEPHERD** and **find REST in HIS CARE!**