The Pilgrim’s Progress

Chapter 9: The Valley of the Shadow of Death
When we last saw Christian, he was in the Valley of Humiliation battling Apollyon. After a fierce contest, Christian gave him a “deadly thrust” with his sword which sent Apollyon staggering back. With that, he spread out his dragon wings and fled.
Introduction

At the end of this valley was another, called the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Christian had to go through it because the way to the Celestial City went through the middle of it.

Wadi Kelt
Judean Wilderness east of Jerusalem
The Valley of the Shadow of Death “signifies darkness and desertion of soul...None but the heart of a Christian knows the bitterness of God’s hiding away his face. It is death to all his comforts; his mourning under a sense of it manifests his love to the Lord and delight in his presence” (John S. Roberts).
The Basic Sense of Darkness

The Greek word means “darkness, not in connection with its optical effect, but experienced as an enveloping sphere and described in its significance for existence, i.e., as a hindrance to movement and action, to foresight, as the sphere of objective peril and subjective anxiety...If light is the sphere of true potentiality, cutting off from light, going into the dark, means death.”

- Kittel’s Theological Dictionary
“Darkness is almost an instinctive symbol of the horrible, the uncanny and the evil in all literature.”

- E.M. Blaiklock
“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep...” (Gen. 1:2).

“God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness” (Gen. 1:4).
“Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt – darkness that can be felt” (Ex. 10:21).

“So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived” (Ex. 10:22-23).
Darkness in the Old Testament

“These are the commandments the Lord proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me” (Deut. 5:22).
“Though I cry, ‘I’ve been wronged!’ I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice. He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness” (Job 19:7-8).
“What is the way to the abode of light? 
And where does darkness reside?”

Job 38:19
“It is night; night in Christian’s soul, and therefore night in this valley. He is walking in the path of duty, and no forebodings of evil, though he had them abundantly, can turn him back; and yet, it is night in him, and night around him.”

- Rev. G.B. Cheever, D.D.
The Path Through the Valley

- Extremely narrow
- Dark as pitch
- Hobgoblins, satyrs, and dragons
- Continual howling and yelling (unutterable misery)
- A discouraging cloud of confusion
- The wings of death spread over it
- Incredibly dreadful
The Path Through the Valley

• Without any order whatsoever
• Very deep ditch on the right
• Dangerous swamp on the left
• The mouth of hell in the middle of the valley
• Flames and smoke
• Hideous noises
• A company of fiends
“The ditch, on the right hand, is error in principle, into which the blind (as to spiritual truths, blind guides) lead the blind, who were never spiritually enlightened. The ditch on the left hand, means outward sins and wickedness, which many fall into. Both are alike dangerous to pilgrims; but the Lord ‘will keep the feet of his saints’” (I Sam. 2:9).
Bunyan “had two distinct, long, and dreadful seasons of temptation to pass through, each of them lasting for more than two years – the first more nearly resembling this dreadful conflict, hand to hand, with Satan, with Apollyon; and the second more fully depicted in Christian’s fearful journey through this Valley of Death, after that conflict. There was but a short interval of ease and peace between them.”
“Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Elie Wiesel
Auschwitz Survivor
“Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. 

“Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.”
“But it may be asked, why doth the Lord suffer his children to walk in such darkness? It is for his glory: it tries their faith in him, and excites prayer to him; but his love abates not in the least towards them; ‘Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God’ (Is. 50:10, ESV).
“The Psalms disclose God’s fiery love for His people. He draws us to the extreme edge of life, where we cannot live by careful, well-planned control. This is where the desert begins. It is where darkness draws us to a realm of desperation and dependence. It is the place where trust can grow. God’s passion is to rig the world so that we are compelled to deal with whatever blocks us from being like His glorious Son.”
In Time of Trouble

• **Be cautious** – there is a ditch on the right and a mire on the left

• **Use the weapon of All-Prayer:** “Then I called on the name of the LORD: ‘O LORD, save me!’” (Ps. 116:4). The name of the Lord is a strong tower. Cry out to him!

• **Stop:** consider the wisest thing to do

• **Remember:** reflect on the dangers you have already faced and defeated by God’s grace
In Time of Trouble

• **Resolve** to go on; never turn back

• **Walk** in the strength of the Lord. “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

• **Scripture:** make reading and studying the Bible a high priority

• **Know** that the Judge of all the earth will do right

• **Submit** to God’s will
In Time of Trouble

• **Meditate** on the perfections of God: “Because he is Almighty, All-wise, All-seeing, Everywhere-present, boundless, everlasting, and unchangeable, in goodness, mercy, and compassion – we have in him a refuge and stronghold, to which we may continually resort” (James W. Alexander).

• **Run** to your refuge: Christ. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
“You are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord turns my darkness into light” (II Sam. 22:29).

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Is. 9:2).
The Promises of God

• “For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness” (Ps. 18:28).

• “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!” (Ps. 107:13-15).
“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you; for night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.”

Psalm 139:11-12
“Come then, and drown your griefs in the sea of everlasting love! A little longer, and you shall be admitted to a nearer view of those divine excellences, which, even in distant prospect, have sustained your head amidst the billows. And, then, when fully entered into your eternal fortress, how speedily shall you forget all the trials of the pilgrimage!”
“Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.”

Isaiah 50:10