Chapter 23: A Deep River
John Bunyan saw in his dream that there was a very deep river between the two pilgrims and the gate of heaven. Christian and Hopeful, having noticed there was no bridge, were overwhelmed when they saw the river. The angels traveling with them said, “You must go through it, or you cannot get to the other side.”
“Christian and Hopeful began to inquire about another way to the gate, to which they answered, ‘Yes, but there have not been any, except two, namely Enoch and Elijah, who have been permitted to walk that path since the foundation of the world; nor shall there be any more until the last trumpet shall sound.’”
Enoch

- The great-grandson of Adam through Seth (Gen. 4:17); the son of Jared, the father of Methuselah; the great-grandfather of Noah.
- He was “translated” to heaven without dying.
“When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:21-24).
“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God” (Heb. 11:5).
“Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal...And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, ‘My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’ And he saw him no more” (II Kings 2:1,11).
“Bunyan borrows this image from Israel crossing the Jordan and entering into the promised land (Joshua 3). However, nowhere in the Bible is “the crossing of Jordan” used as a symbol of death. The image of crossing a river is used in Christian hymns and poems (and in the writings of Dante and Virgil); but it is not a Bible image. Israel’s experience at Jordan pictures the believer dying to self, leaving a life of wandering
in unbelief, and entering into his inheritance in Christ \textit{in this life}. After all, Canaan cannot be a picture of heaven because Israel fought battles there! However, we must confess that Bunyan’s handling of this event is masterful.”

- Warren Wiersbe
Avoiding Thoughts of Death

“Modern secular man refuses to be reconciled to his own professed nothingness. The prospect of personal death is one to which he, like other men, seems least able to reconcile himself...He thrusts out of mind the notion that he is helpless to reverse his rendezvous with nonbeing, and invests his existence with a secret conviction that he differs in kind and in fate from the range of other finite beings...He declines
Avoiding Thoughts of Death

both to ponder the sure prospect of death and to resign himself to be the cipher ("mere nothing") that current theory computes him to be. He shares the almost universal refusal to look upon old age and personal nonbeing with equanimity. Unsuccessful as is the attempt, he tries nonetheless to anesthetize awareness of the inescapability of death…”

- Carl F.H. Henry
Christian Despondent

• The Scripture speaks of the “valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23).

• When people are despondent, it is better to be compassionate than to blame.

• Some of God’s servants have suffered more times of darkness than others.

• There are enemies on the road to heaven – and death is the final enemy (I Cor. 15:26).
Christian Despondent

• Great darkness and horror fell upon Christian.
• He could not see in front of him.
• He could not remember or talk about any of the pleasant refreshments he had encountered during his pilgrimage.
• He feared he would never obtain entrance at the gate.
• He was troubled by his past sins.
• He was troubled by frightening apparitions of evil spirits.
• He believed that Christ “brought me into this snare and has left me.”
• Hopeful reminded him that God had not forsaken him in his troubles and anguish; they were sent to try him and to cause him to rely on Christ in his distress.
Psalm 42:7

“Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.”
Psalm 88:7

“Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves.”
Psalm 69:1-3

Save me, O God!
For the waters have come up to my neck.
I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.
I am weary with my crying out;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.
The Snares of Death

• “The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me” (Ps. 18:4-5).

• “The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord; ‘O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!’” (Ps. 116:3-4).
Belief in the King

“You will find it deeper or shallower according to your belief in the King of the place.”
“Dear friends, put all your days together; they shall not equal that last day which shall be to you the beginning of days of another sort. The day of our death is the beginning of our best days. Sometimes even that part of a dying day which is spent on earth is the best that the dying believer has ever lived. I have seen believers...”

Charles H. Spurgeon
Our Best Days

die, and if anything can convince a man of the reality of religion, of the truth of the Scriptures, and of the power of the Spirit, it is the death of saints. I have seen many persons who seemed to be as much dying of their joy as of their disease, they were so happy. Their eyes, their face, their whole bearing were those of persons in whom the utmost pain was forgotten in an excess of joy, while weakness was swallowed up in the
Our Best Days
delights of the heaven which was dawning upon them. I believe that angels come and meet certain departing ones, that they come trooping outside the gate, and that dying ones frequently see that which is supernatural. I am not dreaming. I believe that they actually see what eye hath not seen, and that there comes upon them a light which is neither of the sun, nor of the moon. At any rate, they speak words of
wondrous import. Dying children have spoken words which certainly they never learnt, for none have ever heard the like before; and other departing ones have uttered words of rapture and ecstasy and almost delirium of bliss; for Christ has come to them, and they have seen the King in his beauty, even in the border land before they have crossed the river and entered into Canaan.”
“The Logos of God lights man by creation, rescues him by redemption, renews him by sanctification, and sustains man’s sense of meaning and worth, purifying his notions of the good, and reinforcing his conviction of personal value even in the face of death.”

- Carl F.H. Henry
“Oh! I See Him!”

• Hopeful and Christian were encouraged.
• The enemy (death) was “as still as a stone until they had crossed over.”
• Christian discovered the rest of the river was shallow.
• Two Shining Ones (ministering spirits) were waiting for them.
• They went along toward the gate.
“Oh! I See Him!”

• Christian and Hopeful went up the hill to the City with ease – they had left their mortal garments behind them in the river.
• The foundation of the City was built higher than the clouds.
• They experienced comfort because they had safely crossed the river and had such glorious companions to welcome them.