Chapter Nine

The Valley of the Shadow of Death

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. Now this
valley is a very lonely place. The prophet Jeremiah describes it in this way: “A wilderness, a land
of deserts and of pits, a land of drought, and of the shadow of death; a land that no man (but a
Christian) passes through, and where no man lives.”

Here, Christian had a harder time than in his fight with Apollyon, which you will soon see.

Then I saw in my dream that when Christian had come to the border of the shadow of death, two
men met him there. They were the children of those who had brought the bad report from the
land of Canaan when Moses sent in the twelve spies. Christian spoke to them as they were
hurrying to go back:

Chr. “Where are you going?”

The Two Men. “Back, back; and we would suggest that you go back as well, if you value either
your life or peace.”

Chr. “Why, what is the matter?”

Men. “Matter!” they said. “We were going the same way that you are going and went as far as
we dared. We were almost past the point of coming back. If we had gone a little farther, we
would not be here to bring the news to you.”

Chr. “But what have you encountered?”

Men. “Why, we were almost in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. By good fortune, we looked
ahead of us and saw the danger before we got to it.”

1. “They did not ask, ‘Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren
wilderness, through a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no
one lives?’” (Jer. 2:6).

2. “And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, ‘The land we
explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size’” (Num. 13:32).

3. “But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness” (Ps. 44:19).

“Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains” (Ps. 107:10).
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Chr. “But what have you seen?”

Men. “Seen! Why the valley itself, which is as dark as pitch. We also saw hobgoblins, satyrs, and dragons of the pit. We also heard in the valley a continual howling and yelling, like people who are in utterable misery. They must have been terribly afflicted and bound in chains. Over the valley hangs discouraging clouds of confusion. Also, death always spreads his wings over it. In a word, it is incredibly dreadful and without any order whatsoever.4

Chr. “Even with this report, I still perceive that this is my way to the desired haven.”5

Men. “It may be your way, but we will not choose it as ours.” So they departed, and Christian went on his way, but still with his sword drawn in his hand. He was afraid that he might be assaulted.

I saw in my dream, as far as the valley went, that there was a very deep ditch on the right hand side. That ditch is the one into which the blind have led the blind in all ages. Both have miserably perished there. On the left side there was a very dangerous swamp in which even a good man can find no bottom for his foot to stand on. King David fell into that bog. There is no doubt that he would have been smothered unless he that is able plucked him out.6

The pathway here was extremely narrow, so Christian had to be very cautious. In the darkness, when he tried to avoid the ditch on the right, he almost fell into the mire on the left. And when he tried to escape the mire, he almost fell into the ditch. So he went on, and I heard him sigh bitterly. For besides the dangers mentioned above, the path was so dark, that often when he picked up his foot to move forward, he did not know where, or upon what, he would put it.

I perceived the mouth of hell to be in the middle of this valley. It stood solidly on the side of the path. “Now,” thought Christian, “what should I do?” Every now and then the flames and smoke would come out in such abundance, with sparks and hideous noises (things that could not be fought with Christian’s sword, like Apollyon), that he was forced to put up his sword and take up another weapon called All Prayer.7 So he cried in my hearing, “O Lord, save me!”8 He traveled

4. “May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light” (Job 3:5).

“…to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness” (Job 10:22).

5. “They did not ask, ‘Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?’” (Jer. 2:6).

6. “Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters” (Ps. 69:14).

7. “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18).

on for a great while in this frame of mind. The flames were still reaching toward him. Also he heard dismal voices and creatures rushing back and forth. Sometimes he thought he would be torn in pieces or trampled like dirt in the streets. He saw this frightful sight and heard these dreadful noises for several miles. When he came to a place where he thought he heard a company of fiends coming forward to meet him, he stopped and began to consider the best thing to do. Sometimes he had half a thought to go back. Then again, he thought he might be halfway through the valley. He remembered also how he had already conquered many dangers, and that the danger of going back might be much greater than going forward. So, he resolved to go on. Yet the fiends seemed to come nearer and nearer. When they were coming right at him, he cried out with a loud voice, “I will walk in the strength of the Lord God.” So they fell back and came no farther.

One thing I would not forget to tell you. I noticed that now poor Christian was so confused that he did not know his own voice. This is how I perceived it: just when he had come over to the mouth of the burning pit, one of the wicked ones got behind him and crept up softly to him. Whispering, he suggested many grievous blasphemies to him - and he thought these had originated in his own mind. This was the hardest thing Christian had faced to date - to think that he would now blaspheme him whom he loved so much before! But if he could have helped it, he would not have done it. He did not have the insight to know where the blasphemies originated.

When Christian had traveled in this despondent condition for a considerable time, he thought he heard the voice of a man saying, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

Then was he glad; and for the following reasons:

First, he gathered from this statement that others who feared God were in this valley with him.

Secondly, he perceived that God was with them, though they were in a dark and dismal state. “And why would he not be with me,” he thought, “even though I cannot comprehend it because of the obstacle that this place presents?”

Thirdly, he hoped to have company as soon as possible, if he could catch up to some of them. So he went on and called to a man who was ahead of him. But the man did not know what to answer, because he also thought that he was alone. After a time, the day broke. Then Christian said, “He has turned the shadow of death into the morning.”

Now when morning came, he looked back, not out of a desire to return, but to see in the daylight the dangers he had faced in the dark. He saw the ditch and the swamp more clearly. Then he saw

9. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4).

10. “He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be numbered” (Job 9:10).

11. “He who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns blackness into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land - the LORD is his name” (Am. 5:8).
the hobgoblins, satyrs, and dragons of the pit. All were far away, for after the break of day, they did not come near. They were revealed to him according to what is written, “He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light.”  

Now Christian was greatly affected with his deliverance from all the dangers that he had encountered on his solitary journey. He had feared the dangers before, but now he saw them more clearly because the daylight revealed them to him. About this time the sun was rising, and this was another mercy to Christian. You must take note that, though the first part of the valley of the shadow of death was dangerous, yet this second part, which he was still facing, was far more dangerous (if that is possible). From the place where he now stood to the end of the valley was filled with snares, traps, and nets. It was full of pits, hidden traps, deep holes, and ledges below, that had it now been dark as it had been when he traveled the first part of the way, that had he possessed a thousand souls, they would have all been destroyed. But, as I just now said, the sun was rising. Then he said, “...his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness!”

In this light he came to the end of the valley. Now I saw in my dream, that at the end of this valley lay blood, bones, ashes, and mangled bodies of men, even of pilgrims that had previously gone this way. While I was contemplating the reason for this devastation, I saw a cave just a little way ahead. Two giants, Pope and Pagan, lived there in the past and, by their power and tyranny, cruelly put the men to death whose bones, blood, ashes, etc. were lying there. But Christian went by this place without much danger, and I was somewhat confused by that. I have learned since that time that Pagan had been dead for a long time. As for the other, Pope, he is still alive but, because of his age and the many shrewd clashes that he encountered in his younger years, has become so crazy and stiff in his joints, that he can now do little more than sit in the mouth of the cave grinning at pilgrims as they travel by, and biting his nails because he cannot come at them.

So, I saw that Christian went on his way. At the sight of the old man who sat in the mouth of the cave, he did not know what to think, especially after the man said to him (though he could not go after him), “You will never change till more of you be burned.” But Christian kept quiet, and had a good attitude about it. So he went on his way unharmed. Then he sang:

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Oh world of wonders! (I can say no less)  
That I should be preserved in that distress  
That I have met with here! Oh blessed be  
That hand that from it hath delivered me!  
Dangers in darkness, Devils, Hell, and Sin,  
Did compass me, while I this Vale was in:
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13. “How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness!” (Job 29:2-3).
Yea, Snares, and Pits, and Traps, and Nets did lie
My path about, that worthless silly I
Might have been caught, entangled, and cast down:
But since I live, let Jesus wear the crown.

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