

THE VALLEY OF WEEPING (PART 1)

BY GUY HAMMOND

We're going to talk about a place that the Bible mentions only twice in all of scripture. If you've read through the Psalms, or through Judges, you would have read about this location, but it's a place that has escaped my attention and I have rarely thought about it. This place is a valley just outside of Jerusalem. I want to talk about this little valley because of what occurred there can provide us with some valuable insight into our Christian walk. The valley is called "The Valley of Baca" As I said, the valley of Baca is named only twice in the Bible. The first mention is our main text for today.

Psalm 84:5-6

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools."

"Baca" is a Hebrew word which means "weeping." Therefore, the valley of Baca means literally, the "valley of weeping." Where did this valley get this name? It's an odd name for a valley.

Judges 2:1-5

The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? 3 Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you." When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, and they called that place Bokim [Or Baca]. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD."

The Israelites were in the midst of driving their enemies out of the land of Canaan. But they intermarried with the enemy (and at times worshipped their gods), so after the death of Joshua, the Lord sent an angel to rebuke Israelites for their insubordination and wickedness.

At this time of the rebuke, they were encamped in a valley. So severe was the rebuke, so hurtful the punishment that the people, (literally millions of them), broke down and wept. The crying and wailing was so intense, that the valley was given the name "The Valley of Baca" or, "The Valley of Weeping." Now today, geographically, there is actually a valley that exists with the same name in southern Lebanon. In fact, it is exactly in the area that is still a hotly contested area and that in 2007 the Hezbollah dug itself in and fought Israel over it. That area is called the Baca Valley. However, the worlds most authentic geographers and historians seem generally agreed that the Valley of Weeping that we read about in Psalms and Judges was geographically situated near Jerusalem, not in Southern Lebanon.

Now in Psalm 84, the writer is saying that the person who is set on a pilgrimage through this valley should be blessed. So, going through the valley of tears is actually a good thing!

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools."

When you think of a valley, you picture it as being a picturesque place between beautiful mountains with colorful flowers blanketing the hillsides. Kind of like that scene in the movie "The Sound of Music" with Julie Andrews swirling around singing "The Hills are Alive."

Take that picture out of your mind. The Valley of Baca has no resemblance to that image, whatsoever. Throughout the centuries, this area outside of Jerusalem was, and still is a dry, barren desert, a terrible stretch of land through which one had to travel on his journey to Jerusalem to get to the temple to worship. Indeed, the prospect was not a very pleasant one, for to journey through Baca meant fatigue and hardship and hunger and thirst.

So why, then, does the Psalmist say that those who are on a pilgrimage and who must go through the valley of tears is actually blessed? How can traveling through a hot, dry and barren land that causes pain, hunger, thirst and tears be a good thing? For the man or woman who wanted to get to Jerusalem to worship God, the joy and determination to carry on *through* this terrible place, the valley of weeping; was that once you got to the other side, Jerusalem was waiting. The temple where God lived was waiting for your arrival.

Speaking metaphorically, the Valley of Baca is actually none other than life's valley of weeping that we all must go through to successfully reach the other side, where God waits. In society, our own personal lives and sometimes even in the church, we are lead to believe that pain is a bad thing and it should be avoided at all costs.

In my Christian walk I have tried to cover over the pain I may feel by making myself busier, praying more, doing more bible study, telling myself I just need more faith, I can turn to entertainment, sleep, fun, joking, or self indulgence of some kind, that often results in only further sin, whatever I have to do to avoid going beneath the surface to really deal with the things that God wants me to deal with.

We have all seen some televangelists preaching the common and popular false doctrine that Christianity is for wealth and health. That following Jesus is more for what we can get out of life now, instead of a journey to know God, whatever the cost, so that we can enjoy what we will receive after this life. It is a teaching that says that God is here to relieve us of the pain of living in a fallen world.

But I disagree with that doctrine. I believe that it is not only okay to hurt and struggle in our hearts, but even necessary. We're not Christians for health and wealth. We're Christians because we want to know God.

The valley of the weeping for the Israelites in Judges 2 was a place of rebuke, conviction and repentance. It was necessary for them to weep. The valley of the weeping for the early Jewish pilgrim was a place that they had to travel in order to get to the city of God and find his temple. It was a necessary trip for them to make to see God.

The Valley of the weeping for you and I is a place that we must go through in order that we might get closer to God. The valley of the weeping is a lesson that you and I cannot be afraid of facing our sadness, our hidden sin, or the pain that comes from brokenness.

With God, fewer statements are truer: no pain, no gain. In fact, this whole physical world and the physical bodies in which we live is not our real home for the Christian. Our real home is heaven with God. In tomorrow's devotional time together, we will explore that incredible truth further.

Thoughts presented in this devotional are taken from the book *MESSED UP: Proof That You're More to God Than Your Mistakes* by Guy Hammond and published by Illumination Publishers. The book is a companion to the documentary movie *FINDING GUY* by One Compass Media.

Copyright © 2017 by Guy Hammond.
All rights are reserved.