



EXPERIENCING GOD IN THE  
VALLEYS  
(8 BIBLE STUDIES)

**EXAMINATION**  
**BIBLE STUDIES**

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## THE SMALL PRINT

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### **Your Commitment**

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

### **Your Contribution**

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

### **Your Preparation – Topical Studies**

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading the group discussions but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials firstly provide you with a series of passages so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Secondly, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought and help you think through what the passages meant both at the time it was written and also what it means for us now. Because these studies are topical there is a much stronger progression of thought (than there would be in a passage-based study). The dangers of such studies are that discussion can move quite far from the Bible. Yet this it is still the best way of covering broad subjects like this.

I would really encourage you to make use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are however only “tools”, they are there to help you and not to restrict you or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages and if the questions or notes do not help you, then don't use them!

I have included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

### **Your Leadership**

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure, Spring 2019*

## INTRODUCING “EXPERIENCING GOD IN THE VALLEYS”

Some years ago, while my wife Debbie and I were walking, she commented on how much she liked valleys. Many of her favourite hikes include time in the valleys. Perhaps unsurprisingly we were walking through a valley at the time! She suggested that we could follow up the series on *the mountains (2014)* with something on *the valleys*. So, we pondered together what the Bible had to say about valleys. As a result of that discussion, I developed a teaching series based on Biblical Valleys and then later a series of blogs (<http://www.the-mcclures.co.uk/category/valleys/>). Now finally I have found time to put together the accompanying studies!

The theme of Experiencing God is not particularly unique – indeed much of the Bible speaks into this topic. However, I've not found many Bible studies on the theme of Valleys. The fact that the Bible contains lots of references to mountains, valleys and water features is not particularly surprising because those are the features of the landscape in which it was written. It does however make for an interesting study to look at how these natural features take centre stage for some of the Bible's key encounters with God and/or teaching about walking with God over a lifetime. In the Bible we have a whole range of valleys that are mentioned. Some are used literally while others are used more metaphorically. I think we can broadly distil the Bible's use of Valleys into the following six categories:

1. **Places to Camp or Settle:** They have the needed moisture and pastures for growing crops. They often include great sources of water (rivers, ravines, springs etc). See Deuteronomy 8:7-9.
2. **Battlegrounds:** Valleys seem to play host to a lot of battles. For example, David & Goliath in [the Valley of Elah](#) (1 Samuel 17) or the battles fought on [the plain of Megiddo](#) (2 Kings 23).
3. **Places of Fertility:** Things were grown in valleys precisely because the conditions were helpful for things to grow. For example, grapes growing in [the Valley of Eshkol](#) (Numbers 13-14).
4. **Places of blessing:** Some of the valleys in this series are places where we see transformation from difficulty to blessing. [The Valley of the Shadow of Death](#) pictures the flock passing through the valley on route to higher pastures – here they experience the love, care and provision of the Shepherd. [The Valley of Achor](#) (Joshua 7, Hosea 2:14-15) was the scene of God's judgement but God says that now it would be a door of hope. [The Besor Valley](#) (1 Sam 30) was where David's men were exhausted as they chased after their captured loved ones – to them is offered rest.
5. **Places of Worship:** Sometimes this was a positive thing but often it was more of a negative association. For example, idolatry in [the Valley of Ben Hinnom](#) (Jeremiah 18-19).
6. **Used to describe the future:** Metaphorically valleys are used to depict things which are still to come. Good examples are [the Valley of Decision](#) (Joel 3) or [the Valley of Dry Bones](#) (Ezekiel 37).

The richness of this metaphor is developed further through the five words translated Valley in the Bible. They depict some quite different settings (lowlands, plains, narrow steep gorges, ravines, wadis and so on). As seen from the valleys examined here in this study guide, these valleys are often difficult places to be (or at least depicting difficult places). However, there is plenty of hope and encouragement in each one. The Bible uses 5 words for valleys detailed as follows (source: [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)):

### **WORD 1 (H6010): `emeq pronounced ā'mek**

**Examples:** Jezreel Valley, Baka, Achor, Elah (Joshua 17:16, Hosea 1:5 & Judges 6:33):

**Definition:** A low plain with distant valleys. Valley, vale, lowland, open country. The Valley of Jezreel (the 'breadbasket of Israel') was a channel connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Sea of Galilee.

**WORD 2 (H1237): *biq`ah* pronounced *bik-ä`***

**Examples:** Valley of Mizpah, Lebanon, Aven, Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14) or Plain of Megiddo

**Definition:** Valley, plain, level valley: a split, i.e., a wide level valley between mountains.

**WORD 3 (H1516): *gay`* pronounced *gah`ë*.**

**Examples:** Valley of Hinnom, Shadow of Death (Joshua 15:8, 18:16, 2 Kings 23:10, 2 Chron 28:3, 33:6, Nehemiah 11:30, Jeremiah 7:31-32, 19:2 & 6, 32:35):

**Definition:** A very steep or deep valley, a narrow gorge: a gorge (from its lofty sides; hence, narrow, but not a gully or winter-torrent). The waste-paper basket of Israel.

**WORD 4 (H5158): *nachal* pronounced *nakh`-al***

**Examples:** Valley of Eshkol, Arran, Arnon Gorge or River Jabbok, Brook Zared (Numbers 13:23-24)

**Definition:** River, brook, valley, ravine, stream, wadi, flood: in its original sense; a stream-bed, especially a winter torrent; (by implication) a (narrow) valley (in which a brook runs).

**WORD 5 (H8219): *shëphelah* pronounced *shef-ä-lä`***

**Examples:** Eshtaol, Zorah & Ashnah (Joshua 15:33)

**Definition:** A Low region or foothills or plain. Valley, vale, plain, low country, low plain. In this kind of valley, you would not necessarily even know that it was a valley at all.

Life in the valley can often be quite different to elsewhere. A story from my own life illustrates this well. The year is 2017 and I remember leading a hike through a narrow, rising valley in Norway (Mørkridsdalen). The weather was pleasant in the village where we were staying (Skjolden), throughout our time in the valley. However in the valley (only 10mins away), the weather was very wet. Suffice to say it made for quite a different hike than we were expecting. When it rains hard, we get wet, the rocks get more slippery, and the ground gets muddier. When that happens it's easy for us to lose heart or get discouraged. One person's reaction was 'never again!' For others however it was the real highlight of their trip because they relished the challenge the rain provided. Why am I telling you this story? This is a bit of a picture of our time in the valley. Sometimes things do not go as we expect. Time in the valley at some point is inevitable. Yet it will look quite different for different people and be quite different than other stages of our journey. Perhaps you have been enjoying some time on the mountains of life – it's been encouraging, and right now you are pretty excited. Or perhaps however you have been struggling down in the valley, and you are just not sure about how things are going to work out. Maybe you are asking 'where is God' in the things you have been facing? My firm conviction is that even in the valley God is still God, God is still at work and God is still with us. We have seen that throughout our journey and that is where we spend some time here now through these studies.

Some of the studies are based around things that happen in the valleys (e.g., David & Goliath in the Valley of Elah or the twelve spies going down to the Valley of Eshkol) and serve as opportunities to take courage and move forward in faith rather than fear. Others use valleys as a metaphor for life. The Valley of Baka is a tough place to be but even there the Psalmist says we can make it a place of springs as we set our perspective on God. The Valley of the Shadow of Death is another tough place to be, but we are encouraged to stay close to the Shepherd who works tirelessly to care, protect and provide for His flock. I don't know about you but while I aspire to be up on the mountain tops, it is often in the valleys where I learn the most! Using the studies, my prayer is that you would experience God and find a framework for thinking about all that God is seeking to do in and through your life.

**To God be the glory;  
Steve McClure, Summer 2021**

**STUDY 1: GOD OF THE VALLEYS – 1 KINGS 20**

**INTRODUCTION:** Valleys are significant places in the Bible both literally and metaphorically. In 1 Kings 20 we will see how God is still God both in the mountains and in the valleys. Even when we are in the valley, Jeremiah 18-19 teaches us that God is still at work, and He is always with us.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** Read through the introduction on pg. 4-5: what is your reaction to the diversity of words and usages that the Bible uses to depict valleys? Any surprises? What have been your most significant experiences of being in the valley (taken either literally or more metaphorically)?

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**THE CRUX OF THE MATTER:** What is your initial response to the key message of this study as expressed in [Additional Quotes 1](#)? To what extent do you agree that time in the valley is both inevitable and unavoidable? What might it look like for you to trust God through such difficult times?

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**GOD IS STILL GOD (1 KINGS 20):** Ahab is the King of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) while Ben-Hadad is the King of Aram. What do you notice about the interactions between these two Kings in v1-10? What do v11-12 tell us about the character of these two men? Given King Ahab's reputation (see 1 Kings 16:29-33): why do you think God stepped into fight this battle on his behalf (v13-14)?

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How might these two Kings have responded to the surprising manner of victory God afforded to Israel (v15-21)? The Arameans came again in the Spring. What do you make of their assumption that God is a *God of the hills* and *not of the valleys* (v23-25 & 28)? What is God doing in the lives of these two Kings? Why do we so easily forget that God is still God when things are hard ([Additional Quotes 2](#))?

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**GOD IS STILL AT WORK (JEREMIAH 18 & 19):** What do we learn about the Valley of Ben Hinnom in 19:2-9 (see also 7:31-32) and why in particular was God so angry about what was being done

there? How do you respond to the visual illustration of the clay jar broken before them (v1, 10-11)? In what ways do we also chase after our own idols (see [Additional Quote 3](#) for definition) today?

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God first sends Jeremiah to the Potters house in c.18: in what ways is the illustration of the clay pot different to that of c.19 (esp. v1-10)? What challenges you most about the idea of us being like clay in the hands of the potter (See also 2 Cor 4:7-8)? How have you seen God at work in reshaping you?

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**GOD IS STILL WITH US & PROVIDES FOR US (ISAIAH 41:10, 17-20, 43:1-2):** If time in the valleys is both inevitable and unavoidable, in what ways do these verses provide encouragement of God's presence, provision and strength? How have you experienced God's refreshment during tough times?

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**ALL THINGS NEW (LUKE 3:4-6):** Isaiah 40:3-5 prophesied about how John would prepare the way for Jesus who would set all things right and make all things new. How does the picture of *valleys being filled in* and *mountains being made low* encourage you as you travel through the valleys yourself?

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**DRAWING THINGS TOGETHER:** Thinking back to what we saw above in *the Crux of the matter*, what has (or hasn't) help motivate you to respond by trusting God? What are the biggest obstacles to you trusting God in whatever you are facing in your life just now?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Thank God that He is the God of both the hills and the valleys. Praise Him that wherever we find ourselves, God is still God, still at work and still with us. Ask Him to help us to remember these glorious truths and trust Him in the midst of whatever life brings our way.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 KINGS 20:28**

**STUDY 2: THE VALLEY OF ESHKOL: FEAR – NUMBERS 13-14 & DEUTERONOMY 1:19-46**

**INTRODUCTION:** The Valley of Eshkol was where Moses sent the twelve spies to check out the land of Canaan. The lesson of this Valley is the impact of fear in our lives and the danger that fear can freeze out our faith. We also see that God really does keep His promises to us no matter what.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** How would you make a distinction between acting in fear and in faith? What would be the major differences between the two (see also [Additional Quotes 4-6](#))? Can you think of a time when fear froze out faith in your own life? What lessons did this experience teach you?

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**GOD'S PROMISE AND FAITHFULNESS (13:1-22):** What was God's purpose in sending the spies to explore Canaan? Why should God's instructions have reminded them about God's promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1-9)? To what extent had these promises already been fulfilled in the life of Israel?

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What was the significance of the land that the spies sent to (see Genesis 12:9, 13:14-18 & 23:1-20)? What did they find upon arrival in the valley of Eshkol? Why do you think that these reminders of God's faithfulness to their ancestors failed to encourage the spies about the prospect of entering the land?

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**GOD'S GENEROSITY (13:23-27):** Why do you think that Moses asks them to "do their best" to bring back the fruit of the land? How did what they brought back, confirm the reliability of God's word? When has 'change' left us hesitant, and like the Israelites, unable to trust in God's unfailing generosity?

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**RECEIVE GOD'S RESOURCES (13:28-33):** How are the spies guilty of magnifying the problems and minimising the resources before them? How do you respond to the contrast between Joshua and Caleb's faith and the despairing fear of the rest? How can we nurture the kind of attitude described in [Additional Quotes 7](#) in our own lives as we face seemingly insurmountable challenges of our own?

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**THE HOSTILE MULTITUDE (14:1-4):** How do you understand such a strong response from the Israelites? (Consider how Israel despises God's provision, questions His protection, doubts His unfailing love, disowns His redemption and spurns His anointed leader.)

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**PLEADING WITH THE PEOPLE (14:5-19):** To what extent can you sympathise with the leaders as they plead with the people not to rebel? How do Caleb & Joshua present a different perspective on the situation? In view of the people's disobedience and their desire to stone him, why does Moses ask God to forgive them? Are you jealous for God's glory like Moses (v13-16)?

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**CONSEQUENCES (14:20-23):** How is God's decision to bar an entire generation from entering the land an expression of both judgement and mercy (20-23)? How might spending 40 years in the desert under Moses' leadership help address the Israelites lack of faith?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER (JOSHUA 1:1-9, 21:45 & 23:14):** After the 40 years Joshua is tasked to lead Israel into the Promised Land: how does he now encourage them towards faith not fear? How in time did God prove Himself faithful? What steps can you take to step forward in faith rather than fear?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Talk and share about the harsh warnings we have seen in this valley about rebelling against God. Pray for one another that you would be able to trust God, stand firm, move forward in faith, not fear and without falling into sin (1 Cor 10:12).

**MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 15:4**

**STUDY 3: THE VALLEY OF ELAH (COURAGE) – 1 SAMUEL 17**

**INTRODUCTION:** This third valley is the setting for the famous confrontation between the Philistine champion Goliath and a teenage David who fought on behalf of Israel. This valley is about courage and stepping out in faith in the knowledge that God is with you.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What human reasons made the Israelites 'dismayed and terrified' of Goliath (v1-11) and what spiritual reasons should have encouraged them to stand up to him (Deuteronomy 20:1-4)? What was the heart of the problem that Israel faced?

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**FOCUSING ON GOD RATHER THAN OUR GIANTS:** Throughout the account what was David's chief concern (See esp. v26, 36 & 45)? What is the significance of this word "defiance" (and its derivatives) which are used repeatedly in v10, 23, 25, 26, 36, 42 & 45?

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How do you respond to Max Lucado's words on this chapter (see [Additional Quotes 8](#))? Which ratio of *God to Giant* thoughts would you most identify with and why? What practical steps can we take to focus more on God and our relationship with Him rather than on our 'giants'?

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**AN UNLIKELY HERO:** What makes David an unlikely hero for Israel (v12-19, v33, v38-40)? How is he despised and rejected by Eliab (v28-29), Saul (v32-39) and Goliath (v42-44)? In what sense do they look at the 'outward appearance' (see 16v7) and how does David respond?

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**SAUL'S DECISION TO SEND DAVID:** What risk was Saul taking in allowing David to fight Goliath and why do you think he does so (v8-9, 32-39)? Why do you think that David is so confident of Goliath's certain defeat (v34-37); was it courageous faith or youthful bravado?

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**THE ABILITY TO DO ANYTHING:** Society teaches us ‘you can do anything if you set your mind to it’; evaluate this message and discuss how this chapter teaches otherwise (esp. v45-47)? How have you been encouraged by spiritual victories in the past and how can they encourage you for the future?

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**DAVID'S VICTORY:** How did the Israelites respond to David's victory (v52-53)? There are parallels here between David and Jesus; how do we fall into the traps of looking only at the outward appearance? What would be a good and a bad response to Jesus' victory for us?

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**A SPIRITUAL BATTLE:** We too are in a spiritual battle (see also Ephesians 6:12); what “Goliaths” do we face OR are we facing individually, corporately or as a wider church? What can we learn from this story about how these giants will be overcome?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** How would you summarise the key lessons from the Valley of Elah? David did not always get it right but what do you think was his secret of success here? What steps can we take to move forward with courage amidst the realities of the spiritual battle raging all around us?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Think about Jesus' victory at the cross and all that He has done for us. Spend some time thanking God for these things. Pray for people you know who look only on outward appearances and regard Jesus as weak, irrelevant, and not worthy of their interest.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 17:47**

## STUDY 4: THE VALLEY OF BESOR (REST) – 1 SAMUEL 30

**INTRODUCTION:** This fourth valley is about rest for the weary. David & his men had been away on a military mission and had left their families unprotected. On their return, they find the Amalekites had taken their families captive. They set out in pursuit, but not all of the men were able to continue.

**SETTING THE SCENE (1 SAM 27 & 29):** Why was David residing in the land of the Philistines (27:1) at this point, and what were the consequences of this decision (27:10-12, 29:3-7)? What does this decision tell us about where David and his sense of security was at?

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**WALKING INTO CRISIS (v1-6a):** How do you think that David and his men felt when they returned home to find their houses burned and families captured? In what ways does (or doesn't) their response to this distress surprise you? When have you felt overwhelmed by distress and how did you respond?

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**STRENGTH IN GOD (v6b):** During David's time in Ziklag there is no mention of him seeking the Lord, why is it so important that he 'found strength in the Lord his God'? What do you think this looks like in practice (see also 1 Sam 23:16)? What is your experience of finding new perspective and clarity of vision from the Lord (e.g., Lamentations 3:19-24, Psalm 73:16-17)?

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**MOVED TO ACTION (v7-10):** What impresses you about the difference in David's leadership seen in the contrast in the men as they turn from near mutiny (v6) to hot pursuit? Is there anything we can learn from here about the way that David enquires of the Lord (v8)?

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**ENJOYING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (v11-20):** Why do you think the men agree to David's ambitious plan to pursue the Amalekites despite the odds being against them? How did God open the door to victory through the unlikely figure of the famished and dehydrated Egyptian (to whom they showed kindness)? What is surprising about the 'completeness' of the outcome?

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**EQUAL SPOILS FOR ALL (v21-30):** To what extent would you say (or not say) that the soldiers who did not go up to fight with David do wrong in staying behind (see [Additional Quotes 9](#))? How do you respond to David's decision to share the plunder with the 200 men who had stayed behind (v10 & 24)?

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What was wrong with the logic of those who said that these men should get nothing (v22-24)? What might be a present-day situation in which you could honour those who are tired and weary? At what times might you describe yourself as being in such a place and what was the outcome?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** How would you summarise the lessons arising from the Besor Valley? In what ways might David's actions have anticipated Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30 (particularly poignant in the MSG version)? How also do the words of Isaiah 40:28-31 encourage you?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Pray to God asking Him to strengthen you amidst the challenges, difficulties and pressures that you currently face. Ask God to help you respond like David in responding graciously to others amidst the undeserved blessings that God lavishes upon each of us every day.

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 30:6**

**STUDY 5: THE VALLEY OF ACHOR: HOPE – JOSHUA 7-8, HOSEA 2:14-15**

**INTRODUCTION:** The valley of Achor becomes a place of judgement after Achan helps himself to the devoted things and suffers the consequences. The prophets Hosea & Isaiah also mention this valley and prophecy that God is going to make the valley of Achor into a door of hope. We will see that God loves to turn our bleak situations into opportunities for hope to break through.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** When have you seen the actions of one individual impact upon a larger group and what were the consequences? When you see/hear the word Hope, what comes to mind? What do you say is the difference between Hope and Hopelessness? What do they each produce?

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**ACHAN'S SIN (7:1-5):** What was so serious about Achan's sin that God was willing to allow it to result in defeat for the army of Israel? The loss of men and defeat in battle had big consequences for the people of Israel (v5): how would this have impacted how they felt about continuing their mission?

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**THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM (7:6-15):** How does the passage contrast the concerns of Joshua (v6-9) and God (v10-15)? To what extent can you identify with Joshua tearing his clothes, falling facedown (v6) and questioning God's motives in bringing them across the Jordan (v7)?

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**THE CONSEQUENCES (7:16-29):** What do you imagine it would have been like for Achor as he tried to sleep and then when he presented himself before God? Why does Joshua urge Achan to *give glory to God and honour Him* (v19)? How do you respond to Achan's severe punishment despite having obeyed Joshua in giving glory to God by confessing his sin? Is this justice? Why or why not?

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**A DOOR OF HOPE (HOSEA 2:14-15, ISAIAH 65:8-10):** How do the prophecies of Hosea & Isaiah help us to see how the Valley of Achor might become a *door of hope* and a *resting place* for those who seek after God? NB: Other translations say God will “*turn the “Valley of Trouble” into an “Opportunity for Hope”*” (NLT) “*I’ll turn Heartbreak Valley into Acres of Hope*” (MSG).

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**GOD’S VICTORY (8:1-29):** What is different the second time they attack the city of Ai and what was it that made the difference in victory? Where do you see the hand of God working through all of this in a battle that was already won? What about us: in what sense is our spiritual battle already won?

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**COVENANT RENEWAL (8:30-35):** Why was it so important to renew the covenant at Mount Ebal (see Deuteronomy 27-28)? What impact would this renewal and the reading of the words of the law (v34-35) have had on Israel? How would the two large piles of rocks (7:26 & 8:29) help them to remember?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** How would you summarise the lessons of the valley of Achor? When have you experienced this incredible turnaround from judgement to hope (see also [Additional Quotes 10](#))? In what areas of your life might this valley be a challenge and an encouragement to you today?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Pray together that God would convict each of you of any unconfessed sin in your lives. Thank God for His grace, His forgiveness and that He uses these times as a door and opportunity for hope. Pray for opportunities to share this hope with others this week.

**MEMORY VERSE: JOSHUA 8:1**

**STUDY 6: THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH (TRUST) – PSALM 23**

**INTRODUCTION:** Psalm 23 refers to perhaps the best-known valley, the valley of the shadow of death. This Psalm is about the care and provision of the Good Shepherd as seen through the illustration of the shepherd leading the sheep through the valley and up into the mountains for grazing. The Psalm is a fantastic encouragement to trust in the Good Shepherd who laid His life down for us

**SETTING THE SCENE:** If you think about an older person who has had a significant impact on your life (e.g., parent, teacher, sibling) how would you describe their care, concern and blessing to you?

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**SHEEP AND THEIR SHEPHERD (v1-3):** What do you think David (a shepherd himself, see 1 Sam 16:13) has in mind when he says the LORD is *his* shepherd? To what extent do you identify as a sheep? What light does Psalm 78:70-72 shed on this metaphor (See also 2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7; Micah 5:4)?

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**THE GOOD SHEPHERD (EZEKIEL 34:11-16, 23-24, JOHN 10:11-15):** What do these passages have to say about the Lord as our Shepherd? Why do you think God chooses to describe Himself in this way (NB: Shepherds were seen as the lowest of all)? How have you experienced God as Shepherd?

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**THE SHEPHERD'S PROVISION (v1b-3a):** What kind of shepherd would give his sheep reason to lack nothing? What has been your experience of the All-Sufficient provision of the Good Shepherd? David highlights the rest and restoration that the Shepherd provides: what might this look like for us today?

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**THE SHEPHERD'S LEADING (v2b, 3b):** Where and why does David say that the Lord leads? What has been your experience of the Good Shepherd leading and guiding you along "right paths"? To what extent would you say that this has been a challenge and a comfort?

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**THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH (v4):** What do you imagine David has in mind when he talks of the valley of the *shadow of death* (or *darkest valley*, see also [Additional Quotes 11-12](#))? How do you respond to the implication that the Shepherd might lead you through such places?

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**THE LORD'S PRESENCE:** Why does the presence of his Lord and Shepherd cause David to say that he will fear no evil (notice the change from 'He' to 'You' here)? What do the rod and staff (a Shepherd's instruments for guiding their sheep) symbolise and why were they such a comfort to David?

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**PREPARING A TABLE FOR US (v5-6):** The final metaphor focuses on God as our host pouring out His blessings on us: what is implied by the imagery David uses in v5 (think about the words David uses)? Why is it so significant that this table is set in the presence of his enemies?

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Why has David's experience of God's goodness and love made him so confident about the future? How much do you long to dwell in the God's presence forever?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** In what ways has studying this very familiar Psalm helped you appreciate more deeply God's care for us? What are you taking away that will encourage you this week?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Commit one another to God, praying through these verses together and asking God to imprint them on your hearts. Pray together that God will give you this same kind of simple trust in God that we see displayed in the words of the Psalm.

**MEMORISE PSALM 23**

**STUDY 7: THE VALLEY OF BAKA (JOURNEY) – PSALM 84**

**INTRODUCTION:** This valley is either characterised by *tears and weeping* or *drought and dryness*. It was a Psalm written for the annual journey to Jerusalem and this valley represented some sort of challenge enroute. We will see how phases of our own journeys can be both challenging but also an opportunity to be made a place of springs: a place of hope and refreshment.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** Who are the sons of Korah (see Numbers 16 & 26:9-11) and why is it so remarkable that here we find them serving during the reign of David (2 Chronicles 20:19)? Thinking about the Psalm as a whole, how would you summarise the gist of these twelve incredible verses?

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**INTENSE LONGING (v1-2):** Why does the Psalmist describe God's dwelling place as lovely (v1, literally 'how dear' or 'how beloved')? To what extent can you identify with the Psalmists description of his soul (yearning and fainting) and his heart and flesh (crying out) in v2? Why is our soul so needy and what are the consequences of meeting those needs with the wrong things ([Additional quotes 13](#))?

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**FINDING SATISFACTION (v3-4):** How do the sparrows and swallows help the Psalmist to find satisfaction and blessing in God's dwelling place? Why is dwelling in God's house such a big deal for the Psalmist? Why should that lead to praise? What might this look like for us today?

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**SET ON PIMGRIMAGE (v5):** How do you understand what the Psalmist means by *setting our hearts on pilgrimage* (journey of a pilgrim either to a particular place or over a lifetime)? What does it look like to put our strength in God and why are we blessed if we do so? Where do you find your strength?

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**JUST PASSING THROUGH (v6):** The only reference in the Bible to the valley of Baka is here and there is much debate whether it pictures (a) a place of tears and weeping (NLT), (b) a place of drought

and dryness (Baka could indicate a thorny Balsam tree which managed to grow in barren places) or (c) wild and lonesome valleys (MSG). What is your take on this and what are the implications here?

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The Psalmist implies that we *will* pass through such challenging valleys but that there are things that we can do to *make it a place of springs*: how do you understand this idea? What is your experience in your own pilgrimage of such arid valleys and how have you made them *places of springs*?

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**FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH (v7):** The Psalmist describes these times of refreshment as taking us from strength to strength: when have you experienced this (Isaiah 40:28-31) and what helps you to do so (See [Additional Quotes 14](#))? Why is it so important for us until we appear before our God?

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**BETTER IS ONE DAY (v8-12):** What reasons does the Psalmist give as to why even one day in God's presence is better than a thousand elsewhere? How is God both a *sun* and *shield* to the blameless (v11)? In what sense might trusting God (v12) be a key to experiencing God's refreshment?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** Having looked at the Psalm how would you now describe the lessons of the valley of Baka? What steps do you now need to take in order to find these places of strength and refreshment as you pass through the challenges and difficulties that life brings your way?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Ask God to give you the Psalmist's intense longing and satisfaction at being in the presence of God. Share with one another about the challenges and difficulties that you are experiencing right now. Pray into these things and ask God to bring you into places of refreshment.

**MEMORY VERSE: PSALM 84:10**

**STUDY 8: THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES (RENEWAL) – EZEKIEL 37:1-14**

**INTRODUCTION:** Ezekiel's prophecy is a massive wake-up call for a nation in exile because of their repeated idolatry. This vision however points to a brighter future...one not of dead and lifeless bones but new life and renewal. This valley points us to the ministry of the Spirit in us and through us.

**SETTING THE SCENE:** What is your initial response to the idea of a God-given vision or dream? What is your knowledge of dreams/visions recorded in the Bible (e.g., see Abraham in Gen 15:1, Zacharias in Luke 1, Peter in Act1 10:9-15, Revelation)? What is your own experience of such things?

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**A FUTURE AND A HOPE (1:1-3, 34 & 36):** What is the context the book of Ezekiel (see 1:1-3)? What was the impact of the Babylonian exile on the nation of Judah? Ezekiel contains promises (often given through visions) about their future: what hope is offered in 34:11-16, 36:24-32?

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**A VALLEY OF DEATH (v1-3):** What are your impressions of the valley experience that the Spirit of the LORD gives Ezekiel as described in these verses? The valley is full of bones that are very dry (v2): how might you have responded to God's question about whether they could live (v3)? What is significant about the way that Ezekiel responds and what can we learn from it?

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**ASSEMBLY (v4-6):** In light of the apparent foolishness of God's command to prophesy to dead bones: what would it take for you to demonstrate such obedience? What is implied by the detail included here (e.g., breath, tendons, flesh and skin)? Who is it who would know that He was the LORD (v6)?

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**BONES (v7-8):** Ezekiel obeyed and immediately there is a change: why do you think God chooses to bring life to the bones in this way (note the logical steps but still no breath)?

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**BREATH (v9-10):** What similarities and differences are there between the prophecy here to the Breath (wind, spirit) and the prophecy to the bones (v4-8)? Why do you think that the process of bringing these bones to life comes in stages? How do you imagine this vast army described in v10?

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**THE VISION EXPLAINED (v11-14):** In view of the context to this chapter, how do you understand the explanation given in these verses about how this vision applies to Israel? Are there any circumstances in your life that make you feel like the Israelites? In what ways might this vision be of hope to us?

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**ONE NATION & KING (v15-28):** Next Ezekiel is instructed to take two sticks and write on them before joining them together: what was the significance of this visual illustration (v15-23)? In what sense could God's servant David be their shepherd and King once more (v24-28)? How would the prospect of being one nation under one King, with God dwelling amongst them, have encouraged God's people?

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**DRAWING IT TOGETHER:** What do you see as the key lessons arising from this vision as you think about your own situation and life (see [Additional Quotes 15-16](#))? What steps can you take to begin asking the Spirit to work in/through your life in bringing such renewal? What are you taking away from what God has been teaching you from this series on the valleys?

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**IDEAS FOR PRAYER:** Thank God for the lessons arising from this inspiring valley experience. Ask Him to help you believe in faith that God can bring life to hopeless situations. Pray too that God would bring new life and renewal to the dead valleys of your life.

**MEMORY VERSE: EZEKIEL 37:14**

## APPENDIX – ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

**QUOTE 1:** “For all of us, there will be time in the Valleys: it is both inevitable and unavoidable. Yet even in those valley experiences God is still God, God is still at work and God will still be with us: Our response is to trust Him.” *Steve McClure, Talk at Elvheim Discipleship Week, 2019, <https://navigators.co.uk/blog/2019/08/06/elvheim-2019-experiencing-god-in-the-valleys/>*

**QUOTE 2:** “What is true in the light is still true in the dark”. *The Rend Collective, Weep with Me*

**QUOTE 3:** “An idol is anything that absorbs our hearts and imagination more than God, anything we seek to give us what only God can give...The human heart is an idol factory that takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the centre of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfilment, if we attain them.” *Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods*

**QUOTE 4:** “You gotta act. And you’ve gotta be willing to fail, you gotta be ready to crash and burn, with people on the phone, with starting a company, with whatever. If you’re afraid of failing, you won’t get very far.” *Steve Jobs*

**QUOTE 5:** “Faith involves certain beliefs. Faith involves an attitude of hope and confidence. But at its core, faith is trusting a person.” *John Ortberg, Faith & Doubt, pg. 51*

**QUOTE 6:** “The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith. Fear visits everyone. But make your fear a visitor and not a resident.” *Max Lucado*

**QUOTE 7:** “All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them.” *Hudson Taylor 1832-1905, British Missionary to China*

**QUOTE 8:** “Giants. We must face them. Yet we need not face them alone. Focus first, and most, on God. The times David did, giants fell. The days he didn’t David did. Test this theory by listing the observations David made regarding Goliath. I find only two. One statement to Saul about Goliath (v36) and one to Goliath’s face (v26). That’s it. Two Goliath-related comments (and tacky ones at that) and no questions. No inquiries about Goliath’s skill, age, social standing, or IQ. [...] But he gives much thought to God. I count 9 references (v26, 36, 45, 46 & 47). God-thoughts outnumber Goliath-thoughts 9 to 2. How does this ratio compare with yours? Do you ponder God’s grace 4 times as much as you ponder your guilt? Is your list of blessings 4 times as long as you list of complaints? Is your mental file of hope 4 times as thick as your mental file of dread? Are you 4 times more likely to describe the strength of God as you are the demands of your day? No? Then David is your man. Some note the absence of miracles in the story. [...] But there is one. David is one. A rough-edged walking wonder of God who neon-lights this truth: Focus on giants – you stumble. Focus on God – Your giants tumble. Lift your eyes, giant slayer. The God who made a miracle out of David stands ready to make one out of you.” *Max Lucado, Facing Your Giants, pg. 9*

**QUOTE 9:** “David did many mighty deeds in his life. He did many foolish deeds in his life. But perhaps David’s noblest deed was to honour his tired soldiers at Brook Besor.” Someday someone will read what David did and name their church the congregation at Brook Besor. Isn’t that what the church is intended to be? A place for soldiers to recover their strength? Brook Besor blesses rest. Brook Besor also cautions against arrogance. David knew the victory was a gift. Let’s remember the same.

Salvation comes like the Egyptian in the desert, a delightful surprise on the path. Unearned. Undeserved. Who are the strong to criticise the tired? Are you weary? Catch your breath. We need your strength. Are you strong? Reserve passing judgement on the tired. Odds are you'll need to plop down yourself. And when you do, Brook Besor is a good story to know."

*Max Lucado, Facing your Giants, pg. 78*

**QUOTE 10:** "God is the God of transformation, and this valley is surely just that: a place of judgement that has become a door of hope. Whatever life brings our way we can be sure that God can turn it around. He may not choose to do so, or He might wait but we can be sure that He will turn it into a door or opportunity for hope." *Steve McClure, <http://www.the-mcclures.co.uk/2018/10/08/life-in-the-valleys-a-door-of-hope/>*

**QUOTE 11:** "The valley of the shadow of death holds no darkness for the child of God. There must be light, else there could be no shadow. Jesus is the light. He has overcome death." *D.L. Moody*

**QUOTE 12:** "Every mountain has its valleys. Its sides are scarred by deep ravines and gulches and draws. And the best route to the top is always along these valleys. Any sheepman familiar with the high country knows this. He leads his flock gently, but persistently, up the paths that wind through the dark valleys. It should be noticed that the verse states, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." It does not say I die there, or stop there – but rather "I walk through."

*W. Phillip Keller, A Shepherds look at Psalm 23, ©2007 Zondervan, pg. 100*

**QUOTE 13:** "The soul is a little like the King on a chessboard. The King is the most limited of chess pieces; it can only move one square at a time. But if you lose the king, game over. Your soul is vulnerable because it is needy. If you meet those needs with the wrong things, game over. Or at least, game not going so well." *John Ortberg, Soul Keeping, ©2014 Zondervan, p81.*

**QUOTE 14:** "It seems the Psalmist has also encountered such blessings as well as the impact of the Autumn rains creating pools of water. This it seems is a picture of how God, in response to our faith, brings us refreshment as we rest in His presence. Even in the bleakest of valleys, God can provide all that we need to be revived and make it through to the other side. I know for myself how quality time in the presence of Jesus can totally transform my outlook on what is going on around me. It doesn't necessarily take away the situation or problem, but it gives me a new perspective." *Steve McClure, <http://www.the-mcclures.co.uk/2019/03/12/the-valley-of-baka-a-place-of-springs/>*

**QUOTE 15:** "God wants to breathe life into the dead valleys of your life. Three truths: (1) What we believe about ourselves matters in the valley, (2) What we believe about God matters in the valley and (3) What we believe about the future matters in the valley." *Beth Peterson, Talk at Elvheim Discipleship Week, 2019, <https://navigators.co.uk/blog/2019/08/06/elvheim-2019-experiencing-god-in-the-valleys/>*

**QUOTE 16:** "Every generation needs this hope. From his exile, Ezekiel speaks to all generations, and particularly to ours, for, more than his own contemporaries, we have witnessed the frailty of social structures and the irresistible power of spiritual courage and dreams. For once upon a time some of us did see a deserted land covered with dry bones. And yes, we could testify to man's ability to transform memories of tragedy into necessary hope. Indeed, no generation can understand Ezekiel as well—as profoundly—as ours." *Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor*

# MEMORY VERSES

## STUDY 1: GOD OF THE VALLEYS – 1 KINGS 20

“The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD.”

**1 Kings 20:28**

## STUDY 2: THE VALLEY OF ESHKOL: FEAR – NUMBERS 13-14

“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”

**Romans 15:4**

## STUDY 3: THE VALLEY OF ELAH (COURAGE) – 1 SAMUEL 17

“All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

**1 Samuel 17:47**

## STUDY 4: THE VALLEY OF BESOR (REST) – 1 SAMUEL 30

“David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.”

**1 Samuel 30:6**

## STUDY 5: THE VALLEY OF ACHOR: HOPE – JOSHUA 7 & HOSEA 2:14-15

“Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land.” **Joshua 8:1**

## STUDY 6: THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH (TRUST) – PSALM 23

“<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. <sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup>Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” **Psalm 23**

## STUDY 7: THE VALLEY OF BAKA (JOURNEY) – PSALM 84

“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.”

**Psalm 84:10**

## STUDY 8: THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES (RENEWAL) – EZEKIEL 37:1-14

“I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.”

**Ezekiel 37:14**