

Coming Up Out of the Wilderness

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Song of Solomon 3 — Out of Communion and Back

Song of Solomon 2 closes at a high point: my beloved is mine and I am his. It is a wonderful place to reach, though not the highest. He feedeth among the lilies — among those who by His grace offer some fragrance to Him in their lives. And she closes with the longing: until the daybreak and the shadows flee away. In the meantime, the call is to be like the roe or the young hart upon the mountains of Bether — graceful, agile, finding no difficulty in the craggy places, leaping over them.

But chapter 3 opens with how quickly communion slips away. By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth. She sought him from a bed — there is not much seeking that can be done from a bed. Something of lethargy, weakness, or spiritual coldness had crept in. She sought him, but found him not. She went out into the streets and the broad ways — out into the world, as it were. And we will not find Him there. His prayer was not that we should be taken out of this world but that we should be kept from it. She found the watchman, not her beloved.

And notice: he who had been called my beloved in chapter 2:16 has dropped in her estimation to one whom my soul loveth. There has been departure. She found him — but only just. He was not far. He was very near all the time; it was her own state of soul that hindered the finding. And when she found him, she held him and would not let him go.

There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee. — Isaiah 64:7

When she is restored, she brings him into her mother's house — back to the place of her origins, even to the chamber of her that conceived me. The point of departure is the point of recovery, and sometimes we must go even further back than the point of departure — all the way to the day of our salvation, to have our hearts stirred afresh to take hold of our Beloved and not let Him go. Then she charges the daughters of Jerusalem: stir not up nor awake my love till he please. He always rests in His love. We disturb that rest when we do not rest in it ourselves.

Who Is This Coming Up Out of the Wilderness?

Song of Solomon 3:6 asks the question: who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant? And chapter 8:5 asks it again, with a difference: who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved? There is progression between the two.

Deuteronomy 8:14–17 shows what the wilderness could have been. God led Israel through that great and terrible wilderness — fiery serpents, scorpions, drought — bearing them on eagle's wings, feeding them with manna which their fathers knew not, bringing water from flint rock. The divine intention was to humble them, to prove them, to do them good at their latter end. Oh, that there were such a heart in them, God said. This could have been a triumphal march. It was not, because of unbelief — unbelief of the goodness that is in the heart of God.

The wilderness is for us too. We have nothing to seek or to choose in this scene; we have naught to regret or to lose. But there is one in the waste whose footsteps have gone on before, and we follow in diligent haste to the place where He is now upon the throne. Coming up out of the wilderness fragrant with myrrh and frankincense — those who are His own, walking with Him, a fragrant odour to

Him, bringing glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. And the higher calling of chapter 8: leaning upon the Beloved. That is the fruit of resting in His love.

Eight Who Came Through — The Moral Lessons

Numbers 26:63–65 records the solemn outcome: of all the men numbered by Moses and Aaron in the wilderness of Sinai, not one was left among those numbered in the plains of Moab. For the Lord had said of them, they shall surely die in the wilderness. Every man who walked out of Egypt perished. Every bone was left in the desert. There were only two exceptions among the men: Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

How did Caleb come through? Joshua 14:8–9 gives his own answer: nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the Lord my God. The Lord spoke the same back to him through Moses: because thou hast wholly followed the Lord thy God. Caleb at eighty-five years old, asking for Hebron where the sons of Anak lived — wholly, not half-heartedly, not with one eye on the giants and one on the Lord. One hundred per cent. That is how he came up out of the wilderness.

Joshua is a type of Christ — bearing the same name, for Joshua in Hebrew and Jesus in Greek are one name. His coming through the wilderness is bound up with Moses being dead. The law could not bring anyone into the inheritance; only resurrection life, figured in Joshua, could do that. How significant then that Christendom in so many places, as the Galatians did, tries to put itself back under the law of Moses — following another gospel, which is not a gospel at all.

And there was one more who came through — not among the living, but among the dead. Genesis 50:25: Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. Joseph died the ruler of Egypt. Egypt meant nothing to him when it came to the question of where his bones would rest. He made provision for the land of promise, not for

the place of his earthly honour. When Moses left Egypt, he gathered up the bones of Joseph. And when they entered the land, Joseph's bones were buried there. To come up out of the wilderness there is a necessity that we reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin. Joseph said nothing about the giants in Canaan. Of course he didn't — he was dead. That is just the point.

Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. — Romans 6:11

The Five Daughters of Zelophehad

Numbers 36 records the case of the five daughters of Zelophehad: Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah. Their father had died with no sons, and they came before Moses and asked for their inheritance. The Lord commanded it to be given them. The statement stands: among these there was not a man who came out of the wilderness. That is literally true. But there were five women who did, and their names are given.

In the land, the half tribe of Manasseh held ten portions. Two and a half tribes had asked to settle on the wrong side of Jordan — Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. That was never God's purpose. He had intended to bring His people over and set them in the true land, the full inheritance. The half tribe of Manasseh that came into the land had ten portions — five for the daughters of Zelophehad themselves, and five for their husbands, sons of their father's brothers. They asked for their inheritance, they received it, and they brought their husbands with them into it.

The moral lesson is plain. God's purpose is never that we should settle for half — half the truth, half the ground, half the inheritance — on the wrong side of Jordan. His purpose all along was to bring His people fully through and set them in the land of their inheritance. May we be found as those who, having reckoned the flesh in the place of death, come up out of the wilderness leaning upon our

Beloved, our hearts still wholly for the Lord, asking for and entering into the full portion He has prepared.

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