

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."

FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

Part 145

THE WOMAN IN THE WILDERNESS

“And the woman *fled into the wilderness*, where she hath a place prepared of God...and to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might *fly into the wilderness*, into her place...” (Rev. 12:6,14).

This passage calls to our mind that it was “when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth” that he turned to “persecute the woman which brought forth the manchild.” These words refer to the battle that was fought in heaven, the battle between the dragon and the overcoming sons of God, a spiritual battle in which Satan is cast down out of the heavens of the spirit where the manchild dwells, cast into the “earth” — the soul realm of each of us individually, and the soulful religious realm of the corporate woman, the church. In its individual application, the Spirit is catching us up in part — in our spirit — and that part of us is made to overcome, casting out the serpent. The serpent then goes after the earthy part of us, our soul, which is the woman within us, with its mind, will, emotions, and desires, and the soul enters into a “wilderness experience.” Individually the “manchild” is the spirit within us which is seated with Christ in the heavenly places, whereas the “woman” is the soul. Corporately, the “manchild” is the body of the sons of God which make up the “man,” the bridegroom company. The “woman” is the virgin-church, the bride of Christ.

While the woman had been seen in heaven from a spiritual standpoint, she is now seen on earth, that is, in her position as the church in the world. Here our text begins, and it speaks of the tremendous conflict between the woman-church in her earthly sojourn, and the great red dragon-spirit.

The dragon now comes down to earth. He has failed in every respect thus far! He failed to prevent the birth of the manchild, and he failed to devour it when it was born. He also failed in the war which he fought with the sons of God, and failed to retain any place in the heavens of the spirit-realm where they are seated upon the throne. And because of this absolute failure, and because he also realizes that he cannot continue to fight indefinitely and that his time henceforth is short, he is filled with raging fury, spitefulness, and desperation. And thus he comes down to the earth for the purpose of persecuting the woman who brought forth the manchild!

The woman continues to function as the church on earth, though greatly diminished and weakened by the birth and removal of the manchild. This is clearly revealed by the vision John saw; for when the manchild is brought forth, separated from her, and caught up unto God and to His throne, the beloved seer still beholds her on earth, fleeing into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God for her, and where someone comes to her assistance and nourishes her for a thousand two hundred and sixty days. The cause of her flight was not at first disclosed. It is mentioned in verse six, but then the narrative is interrupted to relate the “war in heaven,” and the casting down of the dragon-spirit. That being told, the account returns, in verse thirteen, to the woman, to reveal what happens to her following the birth and enthronement of the manchild. She is seen in her earthly walk, and the dragon comes down to that earthly place, defeated in the heavens of the spirit, to take his vengeance out on her!

THE DRAGON PURSUES THE WOMAN

“And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he *pursued the woman* which brought forth the manchild” (Rev. 12:13).

The dragon appears to pause a moment, as though stunned by his fall. Then assessing his predicament, determining his former position to be incapable of recovery, he rises and takes off after the woman. The King James Bible says that he “*persecuted the woman*,” but the word should be “*pursued*.” The Greek word has more than one shade of meaning, sometimes meaning to persecute and other times denoting to follow or pursue, which also is a form of persecution, just as the Pharaoh and his armies pursued the children of Israel as they fled from Egypt into the wilderness. The Greek word here translated “persecuted” is rendered as “follow,” “press toward,” and “ensue,” in the sense of “pursue” in the following verses, among a number of others: “Go not after them, nor *follow* them” (Lk. 17:23). “The Gentiles, which *followed not* after righteousness” (Rom. 9:30). “Israel, which *followed after* the law” (Rom. 9:31). “Let us therefore *follow after* the things which make for peace” (Rom. 14:19). “*Follow after* charity, and desire spiritual gifts” (I Cor. 14:1). “I *follow after*, if that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12). “I *press toward* the mark for the prize” (Phil. 3:14). “Let him seek peace, and *ensue* it” (I Pet. 3:11). The woman in this case fled and the dragon pursued her. But his pursuing of her was in the “earth” *before* she went to her place in the wilderness, for in her prepared place in the wilderness he could not touch her!

I am persuaded that the woman is still of great value in the purposes of God, even after she brings forth the manchild, else why would the dragon pursue her so fiercely even after her child is born? The devil is not a deranged fool. He is certainly a fool, but he is not a mad fool that has no rhyme nor reason to his actions. Being a religious spirit, he does not do things that have nothing to do with the plan and purposes of God. You may depend on it, if the woman after she has brought forth the manchild was of no account any more, the devil would not trouble himself about her! He knows full well that this little woman is destined to become the glorious *bride of Christ*. Of her it shall ultimately be said, “*Let us be glad and rejoice... for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready*” (Rev. 19:7).

Just as Eve was the wife of the first man Adam, so is the virgin-church the wife of the last Adam. When in the distant mists of Eden the Creator presented Eve to Adam, He gave both Adam and his wife *joint dominion* over all things. “*God created man in His own image...male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*” (Gen. 1:26-28). My reader will observe the use of the word “them” in this passage. God is blessing “them,” and giving “them” JOINTLY THE PLACE OF UNIVERSAL GOVERNMENT. All the inferior orders of creation were set under their JOINT DOMINION. Eve received all her blessings in Adam: in him, too, she got her dignity and position and power. Universal dominion was not given to Adam alone; it was not said, “Let *him* have dominion,” but “Let *them* have dominion.” There was no other creature so near to Adam as Eve, because no other creature was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. What affection Eve had for Adam! What nearness she enjoyed! What intimacy of communion! What full participation in his thoughts! What shared responsibility over all things! In all his dignity, in all his glory, wisdom, and power, she was entirely ONE. He did not rule *over* her, but *with* her. He was Lord of the whole creation, and she was ONE WITH HIM! They were the king and queen of the universe!

Prefigured by Adam and Eve in Eden, this is the perfect man, man in the image of God, male and female, Christ and His bride, given joint dominion over all things. The bride of Christ is the New Jerusalem, having the glory of God. The *throne* of God and the Lamb is in it and the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. All that dwell upon the earth shall walk in its light and enter through its gates. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it. Then shall the whole earth be filled with the glory and the knowledge of the Lord! Christ and His bride, Jesus with all the holy sons of God in union with the glorious bride-city, shall enlighten all the world with truth, give all men to drink of the water of the river of life, and deliver the whole creation from the bondage of corruption. It is indeed wonderful!

This glorious destiny which the woman has explains the dragon's interest in her. He has but one purpose and he lives but from one principle. It is the purpose and principle of *opposition* against all that pertains to God. This principle he never denies. The dragon was created with this nature to be the adversary, and God is God *because there is an opposite*, an adversary, an opponent, and God will be God to you, dear one, when you have encountered the adversary in all his works *and overcome him there!* And here we have God's perfect wisdom in the formation of the human race and in bringing forth a convenient opposite, the wrong one, the evil one, **THROUGH WHOM HE WOULD BRING BOTH HIS VAST FAMILY OF SONS AND HIS GLORIOUS BRIDE TO MATURITY AND PERFECTION.** "Though He were a Son, yet *learned He obedience by the things which He suffered*" (Heb. 5:8). "For it became Him...in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation *perfect through sufferings*" (Heb. 2:10). "And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold, *Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:* but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou hast turned back again, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:31-32).

If you are of no account to the coming of God's kingdom and are in no way related to the glory of God, the adversary does not trouble his head about you! It is only when he perceives that you are a called and chosen one of God that he begins his action against you. That is his nature! That is his purpose! Thus it is with both the sons of God and the woman! The very fact that the dragon in fury indeed turns against the woman, to pursue and persecute her, reveals the great fact that she is still of great importance to the kingdom of God and the fulfillment of His purposes.

Why is the woman represented as being on earth and fleeing into the wilderness? It seems so very strange! Wasn't she the glorious sun-clad woman who birthed the mighty manchild? Ah, yes, but in spite of her child *she is not the manchild!* Just as Mary was not Jesus, so the woman is not the son. Just as Jesus was resurrected and caught up to heaven, while Mary remained a woman in mortal flesh, so the manchild is caught up unto God and to His throne, whereas the woman that bore him finds herself in a great and terrible wilderness condition. Since the dragon-spirit cannot get at the sons of God who have overcome him and cast him out, he now turns on the woman which brought forth the manchild. Let the fact be imprinted indelibly upon our minds — once the great dragon is cast out of our heavens he is not able to persecute the manchild. When the accuser is cast down, whether out of our heavens or out of our earth, he can no more do anything TO us in that realm. Not that he does nothing AGAINST us, but his activity has no effect upon us!

TWO WINGS OF AN EAGLE

"And to the woman were given *two wings of a great eagle*, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place..." (Rev. 12:14).

Now we are told that the woman receives the wings of a great eagle and that with them she flies into the wilderness. The idea is clear. The dragon is pursuing her in the earth. But in her weakened condition after having given birth to the manchild, she cannot outrun the dragon. If she turns to do battle with him, she cannot stand in the fray. And therefore there is but one place of escape, and that is the wilderness. There the dragon cannot live, for there is nothing for him to feed on. There is nothing there for the woman to feed on either, but her only hope is to flee thither. There she is nourished in a miraculous way, and there she is hid from the face of the serpent. And at the same time, she has not the strength to run into the wilderness, but the loving care of our Father at all times and in every circumstance is revealed in the fact that the woman *was given* two strong wings of a great eagle and was able to soar through the air, with two great wings outspread, like an eagle hastening to his wilderness home, lifted up into the strength of God, thus escaping the snare of the fowler. The serpent pursues her up to the very edge of the desert, but cannot follow farther. And therefore in his rage he casts a great stream of water after her, not to drown her, but to carry her away out of the wilderness, so that he may approach her. But the earth opens up her mouth and swallows up the stream, which is in keeping with the idea of the arid desert, where streams often vanish suddenly into the sand. And finally, the dragon, seeing that also now his efforts are vain and that all his attempts to destroy the woman are futile, turns to her other children, the "remnant of her seed," in order that at any rate he may destroy them. Thus is the symbolism.

“Eagles’ wings” are first presented to us as the way Israel achieved freedom from the pursuing armies of Pharaoh — all the way from slavery in Egypt to security in the land of promise, from death to life, from helplessness to the heart of God. It was not fearless fighting and brilliant military maneuvering that delivered Israel from the hosts of Pharaoh and brought them into the solitude of the wilderness. Actually, it was not by their own efforts at all! It was what God did for them — He carried them on “eagles’ wings.” Three months out of the land of Egypt when Israel had established their camp in the wilderness of Sinai, Moses went up the mountain into the presence of God and the Lord said to him, “*Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you unto myself*” (Ex. 19:4). Borne by wings is the apt symbol of God’s *gracious deliverance*! But why on eagles’ wings? The eagle is admired and applauded for its exploits. It is the jet plane of the bird family! It soars the highest, goes the fastest, and is superior to all other birds in this respect. These features are noted on the pages of the holy scriptures. Concerning God’s care for Israel He said, “*As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him*” (Deut. 32:11-12). “*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles*” (Isa. 40:31).

Therefore the wings of the eagle are given as the symbol of our God in the spirit. By the strength of its great wings it is able to soar to the heights and perform unusual feats. Thus the eagle is set before us as being a symbol of God’s gracious intervention in our lives, whereby He gives us eagles’ wings, so that in our hour of weakness and testing sovereignly the strength of the Spirit is raised up in us and we are able to “mount up with wings as an eagle!” God, the indwelling spirit, is the eagle! And it is significant to note that the expression “two wings of a great eagle” is not altogether correct. In the Greek text it is not “a” great eagle, indefinitely, but “*the*” great eagle — signifying in type the species of eagle which has the most powerful or masterly flight. Surely it is *divine power* that is referred to in these words! It is the power of the Christ within! Oh, yes, my brother, my sister, matters not the seeming hopelessness of the situation or the circumstance — *the wings of the great eagle* are right there within you ready to be unfurled as you wait upon the Lord to renew your strength! And it is not a one-time experience, for the phrase “that she might fly” is in the present tense, the form of the Greek construction indicating that “she may continuously fly” or “repeatedly fly.” As my friend Jonathan Mitchell has pointed out, when God births something new in us, this pattern will always be followed, and we will need to fly into the wilderness away from the serpent’s face. The wings are *always there* — our refuge and strength, a very *present help* in time of trouble! (Ps. 46:1). Aren’t you glad!

Some have suggested that the two wings of the great eagle are the wings of *prayer* and *praise* by which we soar into the presence of God, into the heavens of the spirit. And that may well be — but beyond that I see these wings as a dimension of power released right out of the realm of spirit. It is a power that lifts us within ourselves above all earthly bondage, restriction, and limitation, enabling us to move forward into the purposes of God. It is a divine transportation that carries us from one place in God to another from the face of all that would hinder and thwart us!

THE WILDERNESS

“And the woman fled *into the wilderness*, where she hath a place prepared of God...and to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly *into the wilderness*, into her place” (Rev. 12:6,14).

As God delivered His people from the fury of the Pharaoh in Egypt by bringing them into the wilderness, so also now He brings His virgin-church into the wilderness to escape the rage of the dragon-spirit. But the difference is that in Israel’s case it was a natural, physical wilderness into which they were led, whereas in this case the figure is employed to signify something spiritual. The question follows: what is the meaning of the wilderness into which He enables our individual soul and, corporately, the woman-church to fly in order that she might escape the vengeance of the devil?

It has been said that the wilderness is here used to depict the want and deprivation which the people of God must suffer in the world. They are the despised of the world, they must suffer all kinds of persecutions and indignities in the world. And therefore the world is a real wilderness to them. And, of

course, this is true in itself. But it is not the meaning of our text. For, in the first place, the woman is driven into the wilderness after the birth of the manchild and his exaltation to the throne. And it cannot be said that being subjected to trials and testings and troubles of all kinds is peculiar to the woman who brings forth the manchild. A long list of witnesses in chapter eleven of the book of Hebrews could tell you of them! The early church likewise, and blessed saints throughout the ages, have suffered want, deprivation, persecution, and afflictions. In the second place, it is difficult to see how such troubles could possibly be a means of hiding from the face of the devil, so that he could not attack. Yet "escaping from the devil" is evidently the purpose of it all! The woman received these wings to fly into the wilderness in order to be hid from the face of the serpent, and so be safe. And, in the third place, the wilderness is a place *prepared for her by God*, where she does not suffer want or deprivation, for she is supernaturally *nourished, cared for, and protected* for the length of her stay there. Therefore, this cannot be the meaning of the term "wilderness" in our present passage!

John's "wilderness" comes from a different strain of biblical imagery, the typological use of Israel's flight from Egypt into the wilderness; it was a place of safety and liberation; and it is to such a sanctuary that the woman is taken *to be* protected and *sustained* by God. I would draw your reverent attention to the fact that the woman flees into "*the wilderness*," the well-known one, spoken of from the book of Exodus all the way through the book of Revelation. Herein she is distinguished from the great whore. The Great Harlot of chapter seventeen is seen by John in "*a wilderness*," or "*a wilderness in spirit*," as we should most probably connect the words. Our woman's flight is into *the wilderness*, signifying the spiritual condition into which many of the Lord's people have fled to escape the fury of the adversary.! This was the place of safety for Moses, after Pharaoh was angry and designed to slay him. Hither fled Israel from the face of the Egyptian king. To this refuge did Elijah betake himself from the threats of Jezebel. And Jesus Himself retreated thither after John the Baptist was slain, and near to it He dwelt after His life was sought by the priests and rulers at Jerusalem.

Well did Ray Prinzing write, "Do remember, these things are given in a figurative sense, it does not mean that *every Christian* is transported to some desert place, nor hidden in a retreat, but this is a new and different dealing of God, deeper than the church has known before. '*The Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart*' (Deut. 8:2). When this testing and purification are complete, He will '*present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing*' (Eph. 5:27). How we have longed for, prayed for this to be a reality, and, thank God, He knows just the time and process to bring it to pass."

In the literal and natural sense of the word the wilderness, or desert, is a place *in* the world, but not *of* the world. It may be right in the midst of the world, yet it is absolutely separated from the life of the world. I have been in stark deserts in Israel and Egypt, and elsewhere, where not a blade of grass grows, and no man lives. There are no houses, no cities, no oasis, no movement of any kind except for the howling winds and blowing sands. It is a place in the midst of the world, yet separated from the world. If one is in the wilderness, he is separated from the life of the world. This bespeaks a people as described by our Lord who are "in the world, but not of the world." A people separate in every respect from the life, nature, and ways of the world. They have nothing in common with the world's spirit and institutions or with the religious activities and systems of man. These exist, indeed, in the world. They are neighbors, co-workers, relatives, and friends of those who daily function in the world-system, but they exist and function as a separate community from the world. They live right in the midst of the world, work on the same jobs, shop in the same stores, drive on the same streets, attend the same schools, yet they are spiritually separated from that life, and live their lives from the principles of the kingdom of God and the spirit of Christ.

This virgin-church is a separate institution in the world. She has her own King. She does not recognize any other lordship. No institution of man has any power over her. She has her own laws, and they are the laws of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. She does not mingle with the politics of the world. She has no armies. She does not fight with the sword. She does not live by the world's standards and values. She does not think like the world thinks, or act as the world acts. She lives in separation, in *another world*, in the very midst of the world! Even as the children of Israel in the desert lived in separation from the world-power in Egypt and other nations round about, and even as they received their own laws from their own King in the wilderness, so also the woman-church is in the wilderness with regard to the world and its power and its life.

She fights her own battles, which are spiritual battles, and does her own work, which is spiritual work. She lives her own lifestyle, which is a heavenly lifestyle, and walks her own walk in the kingdom of heaven. She is separate from the life of the world. *She has received a God-prepared place in the wilderness!* Oh, the wonder of it!

Although the wilderness is specifically the place of separation and safety from the world and its ways, as well as from the Babylon church system of man, and her ways, this is not to say that there is no specific and special dealing of God in the wilderness. Every order God leads His people into is uniquely designed to contribute to their growth, development, and perfection in Christ! Again I will quote from the words of brother Ray Prinzing, for he expressed it so well when he wrote, “Oftentimes our processings are as a LED THROUGH THE WILDERNESS type of walking, yet with the assurance that He is doing the LEADING, and that because of His day by day guidance we need not stumble. The outward aspect of the wilderness is like unto a desert with its howling winds and barren existence...no smooth pathway, but a going on in faith step by step, receiving that daily supply of manna divinely provided, and drinking of that Rock which follows us even unto the ends of the earth. Then with joy we sing, *‘My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, and all I have to do is follow. — Strength for today is mine all the way, and all that I need for tomorrow . . .’* He leads, why need we fear? Furthermore, it is written, *‘perfect love casteth out all fear,’* and we know that HE IS PERFECT LOVE, therefore the more He dwells within us by His Spirit, the more we are KEPT IN PEACE.

“Darkness may obscure our vision, but we do not stumble, and though many things seem as obstacles in our way, placed there for our OVERCOMING, still we shall not falter. Why? Because He leads, and *‘He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber’* (Ps. 121:3). We ask for bread, He does not give us a stone. We ask for fish, He does not give us a serpent. No one needs to fear about stumbling in this wilderness when they have put their trust in Him to guide, He leads THROUGH the wilderness! It is essential that we go through these processings, for they work in us much of His purpose, and we would not seek to escape His dealings, but we can go through without worry, fear, or inner turmoil. *‘Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling* (Greek, from stumbling), *and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy’* (Jude 24)” — end quote.

Over past months and years a number of anointed voices have come in printed form across my desk which also bear eloquent testimony to this significant truth, and I will quote the words of a few of them for the edification of those who read these lines. A precious brother, Charles Haun, wrote: “*‘And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai: and the cloud rested in **the wilderness of Paran**...and the people pitched in **the wilderness of Paran**’* (Ex. 10:12; 12:16). It is beautiful. It is a wonderful place, this spiritual wilderness called Paran! The wilderness of Paran is ‘glory’ or ‘beauty,’ according to the meaning of the Hebrew word. To see the wilderness in such gratifying terms, one must first become aware of God’s intentions in bringing a person into the wilderness. Once a believer comes to this awareness, he can then begin to understand why and how glory and beauty are in the Wilderness of Paran.

“The wilderness is God’s *workshop*. He has designed it for us. He brings us to it, *‘even every one who is called by my name, whom I have created for my glory’* (Isa. 43:7). We are brought there to see His glory, to relate to it, to learn from it, and most importantly, to be conformed to His image. We would prefer that God does all His work on us in green grass and beside still waters. Although these and other lovely and pleasant places are part of our spiritual experience, certain types of work are not accomplished in us, except in the wilderness. The wilderness is a part of our development. It is necessary for our growth. It is God’s method of opening our vision to Himself and to His provisions for us. It is that which the Lord uses to bring spiritual enrichment into our lives. It is a method that God uses to develop our faith and trust in Him. The wilderness is an essential part of the Christian life, whether we like it or not!

“When I entered Bible School as a first-year student, the Lord was like a bright light to me. His presence was so near and intense that I could neither eat nor sleep on a regular schedule. I loved the light. But after several weeks of this, it all lifted, and I found myself in total darkness, and dryness. I was in the wilderness. I was impressed. I was terrified. I learned darkness and dryness. More importantly, I learned many things which can be learned only in such circumstances. I learned that God is faithful to me, even in dryness. I learned that He could be my light, even in darkness. But the greatest event spanning those two

years in the wilderness was the treasure I gleaned for myself. I came out with a complete trust in God. So complete that it defies description. So complete that I would expect no one to believe its extent. This treasure of perfect trust was worth the two years of darkness and dryness.

“The wilderness was the place of opportunity. Here, from the Wilderness of Paran, the children of Israel could have moved into greater opportunities. The possibility of taking the Promised Land was theirs! God Himself actually initiated the conquest of Canaan at this time from this place, as seen in Numbers 13:3. *‘And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men were the heads of the children of Israel.’* (These men were the spies sent to spy out the land in preparation for its conquest). The wilderness may not be seen by some people as being a launching pad into an orbit of spiritual reality and living. But the wilderness is that, and more! It is a place of opportunity. The children of Israel were brought into the Wilderness of Paran for the specific and express purpose of going farther, to possess the Promised Land! There are two areas of blessing as related to the wilderness. One area is the blessings that are within the wilderness. The other area is the opportunity for blessings based upon the wilderness itself. The Promised Land was the opportunity for blessings based upon how the children of Israel responded to God in the wilderness.

“God’s direction can be seen and somewhat understood as the Israelites first approach the Wilderness of Paran (Num. 10:12). *‘And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran.’* This was not their choice, rather it was God’s choice; it was God’s direction for them. The Israelites simply followed the cloud, stopping where it stopped, moving when the cloud moved. Here, the cloud stopped in the Wilderness of Paran. The first lesson to be learned is to *follow the cloud*. The believer must learn to follow what he knows to be the direction of God. Don’t be afraid of the wilderness! Times in the wilderness will become the only occasions when God imparts certain divine meanings and rich revelations to us. The wilderness will be the place of our greatest progressions in God. There are certain things which God can bring to us only in the wilderness, as we properly relate to His glory in the wilderness.

“The second lesson to be learned is that we are *not to complain and question God as we follow*. ‘Why did the cloud stop here? Doesn’t God know that there is no water here?’ ‘Why does God lead us into the wilderness? To kill us because there are no graves in Egypt?’ The children of Israel followed the cloud to green grass. The name of the place was *Hazereth*. The stem of this Hebrew word means ‘green,’ ‘grass,’ ‘leeks,’ ‘enclosure.’ This Hazereth must have been a luscious place! The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia refers to it as ‘the best pastures.’ This would have been most pleasing to those camping there! When we go camping, we don’t like to camp in the desert, or in a wilderness. We like to camp in an oasis; we like to camp where there is much green grass and a stream with fish. How long are we allowed to camp in the green grass beside the still waters? *Not very long*. We must follow the cloud. It soon moves from Hazereth, as recorded in Numbers 12:16. *‘And afterward, the people removed from Hazereth and pitched in the wilderness of Paran.’* The green grass of Hazereth is desired by all, but it does not fully and totally meet man’s spiritual needs. The leadership directly under Moses failed in the green grass, for it was there that *‘the anger of the Lord was kindled against them (Aaron and Miriam); and He departed...’* (Num. 12:9).

“What is seen, or not seen, in the wilderness depends upon our point of view. Our point of view is the direction in which we habitually look. *‘And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud’* (Ex. 16:10). The gaze of the Israelites had just been on the meat which they did not have, but desired to have. Only when they looked toward the wilderness did they see the glory of God! The glory of God was not in the meat which they desired. The reason why many believers, upon many different occasions, miss seeing the glory of God is that they are looking toward that which they desire. They are looking toward Canaan Land, when they should be looking toward the wilderness. If the glory of God is appearing in the wilderness, and we want to look longingly and constantly at the Promised Land, we may see the Promised Land, but we will not see the glory of God. When the glory of God has come to the wilderness, it is time to give the wilderness our attention.

“Although many are brought to the wilderness to see the glory of God, not all see it. The direction of our vision at any particular time in our life will determine what we will see. It will also determine what we

are not seeing of that which God wants to show us. We will miss seeing His goodness if we constantly gaze at unfulfilled desires and long for the comforts of the flesh. Let us lay aside our fleshly desires and follow our Maker without complaining and without questioning. As we accomplish these things we will see more clearly the intentions and purposes that God has for us” — end quote.

Another brother, Bruce Caisse, has shared the following. “*Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias **in the wilderness***’ (Lk. 3:1-2). Annas and Caiaphas should have received, in the temple, the word of the Lord. However, the Lord bypassed them and spoke, in the wilderness, to John. The Lord, unable to find a channel that could hear His voice, used the wilderness to prepare a voice through whom He could announce the first appearing of the Messiah. Why did the Lord choose the wilderness? We often think of the wilderness as a place where people go through a time of difficulty. It is usually thought of as being a place where the ‘presence’ of the Lord cannot be felt, or where the ‘rain’ of the Holy Spirit does not fall. It is considered to be a place of dryness and barrenness, both naturally and spiritually.

“Yet, from time to time the Lord brings us into a wilderness experience. The wilderness should not be thought of as a barren place. It becomes a wonderful place when we begin to understand all that the Lord can accomplish within us during this time. What is the wilderness? It can be defined in one word: *Separation*. Here, the Lord is able to deal with us concerning all of the ambitions and drives that are within us. In the barrenness of the wilderness, He is able to take initiative in our lives and separate us unto Himself. When we view the wilderness as a place of separation unto the Lord, we will see that it has great value and purpose. Consider the children of Israel as they were led out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness. There were different levels of separation in this journey. The most obvious one is the Red Sea. God opened the way through the Sea. As they reached the other side, the waters closed up upon the Egyptians. There were no more bricks to be made! Now, they were to abide under the cloud of glory by day and the pillar of fire by night!

“However, they began to murmur. This was to have been a time of preparation, being made ready to possess the land that was before them. The pulls of Egypt had been left behind and they were closed in with the Lord Himself. This is the purpose of the wilderness. Israel failed, however, to understand this. *‘Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and **bring her into the wilderness**, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt*’ (Hosea 2:14-15). The Lord is portraying Himself as a husband whose wife has been unfaithful. She has been distracted by the pull of things that steal her affections from Jehovah. Yet, the Lord seeks to restore her and separate her unto Himself. *‘And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord*’ (Hosea 2:13). This is expressive of the experience many of us go through, even after we know the Lord. We are pulled in other directions. The Lord’s cure for this is expressed in verse fourteen, *‘Therefore, behold, I will allure her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.’* The word ‘comfortably’ means ‘heart.’ The Lord is saying, ‘I will speak my heart to her.’ He removed the distractions by taking her away from Egypt, which speaks of the pulls of the world. The purpose of the Lord in the wilderness is to separate us from ‘things’ and cause us to know Him and His voice personally and intimately. The preparation of John the Baptist in the wilderness is a type of what the Lord is seeking to do within us during this present time of transition.

“The Song of Solomon speaks prophetically of the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ, and of His beloved bride, the church. The question is asked, *‘Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?’* (S. of S. 8:5). This ‘leaning’ speaks of a dependence and trust that had been developed during a wilderness experience. Again, we see the purpose of the wilderness. It provides an atmosphere in which we have no choice except to get close to Him. Here, He is able to begin sharing His heart with us! If we are leaning upon Him, we can get no closer. John the beloved leaned and laid his head on the breast of Jesus. Here, he heard His heartbeat. Jesus could whisper to John because of this intimacy that had developed.

“Why is it that the word of the Lord came to John, and not to Annas and Caiaphas? It was because John the Baptist gave himself to a period of separation. He heard the voice of the Lord alluring him into the wilderness and responded to this time of separation. He left all that he might be alone with God. John began to hear the heartbeat of God as the Lord began to speak His heart to him. *‘I will allure her and speak my heart unto her.’* We do not know how long this took, or all that was required of John. But, he was willing to give himself to the Lord. Why did not the priesthood hear from the Lord? A verse in Jeremiah gives us some understanding of this. *‘For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.’*

“The spiritual leaders of that day were drinking from broken cisterns. Somewhere, they forsook the Lord and broke communion with Him. The rain had fallen at one time upon the house of Israel and they were still drinking from that cistern which only spoke of a former day. They were not ready to hear a *present word* concerning the appearing of the Lamb of God. We cannot rest in a past visitation, or word from the Lord! There must be that continual listening for a present word from the Lord. There must be a present receiving from the Fountain of Living Waters! Only then will we be qualified to minister the word of the Lord. When the Lord begins to rain His blessing upon us, we hold up our cup until it is filled. If we remain satisfied with this, then five years later we will still be saying, ‘I received this cup of water from the Lord, would you like a drink?’ Five year old water does not taste at all good! However, if we cultivate a link with the Fountain of Living Water, we will have water that will be fresh each day.

“John was allured into the wilderness, where God spoke His heart to him. What was the result of this processing that took place in the wilderness? *‘And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias’* (Jn. 1:19-23). John could have said that he came in ‘the spirit of Elijah.’ Jesus said of him that he was Elijah that should come. However, in hearing the heart cry of the Lord, John found that his identity had been consumed. He lost himself in the burden of the Lord. Psalm 69 tells us, *‘For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up.’* While John was alone in the wilderness, the spark that quickened his heart concerning the burden of God’s heart grew and grew until it consumed him and he became simply the ‘voice of one.’ John said, ‘I heard Him alluring me into the wilderness and I went. The Lord birthed within my heart the cry of His heart and it consumed everything that was within me. I have become the expression of the voice that you have not heard for hundreds of years. He was still crying and I went out and listened.’

“The Lord desires to bring each one of us to the place where we will be able to hear this cry. We can be content with, or so busy with the program within the temple, that we do not hear His alluring call into the wilderness. Annas and Caiaphas knew the written word of God, but did not hear the voice of the Lord. John the Baptist probably did not know the written word of God as well as they, but he allowed the Lord to separate him unto Himself so he would be able to hear the very heartbeat of God. The Lord is calling out a people who are willing to be separated unto Him! The wilderness is not a physical place; rather it is an attitude of heart. *‘He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken’* (Isa. 53:8). There is a challenge here. Are you willing to be one who is ‘cut off’ from the land of the living — separated unto Him in the wilderness that you might become one to declare His generation? The Lord is looking for a company of ‘John the Baptists.’ He is not looking for ability, rather He is looking for availability. Each one of us can be a part of this corporate body that is being prepared to express the Word of the Lord in our day!” — end quote.

Another has penned these challenging words. “The story of the Hebrews’ journey out of Egyptian bondage is a wonderful illustration of spiritual development. The Bible tells us that Moses spent forty years exiled in the desert, tending sheep, before leading the children of Israel out of slavery. That might not appear to be the best training for a great leader! Yet during those years, he was growing spiritually. As his understanding of God developed, he overcame personal doubts about his ability to follow divine direction. Eventually, he led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Yet they, too, spent forty years in the

wilderness before making it to the Promised Land! It wouldn't have required that long to travel the few hundred miles between Egypt and Palestine. But in reading the Bible one gets the impression that the *real journey* involved *spiritual progress*, not *physical distance*. What a mental distance between thinking and living as slaves, and thinking and living as the Spirit-led people of God! In the wilderness the children of Israel were learning the difference. It wasn't at once that they understood God's Voice — or saw what it meant to obey Him. Ignorance, immaturity, and fear held the people back. They made mistakes, took 'detours,' and had to retrace some steps. Still, they recovered and kept going.

"Although their route wasn't as direct as it might have been, spiritual progress *was* going on. Their experiences were teaching them what it means to have only one God, to trust Him, and to have their lives corrected and governed by Him. They were learning lessons they needed to learn! Did it take forty years? It seems that spiritual maturing, not time, was the issue. And that's of particular interest to us when — individually or collectively — we're going through a 'wilderness' time. In the midst of the pressures, strippings, and purgings, have we ever wondered, '*How long* is this going to take? Is there a faster way?' When we go back through the accounts of the Bible, we see that spiritual progress doesn't allow for skipping steps we need to take or avoiding the spiritual lessons we need to learn. There *is* a right path and a way for us to stay safe in it, going in the right direction" — end quote.

Steve Wilbur adds these insights. "**THE WILDERNESS** — Did you shudder when this title caught your eye? Was the surface of your consciousness ruffled by this disturbing question: 'Will God take me into the wilderness?' The wilderness! A word calculated to inspire fearsome awe without further qualifiers. Yet Moses qualifies it with the terms 'great' and 'terrible' (Deut. 1:19). The word occurs over three hundred times in scripture. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, let us explore something of the meaning of *the wilderness*.

"First, it is unfriendly. It is selective, working to favor some things, yet militating against others. God's man finds that in the desert some things die while other personal qualities are accentuated. The wilderness is unfriendly to the carnal, the personal, the worldly, but constructive to the development of those eternal qualities the Lord is seeking. The desert is the place of specially adapted life. The Lord desires to cultivate what man disdains or neglects to cultivate — the *spiritual life*. This calls for a hearing ear. It means you delve so deeply into the wilderness that you hear no other voice speaking, but the voice of the Lord. This was so with Moses, who finally turned aside at the burning bush.

"We next notice that the wilderness is dry. There is no evident blessing or revival. In Numbers chapter twenty, the children of Israel demonstrated against Moses and Aaron. Verses three through five tell us they reproached Moses and accused him of bringing the Lord's congregation into the wilderness to die of thirst. They describe their environment as evil, saying, '*It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates, neither is there any water to drink.*'

"We learn also that the wilderness is uninhabited. God deals with His people both corporately and individually in the wilderness experience. The Bible abounds with examples of a single person being brought face to face with God. Consider His dealings with Enoch (Gen. 5:22). '*Enoch walked with God*' (alone). Abraham's separated walk involved numerous encounters with his God. Consider Joseph's specifically tailored trials; Elijah's crying out in the wilderness, '*I, even I only, am left*' (I Kings 19:10). Jeremiah's agonizing, '*I sat alone because of Thy hand*' (Jer. 15:17). '*And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day*' (Gen. 32:24). And finally, Matthew 14:23 declares of Jesus, '*He was alone there.*' The wilderness is a place where very special things happen! The people of God tumbled helter-skelter out of Egypt, but the wilderness brought them into divine order. They became an organized army that marched in ranks into Canaan. Psalm 103:7 tells us that God made His *ways* known to Moses. His ways are ordered ways.

"The wilderness is also the place where the power of simple instruments is revealed. In Exodus 4:2 the Lord asks Moses, 'What is that in thine hand?' And Moses replies, '*A rod.*' The unique power of Moses would forever after be associated with a common shepherd's staff. When Samson was assaulted by the Philistines, the Word says, 'they shouted against him.' But Samson found a jawbone of an ass, and with it, he slew a thousand men. This instrument, found often enough in the wilderness, was at the same time both

common and powerful. What a contrast between God's ways and man's ways! Man's method of salvation is by costly and complicated machinery — salvation by mechanics. God's means of salvation is by vital energy — salvation by dynamics. Here the simplest of instruments suffice.

“Finally, the wilderness is the place of drastic reduction. To reduce is to convert to simpler form. For example, Acts 7:22 describes Moses before he was forty years of age, as being, *‘learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in words and in deeds.’* Forty years later, we find him at eighty years of age confessing, *‘O my Lord, I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue’* (Ex. 4:10). It is to this man Moses, so reduced that he asked sincerely, *‘Who am I?’* (Ex. 3:11), that the mighty ‘I AM’ reveals Himself. Moses’ excess baggage — cultural, intellectual, social — had been dropped during his forty-year journey through the wilderness! How far will God reduce us? We could conjecture that when Moses approached the burning bush that day, he had his garment, his rod, and his shoes. Not much. Yet one third of even that had to be set aside before he could draw near to God! *‘Put off thy shoes.’* The prophet Amos graphically depicts God's people reduced to bare necessities. *Nothing is left but two legs and a piece of an ear — just enough to HEAR A WORD AND WALK IN IT!* (Amos 3:12).

“If our guided tour through the wilderness has had its proper effect, a transformation of consciousness should have taken place. Although at first we had instinctively recoiled from it, as though it were ominously threatening to our sense of self-preservation, we will now really embrace the wilderness as a great friend and servant. We will have the inner sense that only when the Lord Jesus gets what He wants from our lives will life finally stabilize. Thus we know that those who emerge from God's wilderness are indeed the thoroughly processed members of which the unblemished Body is composed. Their coming into view provoked the astonished exclamation, *‘Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved’* (S. of S. 8:5) — end quote.

In closing I would share these confirmatory words from the pen of David Minor. “Many men have been sent to the desert. This is a place that every one of us would like to avoid if we could. We find it unpleasant when God cuts across our path and says, ‘I want you to go to the desert.’ Every life that God uses has this desert experience! The desert experience is an absolute necessity in the lives of God's people. He does not choose to perfect His vessels in the city, but rather in the desert place. You can tell when a person is in the desert because you hear him say, ‘I feel so dry. I don't feel any life. I don't understand what is happening to me.’

“We are so interested in ministry and in multitudes! We want to be going. God is saying to you, ‘Son (or Daughter), I want you to come aside. I want to draw you away from the crowd. I want to separate you. I want to get you out here alone under the stars in a solitary place where I can talk to you. I want to give you a message. I want to burn a word into your soul. I want to get down into your innermost being. I want to do a work in your heart..’ The solitary place is a place we don't want to be! We cry, ‘But I don't like the solitary place. I like people around me. I like people to know what I'm going through. I like people to sympathize with me. I like people to understand me. I like companionship.’ But God says, ‘I'm bringing you to the desert place *because I want to meet you there.*’

“I want to talk about this desert. Thank God there are streams of water. Thank God there are mountains. But in the life of every man and woman of God there is an appointment with destiny. Everyone who comes forth with a burning message, every prophet that comes before the face of a nation, is a person that God has led to a solitary place; it's a desert place — a lonely place — a place of midnight darkness — a place where there is no moisture, and where God speaks and deals and shapes and fashions and forms. Then God sends that man or woman from that desert with life-giving water. If you're coming to God's people with signs, wonders, and miracles, and you're going to carry a rod that brings deliverance, you must meet a burning bush in God's desert place. Don't think that someone is going to call you out of a congregation, lay hands on you, and impart a ministry to you that is going to bring men and women out of the prison-houses. Don't think that you're going to attend Bible School and somebody will hand you a diploma that will qualify you to deliver creation. If you're going to bring people out of the bondage of Egypt, you're going to meet God at the backside of the desert! God will take away the pleasures. He will take away the comforts. He will take away the things that you've trusted in and He will drive you from men to a solitary place where it's

you and God. There you will meet Him on the backside of the desert of human experience. Every prophet has his desert.

“Then you can say, ‘God, I understand now why everything is as it is. I understand now why You’ve let these things happen and You didn’t send any rain into the desert place of loneliness, heartache, despair, rejection, privation and misunderstanding. It was You that brought me there! I didn’t understand at first.’ I questioned, ‘Why? What does God have against me? What have I done? Where have I failed God? Why hasn’t God opened the door? Why am I in this situation?’ You’re there because God is preparing a man or woman to take the message of His everlasting love and unfailing grace to humanity. He’s going to sustain you. You’re going to embrace this desert experience. You’re going to thank God for it! The sweetest hour you’re ever going to know is where God comes down in that desert place and a burning bush appears in that lonely, solitary place. When you’re homesick and weary, then suddenly the angel of God comes and you cry, ‘Bethel! It’s Bethel, the house of God! I thank God for this lonely, windswept mountain.’ Then God will lead you out of the desert place to touch men and women with the power of mighty supernatural deliverance!” — end quote.

To be continued...

J. PRESTON EBY