

Wilderness Gleanings 2: Elim

Exodus 15:27: “And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.”

From Marah the people come to Elim, an oasis of refreshment and rest with abundant sweet water and verdant pasture. Much has been made of the number of wells of which there were 12, and the number of palm trees of which there were 70.

Application to Israel

The 12 wells – or more precisely, well springs which come from a single fount – correspond to the number of Tribes and speak of the all sufficiency of the immediate divine *corporate* provision in full measure pressed down and running over to a thirsty people. This provision too was intended to *prove* the faithfulness of the people in the light of God’s faithfulness. In regard to the palm trees, the number 70 speaks of the all sufficiency of God in regard to His unconditional *covenant* provision. The number 70 refers to Jacob, the last of the covenant fathers to whom the unconditional promises were made. “And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls [Manasseh and Ephraim]: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten [70]: (Gen 46:27).

Elim then becomes a reminder and a foretaste of the everlasting divine covenant to those who were in the loins of Jacob, even the 70 souls.

For the present day Christian, what we have here is God’s all-sufficient provision for us as separated pilgrims in a bitter land, individually and corporately. The gracious portions at Elim are a needed *complement* to the provision at Marah – mollifying the privations of the wilderness. Elim, it would seem, is a further consolation and provision of confidence to the soul that has experienced the sweetened waters of Marah, enabling them to continue a separated walk. And so we have the instruments to facilitate that walk – the enabling of the Spirit through God’s Word. The wells typify the *source* of ministry through God’s inspired Word, enabled by the indwelling **Spirit of Christ**. The palm trees typify the ministerial *services* to the Church, the Body of Christ.

The Word of God

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

Doctrine

We are careful to note that doctrine is the foremost of these four antidotes to the deprivations of the wilderness. It provides a well of consolation and confidence, which fortifies us in our separation from the world and from the professing church that has its roots firmly grounded in the world with its ecumenism, sacraments and rituals. Separating from such can be a sour experience because it can mean separation from friends and family. But to know biblical doctrine is to know *why* we must be separated – this is the edifying ministry of *Elim*; and it is to the *glory of God*. It is *this* that enables us to rise above the flesh, putting off the old man. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim 4:16).

The ministerial services (or gifts) to the Church

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.....And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:8-14).

The gifts here are *men* who are raised and enabled by the *ascended* Head, Christ; they serve in ministering to His Body, the Church,¹ building it up, instilling consolation and confidence to the believer in a walk of separation. Such gifts – the apostles and prophets in their day, evangelists, pastors and teachers, are typified by the 70 palm trees.

¹ In contrast to the “gifts” of the Spirit in Corinthians 12.