

# WAY TO SHILOH

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## The story of the Valley

A journey can be a curious thing. Some people rush along theirs as if in a hurry to reach their destination, but with them it is always just around the next corner, and if they ever arrive where they want, it is never quite what they expected it to be. So they push ever forward, driven by the terrain to new disappointments. With others it seems the destination is never the goal, only the thrill of the journey that counts. Experience is everything, they live for the moment, and I think they may hardly be aware they're moving at all, but they are. Still others drift and meander without any apparent purpose or route, as if they'd lost their compass and had never consulted a map. Regardless, all of this kind seem oblivious of any danger that might be ahead. However, there are those, curious of all people, who seem to follow quite a different path altogether.

It was this last sort that I met upon my journey, and they particularly caught my eye. What of myself you ask? I was rather of the meandering sort. I found myself on a wide road journeying to a place called Gehenna (Matt 7.13). I was aware of this because, some while before, on my aimless wanderings, I had passed a junction with a two-way sign. Behind me the sign pointed to Shiloh, ahead, to Gehenna, and, never being one given to regrets, I decided to push on to this destination. Besides, there was many a companion along the road with me, and as I had the good sense to recognise safety in numbers, and man by nature is prone to follow a crowd, I purposed to see where the road would lead me. This was despite those distinctive former travellers I have already mentioned, who walked in the opposite direction on a straight and narrow road (Matt 7.14). However, these seemed awfully serious in their countenance and quite troubled often, although strangely calm and peaceable people. I must confess that this was not the state of things on our road. For it was often rowdy and boisterous, but full of frivolity and folly which relieved the tedium of the journey well enough.

We would call out, jeering and scoffing at the others when we had occasion, on account of their contrary course and pious manner (1 Peter 4.4)(2 Peter 3.3). They would sometimes speak to those on our road, but would not often gain a listening ear, and if they did, not for long. Although I had seen some turn from the wide road to theirs. I had never really spoken to one of them, but at times I would try to lip read the words they seemed to keep repeating. When I did this I could only make out the words 'reap-end', and not understanding them, thought nothing more of it than that it was a curiosity.

My journey had started well. Sunshine, friends and a gentle downward slope. This was enough for me to be largely unconcerned about the fact that I had no idea of the way, or really where it was I was headed. Soon though the journey became harder, there was a chill in the air, my legs felt heavier and although I wanted to slow a little the road turned downward and this meant I was compelled to keep what had now become a brisk pace. As well as this, those companions had

become less in number around me, and the ones who remained had become quite disagreeable unwelcome friends. But what started to unnerve me the most was the failing light, so subtle it was, that you'd not notice unless you remembered previous, brighter, times along the way. It became clear that rather than confidently following a knowing throng I was blindly following those just as lost as myself (Matt 15.14).

Then, one of those going the opposite way, caught me by the arm, looked me in the eye, and asked me a question I'll never forget; "Who is it that has done such a thing?!", and he handed me a book, with which he left me, for of course he was going the other way. The book seemed to be a collection of ancient writings, histories and laws. Perplexed, I read it to find an account so moving, so awful, so affecting that my heart seemed enlarged from within, it was as if I felt the blood coursing through my veins, and my breathing became shallow, for the crime against the one within was so great. At this point I heard a voice repeat the question, "Who is it that has done such a thing?!", and I realised it was my own. As I stumbled on, my indignation grew from the depth of my heart, and my anger became a fire against the wretch who could have committed such iniquity, for they had ended the life of one whose character and conduct was so meritorious that he clearly could have never deserved such abhorrent treatment (Luke 23.41). I reasoned with myself, "Even as God be my witness, such a guilt ridden person must surely die and repay the debt fourfold because he did this thing without pity, compunction or remorse!" (1 Sam 12.5,6). I marched on in self-righteous pride, looking to enquire into the identity of the culprit so as to heap my condemnation upon his name. I asked those around me if they had come across the account, but was met with indifference, ignorance, falsehoods or foolish scorn (2 Peter 3.3).

The road was ever steeper, descending into what was clearly a dark valley. This was not what any of us had been expecting, and a sense of foreboding gripped all but the most stubbornly resolute. Still, we all went forward, tired but jogging gently now along the downward road. It was darker up ahead, but I could just make out a yellow/orange glow, this I realised was a fire with people near, and it seemed good to warm myself upon as it had become quite cold and not a little gloomy (Prov 21.2). By now I realised I was running and quite unable to stop, even if I had wanted to. Then another of those travellers in the opposite direction pointed to the book still in my hands and remarked, "If you want to know who could have done such a thing, look again." At this he was gone, for I was running past him, momentum carrying me on. My brow furrowed as I looked to open the book, but my attention was grabbed by a fellow at my right shoulder who reminded me of the warmth of the fire ahead and to keep my eye on the road as I may stumble in the darkness of the night. His words were smooth and I seemed to recognise his voice, but couldn't make him out, however the smell of him was strange, unpleasant, like sulphur. I blindly trusted him though, as I had a sense he was a friend of mine (2 Cor 2.11).

I carried on nearing the light of the flame. I could make out dark figures silhouetted against the fire. They had strange nobility about them and carried objects in their hands. Sounds echoed throughout the valley, I could hear cries and shrieks. The sound of revellers had been a common one on my journey on this pathway, although I realised that I hadn't heard or been a partaker in any revelling for quite some time (2 Tim 3.4)(Jer 7.34)(Isaiah 5.12). Nevertheless I assumed these were the sounds of fun and frolic, the objects, tambourines and bottles, and thought nothing of it. I found myself with a group and we were all running shoulder to shoulder, but I new that familiar feeling that I'd become accustomed to along my journey; that of loneliness within a crowd.

The sounds became louder; I could even hear the crackling of the flames like thorns under a pot (Ecc 7.6 Psalm 58.9). I even felt the heat, it was warm in the night, but instead of comfort the overriding sense was quite eerie, and enough to send a shiver down the spine and hairs to rise on the neck. This brought me once again to consider the book now clutched to my chest, and I recalled the words of the traveller, "Look again." I looked around still able to make out others in the darkness turning to go the other way. More than I'd seen before, but I was quite unable to change my course (John 12.40). This time I made out what they were saying to others, I could hear it, not 'reap-end', but 'Repent!' Now my heart shocked from within, and, as if with awakened eyes from a deadly sort of blindness, I looked ahead to the scene before me (Eph 5.14). With open mouth and these new eyes wide, I was witness to a horror I was unprepared for. If the silhouettes were now clear, the sounds were clearer. Fiery figures and shrieks of anguish, cries of pain, not revelling and fun, the objects, not tambourines and bottles but slaughter weapons! (Ezekiel 9.2)(Isaiah 24.8/ 30.32)

At this point I tried to stop but skidded further down the valley side. Clear now before me the fire, coming from a great pit that seemed to burn forever, being fed from within, and it was so deep and dark that I could not see the bottom of it (Isaiah 30.33)(Jer 7.32)(Rev 20.1). People were being slain in this place and thrown into the pit that was as a greedy open mouth always wanting more

(Hab 2.5). Desperate, I looked to hold onto something, but everyone around me was falling downwards to. I clenched my teeth and tightened my grip on the only thing I held as I braced myself, and I realised I still held the book.

It was not curiosity that made me want to look within it's pages again, but a strange sense of guilt as I recalled the account I'd read. "Who is it that has done such a thing?!" The question spun around my head. It was all I could think as I hurtled toward the pit. Then I saw Him, the one from the book.

Now, knowing my end, I fell to my knees, and in a desperate attempt to stop, threw myself upon the ground at His feet, but He seemed too far away, and I just slid and tumbled instead. There seemed no hope and the book flew from my hands. Then quite suddenly, all at once, I felt myself forced to stop and the book landed open by my head. I looked into the pages, as it lay open on the ground, and saw that they were like mirrors, and the reflection of my own face was giving me the answer to that nagging question (Jam 1.22-24). At once I knew whom it was who had done such a crime (1 Peter 2.24). But why had I stopped? I looked up and realised I was lying at the feet of the Man; the Man from the book, Alive! He was dressed in white linen, and he brought me to my feet. From his side he brought forth a writers ink horn, and He put a mark on my forehead (Ezekiel 9.4). All those with the mark the slaughterers left alone. Then with a look of love and kindness I had seen in no other, he turned me to face the opposite way and simply said, "Follow Me." (Matt 9.9) (Mark 8.34)