

# Sorrow and Song

Mark Bennion

*Sariah*

That morning you came to me  
I saw the lamp arising in your beard,  
a flash of solder and fire  
wisping in your robes and hair

dreams full in your mouth like *jamid*  
and your gait uneven on the hardest soil.  
I thought I knew what you were about to say,  
how sweat and sand would become our clothing,

how silt and thirst would cut  
amidst the walking and walking, how we'd  
migrate like dunes, carrying the memory  
of limestone, rain, and bazaars.

How you said, Jerusalem will burn  
until the ash pits rise like mountains  
and remnants will be carried away like wood:  
that celebratory yet somber look

stung in your eye, your frame shaking  
at your own obedience. Together  
we swung and fell in this desert refuge,  
witnessed our sons turn to tempests,

hunts, lies. The belief that our names,  
perhaps, were stamped to tribal codes;  
we, the outlaws of Manasseh, plodding past  
Aqaba, finding meat in *wadis*, our flocks

as lost as we were, but submitting  
still to the crisping, wilderness sun. How  
God chose us to leave when Jeremiah,  
Ezekiel, and Habakkuk stayed behind,

left to time's or the dungeon's swifter,  
less fruitful fate. Eight years later we knew  
the scorpions, the serpents, the vultures  
hovering about; we understood the *nua*h,

the deadening of salt, the trap-catch between  
Jewish pearls and promised land, the  
flair of an oasis and the heat stroke  
of even the smallest mirage.

Such vassals we were to exile and need,  
to passion flourishing in this barren  
landscape. The new beginning of sons—  
our concluding harvest—the lengthening of days

bound to the sea's endlessness, the energy  
of something greener, something more  
bountiful and destructive, something more  
miraculous than Moses' call

to the Red Sea. Forgive me, Lehi,  
for my complaint and hardness.  
I thought I saw the end  
as you believed in our beginning.

Praise me, Lehi, for my denial  
and acceptance, for my quiet confidence  
in a goat-haired tent. You confessed  
the vision as I believed the implication

of leaving shekels, pulse, and friendship  
for the tough yet merciful cup of prophecy,  
the line given to us in our journey  
through this burnt offering, unexpected life.

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*jamid* (Arabic): a hard round food containing goat's cheese, grass, and various herbs.

*wadis* (Arabic): usually dry river beds, except during the rainy season.

*ruah* (Hebrew): wind, intellect, or spirit.