

I was intrigued by a Quaker Speak video that I saw recently

Michael Birkel talks about how an oft quoted Quaker passage is full of allusions to Scripture
I'm going to play the video for you—then we will return and look at it a bit more

<http://quakerspeak.com/george-fox-fit-7-bible-references-single-sentence/>

What Michael Birkel describes here is common among early Quakers

They took Scripture passages and incorporated them into their own message, without reference

The Scripture passages became their own voice—rather than a mere quoting of an ancient text

They lived these Scriptures in such a way that the meaning was theirs

The words of early Quakers are full of Biblical metaphors—but they tell their own story as well

They weren't just telling a Biblical truth—they were using Biblical imagery to tell their own story

Hundreds of Quakers suffered in prison and paid dearly for their commitment to faith

George Fox himself was in prison multiple times—often for refusing to take an oath

He knew personally the darkness of the prisons

Fox didn't seek revenge, but prayed for his enemies, judges, and jailors

He asked them to consider how their actions were contrary to Scripture

So, while they are based on the Biblical story, these words have become personal to George Fox

They are now his personal message, shared with his fellow Quakers who suffer in prison

Yet it is also a message that resonated deeply with the truth of Scripture

“Sing and rejoice, you children of the day and of the light, for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt. Truth does flourish as the rose. Lilies do grow among the thorns, the plants atop the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play.”

Letter written by George Fox in 1663 to Quakers who were in prison

Prison in the 1660s was a very dark place—they were called dungeons for a reason

Quakers were being persecuted for their faith,

they were suffering for their fidelity to their community,

and George Fox wrote to offer them consolation

Sing and rejoice—Zechariah 2:10

Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the LORD.

Zechariah 2:10 NRSV

This passage is written to people in exile assuring them that God is with them

I love the words... *“I will come and dwell in your midst”*

It is also a promise that they will return home

It's a message of consolation and a promise of liberty to those who are captive

you children of the day and of the light—1 Thessalonians 5:5

for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

1 Thessalonians 5:5 NRSV

Paul is describing the followers of Jesus as children of light and of day

Quakers have long identified the Light as a way that God's Presence is among us

Early Quakers often called themselves Children of the Light

for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt. —Exodus 10:21

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt." Exodus 10:21 NRSV

This passage is about one of the plagues as the Hebrews were taken out of Egypt
But even in this, God is at work to release the Israelites from the Egyptians

Frogs, flies, boils, and now a plague of darkness so thick it can be felt

It was a dense darkness—so dark they couldn't see anything or move about
However, the Israelites had light where they lived

George Fox is writing to prisoners in very dark prisons

He promises that the light is with them, even in the prison, dark as it was

Quakers really lived this out as they began to teach and help other prisoners

Wherever they were, Quakers made a difference

Truth does flourish as the rose—Isaiah 35:1

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. Isaiah 35:1 KJV

This passage is about the return of the redeemed to Zion—a return from captivity/exile
Even the desert will bloom and give forth the beauty of a rose

Again, George Fox reminds them that there is freedom beyond captivity and prison

lilies do grow among the thorns—Song of Songs 2:1-2

I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. Song of Solomon 2:1-2 KJV

Song of Songs is a love song between God and the community—God and God's beloved
My beloved is like a rose among thorns

There are hints at a profound intimacy and a divine presence that can be felt,

even though they are in a very bleak situation, imprisoned for their faith

and the plants atop the hills—Jeremiah 31:3-5

...the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. Jeremiah 31:3-5 NRSV

Again, this passage is written during a time of war when invading armies ravage the land
They will come home and plant crops on the hills, which they will harvest

It's about homecoming, renewal, and comfort

You won't just come home—but your life will be rebuilt, you will harvest the produce

and upon them the lambs do skip and play—Song of Songs 2:8 and Psalms 114

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. Song of Solomon 2:8 NRSV

It's a picture of freedom—the ability to run free with abandon across the hills

The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Psalms 114:4 NRSV

This Psalm is a retelling of the story of Exodus and release from captivity

Sing and Rejoice, You Children of the Day and of the Light — Zechariah 2:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; Exodus 10:21; Isaiah 35:1; Song of Songs 2:1-2; Jeremiah 31:3-5; Song of Songs 2:8; Psalms 114

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The whole passage reaffirms the Biblical message that God is with us, even in the darkness
And though it may not be obvious, God is at work in the darkness to accomplish God's purposes
Ultimately, there is life after the darkness—freedom after captivity

Michael Birkel says that George Fox *“was using what early Friends experienced as the language of the soul, because for them the biblical story was not just something that happened long ago, it was something that happens within each reader. It is re-lived. Each of us has our own exile, each of us has our own exodus as well, each of us has a return to the land flowing with abundance.”*

Like the early Quakers, we relive the Biblical story—exile and exodus, darkness and light

Each of us relives the Biblical story

We are invited to make the Biblical story our own

To see ourselves in the text

As you read through Scripture, consider where you are in the story

Where does the text align with your experience—both past and present

In today's quote from George Fox, where are you?

Are you able to rejoice and sing? Skip and play?

Is the darkness so thick that you can feel it around you?

Do you find truth flourishing as a rose when you least expect it?

Are you a lily among thorns? Are you one of the thorns?

Have you left the prison and found new life?

Is God with you?

Has God asked you to wait in the thick night and bring light to others?

“Sing and rejoice, you children of the day and of the light, for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt. Truth does flourish as the rose. Lilies do grow among the thorns, the plants atop the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play.”